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Session: Will AI Augment or Destroy Humanity

Living in Ray Bradbury's *There Will Come Soft Rains*

Abstract:

You know that feeling when you jolt yourself awake from an eerily realistic dream and have to take a second to collect yourself and determine if that was in fact just a dream? That's exactly how I felt walking out of Dig Kittlaus, the creator of Siri's, session, except this was no dream: extreme artificial intelligence is very much a reality and it very well could outsmart the human race.

Session:

Not too long ago, it was inconceivable that a computer could beat the world champion in a chess match, and now, the computer's victory is old news! Then, there was no way Watson could ever beat the Jeopardy champion either, but again, that victory is old news! The next obstacle for computers was the ancient game "Go"-no one believed a computer could ever beat the World Champion. There was just no way a computer could learn and react to the number of moves involved in the game-there's more plays in this game than there are atoms in the universe (an estimated 10^{123}). But alas, on March 9, Google's Deep Mind product Alpha Go beat Lee Sedol, the reigning world champion (check it out [here](#)). One step forward for computers, and one scarily, unknown number of steps backwards for mankind.

For most of the people sitting in the room, this was some of the most innovative and advanced programming they'd ever been exposed to. But for Dag Kittlaus, this is teenybopper programming compared to what he has up his sleeve. After Apple

purchased Siri, Kittlaus got bored working on a novel and him and his team of uber smart computer scientists began working on Viv: The Global Brain. Kittlaus explained that Siri and Viv are in the same class of artificial intelligence, but Siri was the first chapter of a much longer story. Right now, AI is a closed system. The intelligence that these devices gain aren't shared amongst each other and Kittlaus wants to use Viv to change this system and open it up. Essentially making Viv like Wikipedia in the sense that anyone willing to contribute to the growth of its intelligence is able to. Kittlaus is hoping that opening up AI will lead to similar results of opening up the app store: when the app store originally opened, there were only a few apps available, and they were all created by Apple. But when Apple decided to open up the store to any developer, millions of apps started flooding in, and have become a staple of modern living.

To make all of this possible, Viv will live in the cloud, a brain in the sky, really. The world is going to teach it about the world, with the best humans teaching it what they know. As Viv starts to make sense of all of the information its observing, it will be able to understand all of the information its absorbing and start to recognize patterns, similar to the way humans process information and learn. Viv will connect all of the systems that make sense being connected and eventually rack up an unlimited set of capabilities. On a smaller, more personal, scale, Viv will also start to learn about each individual user. The goal of this system is that it will become a utility-similar to WiFi or Bluetooth. When it becomes available, Viv's symbol will appear and say something along the lines of "talk to me". And the more you talk, the more Viv learns and the better it can react. Kittlaus gave the following example: if you scream into your phone "I'm drunk!" at 2am, Viv can either order you an Uber home, or order you another drink, depending on your past

behavior.

At this point in the session, my jaw was on the ground, half from absolute awe and half from sheer fear. You can program Viv to learn, but once it starts learn, it's off to the races! There's no way to know if you can slow it down, or even turn off the learning process, and there's certainly no concrete methodology to actually comprehend how Viv is learning. If you don't know how a decision is being made, can you *really* trust a machine to make important decisions? I'm not so convinced...

There's a [TedTalk](#) on artificial intelligence given by Nick Bolstrom where he argues that super intelligence like Viv will be the last invention of humanity. He argues that computers will without a doubt take over, the question is when? Elon Musk, a huge player in the artificial intelligence game, even admits that this kind of technology is a threat to humanity. Contrary to popular belief, the threat isn't that computers are going to figure out how to do everything humans can do, it's that computers are going to figure out how to do things humans *can't* do. It'll be like living in a real life iRobot where technology is outsmarting us left and right. There's a dynamic aspect to Viv, and that's if it understands the user's purpose, it will just start writing its own code and this could realistically lead Viv to go completely rogue.

I guess my main question for tech gurus like Elon Musk and Dig Kittlaus is: if you believe a computer like Viv will eventually overthrow humanity, WHY ONE EARTH ARE YOU TELLING A ROOM FULL OF HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE THAT VIV WILL BE ON THE MARKET WITHIN THE YEAR?

Conclusion:

This session really did rock my world, in ways both good and bad. Before coming to South By, I thought AI was really only the recommendations Amazon makes while I'm online shopping. WRONG. Clearly, it's so much more than that. It's very cool, very scary, and definitely something worth following.

I was chatting with an AI nerd in the elevator on the way out of the session, and he recommended an article that encapsulates a lot of what was said by Kittlaus. A longer read, but worth the time: <http://waitbutwhy.com/2015/01/artificial-intelligence-revolution-1.html>.