

## **Incorporating AI Must First Mean Interpreting AI**

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*It is spoken of constantly. The ever-present buzz of a new technology that may change (almost) everything. It's in my house, my car, my laptop and the way I now live - though I don't remember asking for it. Then again, I don't remember asking for the internet, mobile phone technology or taxes but I certainly seem to have all of them fully incorporated into the way I live. None-the-less, is AI more than an incremental distraction that we will adjust to just like we have done with other technologies?*

*So, is AI another blip on the human radar screen - a portent of significant change for our way of life - or perhaps it's just a large flock of passing pigeons being misinterpreted as an alien invasion? Of course, misreading radar screens can be catastrophic. The first wave of 183 of the 350 planes of Japan's airborne attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 were initially correctly interpreted as aircraft - but not identified as an approaching act of war. Despite the rest of the world already being at war and America being placed on high alert and a series of radar stations being specifically built to detect threat – the true meaning of the signals was misunderstood by the American Intercept Centre.*

*In this chapter I discuss human intelligence and how interpreting AI must be a parallel consideration and process to simply incorporating AI capacities.*

### **Technological Claims**

I can remember a television advert in the early 1960s which claimed buying a certain brand of washing machine would change my mother's life forever. It would save my busy mum so much time- as she'd no longer need to spin her laundry in a separate spinner or wring the water out of her washing by putting it through hand cranked mangle rollers. She'd have even more free time to concentrate on all those other menial chores that men never dreamt of doing. This new cutting-edge marvel could wash and spin all in one! Hmmm. She would be able to throw her mangle away! Yes, we actually had a mangle. And no. I don't remember Mum's life being forever changed by the new washer when we eventually got one. Of course, it was all marketing hype rather than real technological progress. It wasn't until a few years later that automatic front loaders that could both wash and spin and had variable rinse and gentle wash cycles became affordable. Washer- mangles were just an interim technology. Similarly, EV battery driven cars may also simply be technology in transition

between fossil fuels and a yet to be applied, more convenient, way of powering our travel needs. And then we come to AI. What does it mean in terms of its capabilities and the technological transitions it is likely to produce?

### **New Ways of Learning**

Because of AI the world of Higher Education (HE) is now different. That could be both a good and bad thing. But will AI just become another complicated distraction in how education operates, or is it truly the most important game changer of the century?

According to some, AI is a valuable tool for 'augmenting cognition' particularly when it is involved in online education. However, James Yoonil Auh interprets this augmentation differently. Currently, universities have responded to AI largely in terms of trying to resolve academic integrity matters and rethink approaches to assessment. But there are more risks than that involved.

*“• Invisible pedagogy. AI feedback systems embed assumptions about clarity, relevance and argumentation that are rarely visible to students or faculty.*

*• Flattening of intellectual risk. Systems optimised for coherence and consensus may discourage exploratory, unconventional or culturally distinct reasoning.*

*• Erosion of relational pedagogy. Abundant automated feedback can crowd out slower, human forms of mentoring essential for intellectual formation” (James Yoonil Auh, University World News, 23 January 2026).*

Auh's concerns relate to the potential of AI to reduce students' intellectual interpretation and interrogation of knowledge thereby flattening their engagement with epistemic depth and the integrity of their research and learning.

*Long story cut even shorter:* A student uses AI to answer assignment questions. They/them may be able to do this without deep reading of the required supporting texts and materials. AI does that bit for them. AI also writes the content of their overall assignment responses. The student has answered the assignment requirements without engaging deeply with the curriculum content or its desired pedagogic outcomes. Ultimately, the student may not have much engagement or relationship with the body of knowledge they are supposed to be authoritative in. What value to future employers and the students themselves will their degrees represent?

Dani Dilkes and Mark Daley (*University World News, 23 January 2026*) take this notion a little further. They argue that *'AI disruptions reveal the folly of an idealised university.'*

They further state:

*'If students navigating higher education believe the goal is to pass rather than to learn, then student misuse of generative AI technologies is nothing more than a rational action by a rational agent.'*

Dilkes and Daley foreshadow the death of English literature and humanities through misuse of generative AI - as AI removes both elements of student intellectual rigor and the learned ability to apply critical thinking. Without these processes many elements of traditional university education can no longer rely upon accrued understanding of essential bodies of knowledge, their interrogation and interactions with related bodies of knowledge and practices and/or applied dialogical teaching and critical inquiry. The foundational educational legacies of what is valued re knowledge and learning in Higher Education become weakened. Socratic questioning and the 450-year-old Jesuit Ignatian Pedagogical approach (experience, reflection, action) are moved aside in assignments and online teaching which is vulnerable to invasive AI.

Above all, Dilkes and Daley point out that the tertiary education online education approaches and hybrid courses in which students are not taught face-to-face are signifiers of a *higher education knowledge factory* approach to the massification of awards and their supply. They rightly note that *'the knowledge factory' invites generative AI misuse'*. This is what James Yoonil Auh (25th Jan 2026) sees as an open door for *AI to rewrite online education into a cognitive service*.

### **Neuroplasticity and Human Behaviour**

Human learning and motivations are key to interpreting our responses to AI's presence and potentials. Neuroscientist David Eagleman often writes about the incredible capacities humans have to develop the thinking, tools and responses necessary for *solving problems* in their everyday lives. Rather than being hard-wired like other mammals are to do certain things (*e.g. newborn calves and foals can walk within minutes of being born but humans take around a year to develop the necessary skills*) human brains can flexibly respond to overcoming problems most mammals can't. This can be seen in the human evolutionary development in using tools, farming and creating modes of transportation to meet specific needs.

There is a problem-solving plasticity in how human brains can re-wire themselves and respond to all sorts of changed circumstances. Eagleman refers to a child who, through illness, had one hemisphere of his brain entirely removed. Rather than being vegetative, the

child relearnt language skills, mobility, and went to school and, for a brief period, college. Apart from some mobility issues in his right arm, it was impossible to tell that he'd had half his brain removed. Eagleman's point is that there is plasticity in the human brain which allows, over time, internal rewiring and adaptation. Old concepts of how the brain works and which part of it controls what are, largely, outdated.

We humans learn to solve our fundamental problems.

Whilst climate change will once more eradicate many thousands of animal species globally – humans will likely adapt to the majority of changes. Most other animals lack this element of neuroplasticity which allows us to change our behaviours, diets and habitats at will.

Eagleman points to us being different people each day, week and year of our lives – *as we are constantly responding to different experiences and adjusting accordingly.*

Whilst we may worry about children developing micro-grab learning responses to iPhone apps and computers and bemoan more students using AI instead of following traditional approaches to completing university assignments -none of it is likely to become a shortcut process that will be hard-wired in their brains. The human propensity for solving problems swiftly, effectively and with as little effort as possible is, however, likely to lead to gaps in their knowledge, competencies and deep understanding that may have significant ramifications for research and human behaviour in years to come. This is something that requires more research before it can be properly interpreted. We are still in the infancy of AI and all that it implies.

### **Humans and Gods in Education**

As for detecting AI generated assignments there are those who say they can. Academic Savant Gods, have you ever met one? No. I'm not talking Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking or Noam Chomsky but those academics who see themselves as gatekeepers or the last defence between academic excellence and the abyss. In over 40 years in higher education across four continents – I have met more than my fair share of them. They inhabit their academic identities as being the signifiers of having reached an exalted status. The latest iteration I've recently encountered proclaim (without irrefutable evidence) an ability to be able to infallibly identify generative AI writing from that of their students. In some (or perhaps many) cases they might actually be able to. *The prevalence of AI misuse is extensive amongst students and there are numerous users to be caught.*

Some of the academics in question may really know their students' work and writing styles well enough to be able to spot cheating. However, these days, knowing your students well enough to recognise their writing styles is a much less common experience. Other academics might even detect AI machine writing through applying software - as well as by the general tone of the students' written responses- but in sum, the massification of online courses and on campus delivery modes make identifying AI cheating problematic. And AI is constantly improving and though academics have skills and knowledge infallibility is not one of them. AI will eventually fool us all.

And this brings me back to our Pearl Harbour radar operators.

On that fateful day in 1941 at the Opana Radar Site in Oahu, they saw massive blips on their radar screens and first responders interpreted them (correctly) as aircraft, but, when their report was passed to the Strategic Centre, it was inexperience, radar as a new technology, gaps in training and confusion that ultimately created the outcome of a deadly *misinterpretation*. These blips were not the friendly planes the Strategic Centre thought them to be. It was a failure of correct *interpretation* that led to America entering WWII.

Our present dilemma also relates to a lack of adequate grounds for sound interpretation. AI is being incorporated, like the internet, mobile phones and taxes, into our lives before full choice or due diligence have taken place. Governments are now, retrospectively, seeking to apply interpretation and due diligence and further create regulatory boundaries for AI usage. The stock markets have, as I write, also not seen surety in AI technologies and their applications- and AI stocks have dramatically dropped by 20% or more. But the AI genie won't fit back into its bottle. It is in our education systems.

The end result is that universities are now blithely claiming to have control over AI assessment incursions but are still resisting returning to modes of assessment that prove genuine student engagement. This demonstrates wilful blindness of enormous portent. There is not yet a foolproof way of detecting AI misuse. Universities are downplaying the seriousness of AI's interruptions because to do otherwise would interrupt their business models.

*Universities will have to change – and this may not be a bad thing. The authenticity and value of their academic products is now much in question. Whatever happens next, AI has already incorporated itself into our academic lives and lived worlds before its value has been properly interpreted. Its meaning and impacts currently remain unclear and uninterpreted. That will eventually change.*

## **References**

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