

Against S.L.O.P : Real Feelings in Fake Worlds

The Wheels of Life

"I will punish him and escape from everyone and from myself."

She exclaimed, to herself. The train was roaring in front of her. She was waiting for the perfect moment, or the carriage, to end it all. And so will punish the men and society that have crushed her world, and her soul. She was ready. But she mistimed it and could not jump. All the joys in her mind came rushing forth at that instant. "Give us one more chance to stay here. Just one". And she may have listened, had they come a second earlier. She jumped. No miss this time. The wheels hit the flesh and Anna Karenina was no more.

One wonders, whether if Anna had access to all her memories, instead of just the sad ones, would she have jumped?

In a time when machines can paint perfect sunsets and passable love letters, I find myself asking what still feels real. Anna Karenina was no more real than any AI generated novel. Yet it felt raw and mirrored reality.

To understand how we feel what we feel, we need to go to the depths of how our minds operate.

But is there actually a depth?

The Mind is Flat

We walk among some who still believe the Earth is flat. We talk among some who still believe the Evolution is a flat out lie.

Seldom, will we meet a person who will argue their mind is flat.

We think we are conscious and mindful, remembering the rich perceptual details of what happened yesterday and surely last week. And never fabricate. Alas.

One of the most upsetting line of evidence in cognitive sciences is that the human mind is a premium improviserⁱ. It is not a central planner or an oracle. It is a continuously predicting, adaptively improvising organ that generates behaviours.

The central theme is that our perception of our great depth in our mind is an illusion. This is not to say it does not exist, but rather it is generated on the fly. In other words, our entire experience happens with a small tiny fraction of our memories, <1%, completely unaware of the other >99%.

Our local knowledge of our global memories is painfully evident in many real-life experiences. Reading a trivial tweet in the morning, which affects our professional decision in the afternoon. Watching a political podcast host and suddenly adopting their beliefs as ours, despite contradiction to other beliefs we might not remember then. The daily things.

Experience without Representations

In order to live in a reality that refuses to reveal itself, we must work with possibilities. One does not wait to see the lion to run away; mere roar or footprints are sufficient. This kind of inverse problems are widespread in life, where one must work with incomplete information. These are designed to be solved probabilistically. We see a movie trailer and must infer whether it's worth watching. Your co-worker is unusually courageous today, did he secure a new job? The hard things. Our brain makes this easy by generating predictions on how things can change.

Our predictions always have to be one step ahead of our environment. Predictions are an old world compressed and regenerating as a hypothesis about how the future world might beⁱⁱ. Predictions are a strong belief in something that has no evidence in the present. Our subjective predictions largely dictate what we feel on our environment, others and our bodies.

That bruise on the elbow will hurt only after the fight.

"It was difficult talking to her" (because of one sentence that was uncomfortable, in a 20 min conversation).

No brain (or machine) can hold all the possibilities of how our predictions of the world will unfurl. But we needed to survive so we became local animals. We predict locally while completely oblivious to many memories in us. This is why the examples listed above work. Creativity is the process of going against this, and combining non-local memories too shy to meet otherwise.

Our experience starts with our predictive beliefs about the world, technically called the person's internal world model. Also known as the situation model. These models create predictions which are structured and abstract. The goal of predictions is to choose actions. Many predictions vote for different actions, and thus must be selected based on sensory stimuli we perceive. For example, the prediction of obeying your boss usually wins over the prediction of pouring hot coffee on their shirt. Not every prediction can be granted its day in court.

Only when our predictions are met (or unmet, hence surprise) does our experience comes into play. And we come into being. Our predictions generate our experience. Everything else is habit, autopilot, stamp collecting etc.

Life Needs Fantasies

Life is good (and boring) when predictions are met consistently. When wrong, one can change one's predictions. Or (boldly) change the world to fit one's predictions. Action is how our brain interacts with the world, and without it, there is no evidence for its existence.

Changing the world to one's predictions comes off in many forms across domains. A scientist developing a theory might insert his childhood experience with fiction to insert a fantasy element (which might be wrong). A sexually imaginative journalist might insert a false piece of foreshadowing on a hit piece that was otherwise fully truthful. We always generate predictions that have no existence in reality, but would love to be. We need fantasy and cannot help it.

Computationally mental simulations and its products helped us immensely in our species. For example, planning for the future, piecing together incomplete memories and enticing women by making up humorous stories.

We love Odyssey. We love Alien Earth. We love WWE. We love sitcoms. We know they all are made up. We can't think of life without these. So why can't we love the creations of our newfound machine-siblings?

S.L.O.P - Sensory Level Outputs without Purpose

Let us define an umbrella term, the product of an AI generative model - be it text, images, videos or game frames. We shall call it Sensory Level Outputs without Purpose, or S.L.O.P

SLOP is work that mimics experience without a lived prediction behind it. SLOP is what happens when one trains on a million images and videos which are human generated but stripped away from its creative mental contexts. SLOP is when we learned to mimic the superficial sensory details without the rich internal model that produces the abstract predictions. The latter imposes a much-needed structure onto

the former. It is precisely, this lack of causal structure that implicitly alerts us there is an absence of a human model here. And thus, nothing to predict, change and ultimately experience. SLOP.

Steve Jobs wanted the iPhone in a very specific way. Miyazaki wanted his Princess Mononoke to love wolves over men. These artisanal minds wanted to see a part, a small part, of our world to be changed and experienced in a determined way. They may have sacrificed more than what they created.

Johnny twowits pressing the generate button repeatedly to create an ad to make you buy their (often inferior) product has no such purpose. It is a SLOP. It has only the surface level semblance, without an intent that wants to be predicted and changed.

Do we eat it or Do we sell it?

What happens when you do end up with a digital maw that can generate anything that was ever created?

You do not consume it. No drug dealer worth his salt will consume his own product. You distribute it.

X (formerly twitter) released a bot that SLOPs an anime woman to the masses few months ago.

Meta (formerly facebook) just released a new AI video SLOPland to the masses few weeks ago.

OpenAI, as of today, released an entirely new social media app rich with SLOP.

The Romans already had a solution to this problem. According to a myth, some wily fishermen ended up catching a lot of turtles (which are distasteful) and wanted to sell it. So, they asked everyone around to eat it, including one of the most interesting gods, Mercury. Too clever for them, Mercury understood the setup and forced them to consume their own turtles. We may need Mercury to return.

For the first time, economy might reward the SLOP producer despite no passionate consumers for it. We might even have an entire industry dedicated to this, perhaps 'Sloppywood' but the nerds won't get the irony.

What would society look like, if it does end up shooting this into its cultural bloodstream?

Dollar General Memories, sold here

The first and the most obvious trend is the natural extension of modern social media on our memories. We become saturated with other people's half-baked, half-predicted outputs and yearn for fulfilment. We experience too many things but can only memorize a few. Most people have similar memories because are living in similar bubbles and echo chambers.

Real memories for many people likely will get replaced with fake memories. The human tendency to hallucinate and create false memories, might overshadow the rate of hallucination of these AI models, if continued without constraint.

In such a world, is it more important to distinguish fiction vs memory, or to forego memories altogether and focus on what experience can one get, fast and cheap?

Confessions to Silicon

Many of the most capable people I know confess to a bot. These are educated, competent individuals. And it's not about cooking recipes.

How they feel bad about their actions on someone, wanting justification.

How they feel good about a newfound ill habit, wanting validation.

How they feel about their marriage.

The godfather of AI had his ex-wife leave him after some conversation with ChatGPT. Called him a rat even. Fate and irony, always together.

Never in human history has our carbon brains expose its secrets to anything other than another carbon brain, which hopefully had communion with God. Silicon has now entered the fray. And will replace many more carbon brains.

Trained to Scroll

Habits are hard to make and harder to unmake. Collectively, we all had a decade worth of training to scroll and swipe. I have yet to see a new interface that is not on glass, and that gives more control to the user.

It would have been perfect if no one continued the scroll interface. But someone will. So, everyone new and old, have to continue.

Unless we find incentivize exploring newer interfaces to interact with these, the SLOPs will find it much easier to reach us, than for us to escape them.

Shame as a Helmet

Some might argue that the new AR/VR headset companies have been making is an answer to this.

Great technologies satisfy the whole spectrum of predictions. Unfortunately, this includes the sacred and the profane together. Internet gave us instant access to books and porn.

Surely, these headsets will enable us to work in much more efficient ways than before due to their vastly richer visual-kinetic interfaces.

But is that something we truly want? Does the sculptor need a better chisel or a David worthy of effort?

Singles Only

We all borrow famous minds from the cultural zeitgeist briefly. Their success is our success. We feel we possess similar minds. Except we don't. We mentally simulate enormously about other people, whom we love to possess without understanding. Just ask anyone with a crush on someone who they talked after a month of fantasizing.

Parasocial relationships are on the rise. Predictions without feedback are self-overpowering.

Many men and women have a large online circle, many they have not met in real life. This opens up the one-way street of a culture where an individual's experience is of the utmost priority, even if its unfounded in reality or isolated from others.

Japan Already Knows

But Japan has already been there, and done that.

Japan had low fertility and lower marriage rates decades ago, which has only peaked now in the west.

Japan had less sexual activity and more solo experience among people years ago, which the west is now starting to witness.

Oh, and let us never forget that the word robotics usually was associated with Japan for most of our lifetime. The recent push from the Bay Area crew that robots are the future? Please.

Japan already knowsⁱⁱⁱ. It knows where we are headed. A land without love.

It Needs to Bleed

“Love without sacrifice is theft” - Taleb

Most of us do not love the who or what. We love the desire itself above everything. It is contagious. We do not need to push ourselves. It pulls us. We forego everything else for it. We bleed for it.

It is the highest signal a person can make, to say "I bled to make this work". Be it an app, a relationship or a scientific model. We cannot help but to fawn over and investigate it, adding our opinions on it.

Humans have the uncanny ability to deny meaning where one finds it. Usually when it defies one's predictions. But the inverse is not true. We cannot find meaning where it inherently has none. No matter how much we reframe it.

Things need to be made in blood, sweat and tears for it to connect with us. It needs to suffer. In 5 years, we will find ourselves in a world where creation is limitless and without suffering. In such a world, the only thing that will suffer is ourselves, for we cannot find meaning in anything anymore.

Perhaps the gods can save us here?

The Past We Lost

We cannot create anymore gods. We cannot know any new God. All the gods and God we know and worship are all we have. And all we will ever have.

We cannot write new mythologies or genesis.

We cannot create new festivals or traditions.

We have largely forgotten who we were, abandoned for a future that mocks us.

Recently, Pope Francis (His Holiness) passed away (peacefully). Besides the few 100 men in Vatican, nobody knows or cares about the entire Papal system and how to elect a new Pope. There's a chance we might lose it once and will never reappear again in humanity. Have you seen any politician pushing to build an extraordinary temple or a cathedral? Neither have I.

We cannot imagine new movies either. It is largely franchises that still rule entertainment.

Humanity's tale isn't about love, respect, honour or knowledge. It is about an unending series of comically ironic twists, with little learning happening between these twists. As we approach the peak of our current world, rich in irony, it dawns upon us that we may have forgotten what started our story us in the first place.

The question isn't whether AI is real or fake. It's whether our minds are.

ⁱ Chater, *The Mind Is Flat*.

ⁱⁱ Bar, *Predictions in the Brain*.

ⁱⁱⁱ August 26 and 2025, "Japan Gets There First."