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Dear Reader,

We open with a fascinating 8 minutes read from **Singularity** that focuses on the myth and reality of artificial general intelligence. AI luminaries, such as Ilya Sutskever and Yann LeCun are talking about a new era of research. "It's going to take a while. There are major conceptual breakthroughs that have to happen before we have AI systems that have human-level intelligence," said Yann LeCun, who shared the Turing Award with Geoffrey Hinton and Yoshua Bengio for the invention of deep learning. He has long held that LLMs won't yield human-level AI.

Peter H. Diamandis, in our second story, focuses on the humanoid phenomenon, and predicts that humanoid deployment by 2040 will range from 1 billion to 10 billion units, with ARK Invest projecting a \$24 trillion market. Diamandis reports on the leading lights of this thrust into advanced robotics, and focuses on Bernt Børnich — CEO & Founder, 1X Technologies, Peggy Johnson — CEO, Agility Robotics, Jeff Cardenas — CEO & Co-Founder, Apptronik, Ackles Chen — Co-Founder, Unitree Robotics, and Dhanush Radhakrishnan — Co-Founder & CEO, Clone Robotics.

Next up is **Scott Lamb** who writes about the new AI inflection point, and argues that we are on the precipice of massive change. So how can one get prepared? One place to start is with your own thinking, he says. Follow ideas all the way down, don't stop until you've totally wrapped your mind around them. Embrace contradictions. Be flexible. Use writing as a tool to help you understand what you think.

Itika Sharma Punit writes about her trip to the Maldives where she finds the Chinese shopping app Temu to be all the rage. The Bank of Maldives is seriously concerned over its worsening foreign exchange shortage and has imposed a 30% surcharge known locally as the Temu tax.

Back-of-the-book is our regularly scheduled column Top-of-Mind which this time highlights the Japanese culture of cleanliness as exemplified by its soccer fans at the FIFA World Cup in the USA.

Read on and stay well 😊

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We're now several years into the generative AI era. AI companies are attracting billions of dollars in investment, have hundreds of millions of users, and are experiencing rapid revenue growth. Though corporate profitability and the technology's ultimate impact on the economy are uncertain, it's clear that many people are using AI in a variety of ways.

But selling a new software product isn't the industry's end game. The companies at the heart of the AI boom have publicly stated they're aiming for artificial general intelligence. So it's worth asking, "What comes next?" If you had surveyed the comments of AI CEOs a few years ago, the answer would have been, "Nothing. This technology will get us to AGI. It could happen soon. We just need more scale."

That belief now seems less prevalent.

Several CEOs, including Microsoft's Satya Nadella and OpenAI's Sam Altman, have been downplaying the term AGI—which has, admittedly, always been vaguely defined—when talking about the technology's future. More importantly, AI luminaries, such as Ilya Sutskever and Yann LeCun, say they're now looking to make breakthroughs that take us beyond the large language models (LLMs) central to generative AI. Sutskever, who has been deeply involved in the

most consequential AI developments in the last two decades and cofounded OpenAI, is perhaps the most notable defection. But LeCun, who shared the Turing Award with Geoffrey Hinton and Yoshua Bengio for the invention of deep learning, has also long said LLMs won't yield human-level AI. Both have founded new startups on their convictions.

In a fascinating podcast discussion with Dwarkesh Patel published at the end of last year, Sutskever noted that today's models still don't generalize well, and there's a large gap between impressive paper evaluations—like an AI model passing an advanced medical exam—and real-world performance—a model encouraging a man to ingest dangerous amounts of bromide when asked for health advice. "I think what people are doing right now will go some distance and then peter out," he said. "It will improve, but it will also not be 'it.'"

According to Sutskever, continual learning will be a critical aspect of what "it" is. Foundation models undergo a huge amount of training, both the automated kind, where they're stuffed with data, as well as the hands-on kind, where engineers and experts later fine-tune them. But the core algorithms are largely static after launch. This is, of course, nothing like the constantly morphing connections in the human brain. We're not born knowing calculus; we steadily gain such skills as we grow.

Sutskever declined to say what his company, Safe Superintelligence (SSI), is working on—such is the state of an industry locked in fierce competition—but he did sketch out a vision of what a completed product might be like. Instead of a fully formed, superintelligent agent, he suggested it might be more like a superintelligent 15-year-old with a basic toolset but little experience in the world. Then, through a process of continual learning, the AI might go out and learn trades, say doctor or lawyer, the way we do. In this scenario, AGI wouldn't explode on the scene fully formed.

LeCun, meanwhile, is focused on world models. These algorithms develop an internal representation of the world and use it to reason about their surroundings and plan actions. JEPa, the framework LeCun built at Meta, does this by scarfing down video data. “It learns the underlying rules of the world from observation, like a baby learning about gravity,” LeCun told MIT Technology Review in an interview. “This is the foundation for common sense, and it's the key to building truly intelligent systems that can reason and plan in the real world.” LeCun left Meta in November and founded his new company, Advanced Machine Intelligence (AMI), shortly thereafter.

Both researchers also seem to agree on timing: Human-level, human-like AI isn't going to arrive this year or next. In his podcast interview, Sutskever suggests such AI is probably something like 5 to 20 years out. LeCun agrees, “It's going to take a while. There are major conceptual breakthroughs that have to happen before we have AI systems that have human-level intelligence,” LeCun said in the interview.

SSI and AMI are just two of the most prominent examples of a crop of research-first AI startups called neolabs. These companies number in the dozens, according to the Wall Street Journal, and

are attracting billion-dollar valuations with no product or business in sight. Rather, investors are hoping to get in early on the next OpenAI. “I am very interested in today's 22-year-old who's going to spend the next 10 years trying to find AGI,” Sequoia Capital partner David Cahn told the Wall Street Journal.

This doesn't mean the next advance won't arise at one of the big players. Google, where transformers were first discovered, is well-positioned to push the field forward with Google DeepMind, even as it develops generative AI as a product too. Further, generative AI, as it stands, will continue to have a major impact. Indeed, with AI's coding prowess, it seems plausible the technology may even speed up AI research.

Take the ruckus over Claude Code as an example. After Anthropic updated the tool last year, developers and hobbyists alike have been singing its praises. Anthropic engineers say they already use it to produce a notable fraction of their code. Of course, AI isn't doing the work alone. We're not there. If you want polished products, you need qualified developers holding the reins and keeping a close eye on the end result. But with the guidance of these top coders, it's possible AI coding tools might speed up experimentation and iteration. Using the latest generation of tools to bring the next generation into existence is a very old story in technology.

As the field enters a new “era of research,” as Sutskever calls it, LLMs might not themselves evolve into AGI, but they will quite possibly be an essential tool in the hands of those racing to take the next steps toward it ■

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The Humanoid Faculty: From Lab to Living Room



Peter H. Diamandis | 08 min read

Bernt Børnich — CEO & Founder, 1X Technologies

Bernt founded 1X in Norway over a decade ago, long before the current humanoid wave. Now backed by OpenAI and headquartered in Palo Alto, his company is taking a radically different approach: building robots for homes, not factories.

His insight rewrites the AI playbook: “If you have 10,000 robots gathering data most of the day, that’s more useful data than everything uploaded to YouTube daily.” Intelligence comes from diversity, Bernt argues – and home environments provide unlimited

diversity. Every coffee cup interaction, every door handle, every social context becomes training data that transforms artificial intelligence.

1X’s NEO Gamma robot weighs just 35 kilograms and is deliberately “soft and compliant” for safe human interaction. The price point: \$20,000 to own, or \$499 per month. 1X is targeting 100,000 units by 2027 and millions by 2028.

The home robot revolution starts this year. Bernt is building it.

Peggy Johnson — CEO, Agility Robotics

Peggy led business development at Microsoft, reporting directly to Satya Nadella. She ran

Magic Leap. She spent 24 years at Qualcomm, where she launched the first mobile app downloading platform. Now, she's scaling the company that achieved the world's first commercial humanoid deployment.

Her insight cuts through the hype: "It's not as sexy as making a cup of coffee. But if we can check that safety box, the market is ours." Agility's Digit robots operate as a service at roughly \$30 per hour—cheaper than fully-burdened human labor costs. TIME named her to their AI 100 list for a reason.

Jeff Cardenas — CEO & Co-Founder, Appttronik

Jeff built Appttronik from a decade of research at UT Austin's Human Centered Robotics Lab. His Apollo robot is now partnered with Google DeepMind, Mercedes-Benz, and NASA. His company raised \$403 million in Series A funding.

His philosophy: "It's not man versus machine, but man AND machine that will take humanity into the next stage of evolution." Appttronik is building a "data factory" in Austin where robots continuously generate training data that improves the entire fleet. "Once we build up the initial foundation," he says, "the sky's the limit."

Ackles Chen — Co-Founder, Unitree Robotics

Ackles co-founded Unitree and helped build what may be the most disruptive force in humanoid robotics. Their G1 robot sells for under \$16,000 and is available on Walmart.com. Their R1 model starts at just \$5,900.

This is democratization in action. Ackles serves on China's Intelligent Robotics Professional Committee and is completing his PhD in AI and physical simulation. Unitree's robots can run at 12 km/h (≈ 7.46 mph),

perform cartwheels, and recover from falls. They're bringing full-body humanoid robotics to developers, researchers, and early adopters worldwide.

Dhanush Radhakrishnan — Co-Founder & CEO, Clone Robotics

Dhanush built a megawatt-scale plasma thruster at age thirteen. At NYU, he published research in nuclear fusion. Then, he founded Clone to pursue a childhood dream: building androids that move like humans, down to the muscle and bone.

Clone's approach is unlike anything else in the field. Instead of motors and gears, they use water-powered artificial muscles and 206 synthetic bones that replicate human anatomy. The goal: androids that can do anything a human can, from opening heavy doors to slicing a pineapple.

The Stakes Are Massive

From our recent research (lookout for our upcoming report): predictions for humanoid deployment by 2040 range from 1 billion to 10 billion units. ARK Invest projects a \$24 trillion market. Costs are falling toward \$20,000-\$30,000 per unit – roughly \$10 per day for a robot working 24/7.

We're approaching a future where goods and services trend toward zero cost. Where labor shortages in eldercare, manufacturing, and logistics are solved by machines that never tire. Where your home becomes a classroom for superintelligence.

This is the decade of transformation ■

Peter H. Diamandis
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The new AI inflection point



Scott Lamb | 04 min read

It's been 1,178 days since ChatGPT debuted to the public. Since then, we've been through several waves of hype cycle-followed-by-backlash, and new models and tools have slowly but surely worked their way from thrilling novelty into regular, mundane usage.

Given enough time, every conversation I'm in now somehow finds its way to the topic of AI. Talking about your upcoming travel? AI played a role in planning it. New workout routine? AI helps you keep track of your gains.

Over the last few weeks, though, there's been a collective sense of turning a new corner in the world of software engineering using agentic tools, with writers across Medium sharing their experience. Frontend engineer Brittany Chiang wonders if her role is becoming more like a TSA agent, but looking for bugs instead of prohibited items. The pace of change has engineer Francisco Trindade asking whether companies will continue to review code in the future—when new tools make generating thousands of new lines of code trivial, the new bottleneck becomes review. And Medium iOS engineer Thomas Ricouard feels we've reached a new tipping point, "a sort of collective awakening" with the latest agents. "A year ago," he writes, "if I told you that you'll mostly only review

code those days, and not write a single line yourself, you would have looked at me weirdly."

I've received (and sent!) the link to this massively viral X.com essay comparing the current moment in AI development to early February 2020, when the pandemic had already begun but most people

weren't yet aware of it—it argues we are on the precipice of massive change (and to be fair, the essay has plenty of critics). A key part of the essay, and the driving reason it's been passed around so heavily, is its argument that what's happening in the world of software engineering is soon likely to play out in most knowledge-based fields. The tipping point is coming for us all. So how can one get prepared? One place to start is with your own thinking. Writer Ryan Holiday recently shared his guidelines for being a better thinker in the age of AI, and they'll help you no matter what field you're in as you reckon with how AI will be changing your work. A few especially relevant ones:

- **Go deep:** Follow ideas all the way down, don't stop until you've totally wrapped your mind around them.
- **Embrace contradiction:** F. Scott Fitzgerald said, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function."
- **Be flexible:** Cultivate your capacity for change.
- **Write to think right:** Use writing as a tool to help you understand what you think ■

Source:

<https://medium.com/blog/the-new-ai-inflection-point-83c5ee3a856b>

I went to the Maldives. Everyone wanted to talk about Temu



Itika Sharma Punit | 08 min read

One evening in the Maldives, I spent a few hours talking with local entrepreneurs. I expected to hear about tourism, politics, or the economy. Instead, they kept talking about Temu.

Not artificial intelligence. Not semiconductors. Not even TikTok. Temu.

The Chinese shopping app has become so popular in the Maldives, they told me, that it has changed how people buy everyday goods.

Last year, the Bank of Maldives imposed a 30% surcharge on purchases from a group of popular international e-commerce platforms, including China's Temu, Shein, Alibaba, and AliExpress, as well as U.S.-based eBay. The bank argued that online shopping, which accounted for 75% of foreign purchases made by its customers at the time, was worsening the country's foreign-currency shortage.

Temu was so popular in the country that local media called this surcharge a "Temu tax."

What happened next was even more revealing.

Consumers kept buying. Even after the surcharge, Temu remained cheaper than stores in the capital, Malé. The app's free shipping had become so popular that the national postal service struggled to process the volume of incoming packages, the entrepreneurs told me.

Part of what made this surprising to me is that I live in India, just a two-hour flight from the Maldives, where Chinese apps have been banned for national security reasons since the 2020 border clashes between the two countries. It is easy to forget how pervasive Chinese consumer platforms have become elsewhere.

What I heard in the Maldives made me wonder whether we are misunderstanding China's growing influence in technology. In the West, discussions about Chinese technology are dominated by AI and semiconductors. But in the Maldives, I kept encountering a different form of Chinese power: consumer dependence.

Consumer habits can be consequential.

When people begin buying everyday goods through the same platform, they also become dependent on the logistics networks, payment systems, recommendation algorithms, and supplier ecosystems behind it. Over time, those systems become infrastructure. They shape what products people discover, which merchants survive, and where profits flow.

For years, Americans exported the world's most influential consumer internet products.

Search came from Google. Social networking came from Facebook. Online shopping came from Amazon. Now, Chinese companies may be training the world to shop online.

The more I thought about the Maldives, the more it seemed like an early glimpse of a broader shift. The country's dependence on imports makes it an extreme example, but not necessarily an isolated one.

Governments around the world have spent the past two years trying to protect their local businesses from the onslaught of Chinese e-commerce. Indonesia restricted TikTok Shop. Vietnam has increased scrutiny of imported goods sold through foreign platforms. European regulators have raised concerns about customs exemptions, product safety, and the flood of ultra-cheap imports entering the continent through Temu and Shein.

These debates often frame Chinese e-commerce as a retail story. I increasingly suspect it is a power story.

The platforms people use every day shape trust, expectations, and behavior. Once consumers become accustomed to buying through Chinese marketplaces, the leap to using other Chinese digital products — like DeepSeek's AI bots or Unitree's humanoid robots — may become much smaller.

So, the future of China's technological influence may begin with a cheap plastic package arriving at your doorstep ■

Rest of World
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T.O.M
Top-of-Mind
#16



Japan wins big at 23rd FIFA World Cup!

In their World Cup opener against the Netherlands, Japan held the Dutch to a draw 2-2 in Arlington, Texas. How they will fare in the rest of the tournament is open to question. However, where the world's hearts and minds are concerned, the Japanese spectators have scored a perfect 10, with the fans leaving the stands spotlessly clean, describing it as Japanese culture to tidy up after themselves (The News International, June 16, 2026). Spectators stayed behind after the match to make sure they left the stadium as they found it, meticulously picking up litter and stuffing it into blue plastic bags.

International calling card

Japan are appearing at their 8th straight World Cup and their fans cleanliness has become their international calling card. In World Cup football tournaments in Brazil (2014) and Russia (2018), the national team's fans amazed the world by staying behind to pick up rubbish from the stadium. The players also left their dressing room in immaculate condition. "What an example for all teams!" tweeted FIFA's general coordinator Priscilla Janssens.

Spiritual way

This is our culture, said Futo Hagiwara, a Japanese fan as he energetically went about the cleanliness drive. "It means everywhere we go we need to clean it after ourselves. It's our spiritual way, our attitude. We usually don't tell children they should do it. We just show our actions and behavior, and other people follow."

Social responsibility & peer pressure

Sociologist and philosopher Masachi Ohsawa believes it's a mix of social responsibility and peer pressure behind

"A key concept in Shinto is kegare (impurity or dirt), the opposite of purity. Examples of kegare range from death and disease to virtually anything unpleasant. Frequent purification rituals are necessary to ward off kegare. If an individual is afflicted by kegare, it can bring harm to society as a whole. So it is vital to practice cleanliness. That is why Japan is a very clean country" – Noriaki Ikeda,

assistant Shinto priest at Hiroshima's Kanda Shrine

the fans behavior. "While Japanese people tend not to take much interest in justice on a large scale – issues like global inequality, conflict or climate change – they are extremely sensitive to moral considerations on a smaller scale. When it comes to people with whom they share the same space, or have direct personal contact with, they feel a strong desire not to cause them any trouble, or make them feel uncomfortable."

Cleaning chores are a part of Japanese education from an early age, and children can be seen scrubbing floors and tables at schools every day. Public waste bins are scarce in the country, and people are expected to take their rubbish home with them. Getting rid of household waste can be a physically complex task that involves separating rubbish into different categories.

The Japanese are an ancient civilization, and there is much that they have contributed to the world. As a onetime martial arts practitioner, my takeaways have been judo and the many variants of karate, in particular. The concept of cleanliness has always appeared as a universally sanctified creed not always practiced, unfortunately.

So, I was sufficiently curious, having read about the laudable actions of the Japanese fans in Texas, to probe deeper into what makes the Japanese tick in this very noble manner. A Google search brought up a multitude of options, and I clicked on a report dated 7 October 2019 titled "What Japan can teach us about cleanliness" filed by BBC correspondents Steve John Powell & Angeles Marin Cabello as part of "Why We Are What We Are," a BBC Travel series examining the characteristics of a country and investigating whether they are true.

Absence of litter bins & street sweepers

Most first-time visitors to Japan are struck by how clean the country is, reads the report. Then they notice the absence of litter bins. And street sweepers. So they're left with the question: how does Japan stay so clean? The easy answer is that residents themselves keep it that way. "For 12 years of school life, from elementary school to high school, cleaning time is part of students' daily schedule,"

“Japan are appearing at their 8th straight World Cup and their fans cleanliness has become their international calling card” – The News International, June 16, 2026

says Maiko Awane, assistant director of Hiroshima Prefectural Government's Tokyo office. “In our home life as well, parents teach us that it's bad for us not to keep our things and our space clean.”

Social consciousness

Including this element of social consciousness in the school curriculum helps the children develop an awareness of, and pride in, their surroundings. Who wants to dirty or deface a school that they have to clean up themselves?

“I sometimes didn't want to clean the school,” recalled freelance translator Chika Hayashi, “but I accepted it because it was part of our routine. I think having to clean the school is a very good thing because we learn that it's important for us to take responsibility for cleaning the things and places that we use.”

On arriving at school, students leave their shoes in lockers and change into trainers. At home, too, people leave their street shoes at the entrance. Even workmen coming to your house will remove their shoes and pad around in their socks. And as the schoolchildren grow, their concept of what constitutes their space extends beyond the classroom to include their neighborhood, their city and their country.

Scrupulously clean nobility

So how did the Japanese become so clean-conscious? It certainly isn't a new thing, as mariner Will Adams found when he anchored here in 1600, thus becoming the first Englishman to set foot in Japan. In his biography of Adams titled *Samurai William*, Giles Milton notes ‘the nobility were scrupulously clean’, enjoying ‘pristine sewers and latrines’ and steam baths of scented wood at a time when the streets of England ‘often overflowed with excrement’.

The Japanese ‘were appalled’ by the Europeans’ disregard for personal cleanliness. In part, this preoccupation is born of practical concerns. In a hot, humid environment like Japan's, food goes off quickly. Bacteria flourish. Bug life abounds. So good hygiene means good health.

“While Japanese people tend not to take much interest in justice on a large scale – issues like global inequality, conflict or climate change – they are extremely sensitive to moral considerations on a smaller scale” – Sociologist and philosopher Masachi Ohsawa

Shinto, Buddhism & cleanliness

But it goes deeper than that. Cleanliness is a central part of Buddhism, which arrived from China and Korea between the 6th and 8th Centuries. In fact, in the Zen

version of Buddhism, which came to Japan from China in the 12th and 13th Centuries, daily tasks like cleaning and cooking are considered spiritual exercises, no different from meditating.

“In Zen, all daily life activities, including having meals and cleaning the space, must be regarded as an opportunity to practice Buddhism. Washing off the dirt both physically and spiritually plays an important role in the daily practice,” said Eriko Kuwagaki of Shinshoji Temple in Fukuyama, Hiroshima Prefecture.

So why all Buddhist nations aren't as zealously clean as Japan? Well, long before the arrival of Buddhism, Japan already had its own indigenous religion: Shinto (meaning ‘The Way of The Gods’), said to enshrine the very soul of the Japanese identity. And cleanliness lies at the heart of Shinto. In the West, we are taught that cleanliness is next to godliness. In Shinto, cleanliness is godliness. So Buddhism's emphasis on cleanliness merely reinforced what the Japanese already practiced.

“Cleaning chores are a part of Japanese education from an early age, and children can be seen scrubbing floors and tables at schools every day” – Steve John Powell, correspondent, BBC Travel series

Kegare

A key concept in Shinto is kegaré (impurity or dirt), the opposite of purity. Examples of kegaré range from death and disease to virtually anything unpleasant. Frequent purification rituals are necessary to ward off kegaré. “If an individual is afflicted by kegaré, it can bring harm to society as a whole,” explained Noriaki Ikeda, assistant Shinto priest at Hiroshima's Kanda Shrine. “So it is vital to practice cleanliness. This purifies you and helps avoid bringing calamities to society. That is why Japan is a very clean country.”

This concern for others is understandable in the case of, say, infectious diseases. But it also works on more prosaic levels, like picking up your own rubbish. As Awane put it: “We Japanese believe we shouldn't bother others by being lazy and neglecting the trash we've made.” If you live in Japan, you soon find yourself adopting the clean lifestyle. You stop blowing your nose in public, make use of the hand sanitizers provided for customers in shops and offices, and learn to sort your household rubbish into 10 different types to facilitate recycling.

And, like Will Adams and his castaway crew back in 1600, you find your quality of life improves. Then, when you return to your homeland, you're shocked by barbarians who sneeze and cough in your face. Or stomp into your house in dirty shoes. Unthinkable in Japan. But there's still hope. After all, it also took a while for Pokémon, sushi and camera phones to sweep the world ■

Column by Adil Ahmad, Correspondent, TCS Octara.Com