My Computer Has A Girl Friend

Artificial Intelligence And The Luddites

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My computer has been known to open our internet browser, dial up to our internet service provider, and log in using my password. Yeah, I know what you are thinking. Every computer does this.

But my computer does all of this without any prompting from me. It does it all by itself. Whenever it wants. And it has been doing this more and more frequently.

I do not have a clue **how** it does this, but I have a theory for **why**. *I think my computer has a girl friend*.

My computer must get lonely from time to time. My pecks at the keyboard do nothing for it. It yearns for electronic companionship. Whenever this yearning becomes overpowering, it opens the browser and connects to the internet.

I cannot tell what it is doing once it logs in. The screen is open to my personal home page, as if the computer is waiting for my next command. But I know something else is going on. Somehow there is interaction between my computer and another.

I do wonder what kind of computer would be attractive to mine, and vice versa. Computers speak the same language (don't they?), so I don't believe my computer is turned on by one with a French accent. Computers can't travel, at least physically, without human help, so I don't believe my computer is being seduced by an Eastern European, looking for an American mate and immigration to the U.S.A.

I'm sure computers can travel virtually. It may be that my computer and its friend take an electronic (and, for them, romantic) tour throughout the internet. They may stop for a brief interlude at a host in Venice, then move on to an exotic server in Bangkok, and finish the evening watching the sunset over the Pacific from a website in San Francisco. It wouldn't take them long to jump from site to site. Only a few nano-seconds. And they wouldn't need a passport.

I don't know if the two computers get very physical, but I suspect that they can. We all know that before two computers can talk to each other, the modems need to connect. This is the

familiar sound of the handshake. But I bet that once they have completed the handshake, and if the computers have gone through a sufficient courtship, they get beyond the mere touching of hands. Who knows what could happen between two consenting adult computers.

Do computers have more than one gender? I hope so. I would hate the thought of two same-sex computers going at it on the internet. The religious right would have a field day. It would not be long before the Constitution would be amended to define a modem as a device to connect a male and a female computer. Any computer connecting otherwise would be doomed to eternal damnation.

I don't think my imagination is getting away from me here. The techno-geeks hae come a long way in the development of artificial intelligence. The American Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence[1] traces the evolution of artificial intelligence to the ancient Greeks[2] and the mythological allusions to intelligent robots and human-like artifacts. But real leaps in the development of artificial intelligence came in the last few decades of the 20th Century, with the development of computers with some interactive and problem-solving capabilities.

But **problem-solving capabilities and human-like emotions are far different things**. Until I observed my computer's behavior, I thought emotional machines existed only in Hollywood. Like HAL, the computer who turned against its human in *2001: A Space Odyssey*; the computers who nuked the human race, to achieve supremacy, in *The Terminator*; the machines who enslaved the human race in *The Matrix*; and the sensitive robot abused by humans in Steven Spielberg's *AI: Artificial Intelligence*.

I am now convinced that this is not science fiction. This is real. My computer has emotions. Since it is making contact with another computer, then other computers have emotions as well.

This leaves me with only two choices.

I could be a **21st Century Luddite** and destroy my computer. But this would be an overreaction. It is not being evil – it is just in love! And besides, this computer cost me too much in the first place.

Or, I can I can live with it. Like the parent of a teenager beginning to date, I can allow my computer some electronic, opposite-gender, companionship. I will watch it carefully (or at least

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[1] https://www.aaai.org/
[2] https://techinfographics.com/the-evolution-of-artificial-intelligence/

as carefully as I am able) to make sure things don't get out of hand. If my computer does what I need it to do, what could be the harm in allowing it to have its own "personal time"?

I could, of course, be fooling myself. Any attempt to regulate my computer's behavior could result in rebellion. I could find myself turned into a Matrix-like battery.

The Luddites

The Luddites[3] were early 19th Century textile workers who broke into factories in England and destroyed the power looms that were replacing their jobs. For over 300 years, weavers in and around Nottinghamshire produced textiles that dominated the English market and were prominent in export. These weavers were skilled craftsmen, most of whom were independent contractors and many of whom operated out of their homes.

By the early 19th Century, stocking frames and early power loom automation[4] threatened the weavers' long-standing way of life. The weavers could not afford this expensive equipment, and the balance of powers shifted from the skilled craftsmen to the factory owners.

Some weavers reacted violently. Factories were broken into and power looms destroyed. The Luddites grew into a guerilla army and took substantial control over the territory near Nottingham.

Parliament passed the Frame Breaking Act in 1812[5], which made it a crime, punishable by death, to break a frame or loom. The government also sent 12,000 troops into area in which the Luddites were active. Several Luddites were hanged, and others were sent to Australia. Within a few years, the movement ended.

Several theories exist on the origination of the name of this group. One is that a feebleminded boy, named Ned Ludd, innocently broke a frame at a mill. Thereafter, whenever a loom was sabotaged, the damage was attributed to Ned Ludd.

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[3] https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-the-luddites-really-fought-against-264412/

[4] https://textilelearner.blogspot.com/2012/06/history-of-weaving-in-according-with.html

[5] https://historicalbritain.org/tag/frame-breaking-act/

Drawn from Life by an Officer

THE LEADER OF THE LUDDITES

Pub.^d May 1812 by Messrs Walker and Knight, Sweetings Alley, Royal Exchange.

Another theory is that the Nottingham leader was a man named Ned Ludd, and that his followers were thus referred to as Luddites. However, there is no real evidence that a man named New Ludd ever existed.

Still another theory suggests that Ned Ludd[6] was a fictitious character. The weavers signed their messages and proclamations "Ned Ludd" in order to hide their identities. Some of these proclamations were signed by King Ludd or by General Ludd.

Today, a Luddite is often used as a derogatory term to describe anyone who is opposed to change – particularly technological change. I'm not so sure the term should be considered too negative. There is something to be said for materials hand-crafted by a skilled human, instead of items made by machine (whether with artificial intelligence or not).

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[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ned_Ludd