

## This Computes Just Fine, Thank You

Written by Alex Baer  
Thursday, 20 March 2014 01:00

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Enjoy this sight experience while you can. Before long, robots will also be *reading* the news that they, themselves, produce.

In fact, give it 10 or 20 years, and half of all jobs in the U.S. will be held by machines. The Oxford study does not provide details on other ripples through the financial and social strata. This leaves a lot of room for paranoid imagination, also known as alternately laughing at improbabilities and scaring the bejesus out of yourself.

When it comes to robot workers, perhaps the adage is right: It's not *if* you are paranoid, but if you are paranoid *enough*.  
This is not your grandfather's replacement-by-robots fear, not even its reality, as it has already worked out in the world. Pick your metaphor: This time it's serious as a heart attack, this program's on steroids, it's a whole new level of...

As always: When someone else's job is filled by a robot, it's cost-efficient progress. When it's your job that goes under, via the cold, articulated hand of robotics, it's an unfair radicalization of the global economy. Both are probably correct. Neither treat flesh-based units very well.

Thinking of buying some penny stocks in a robotic future world? Step this way...

For example, there's never any mention of Android Rights. Or Automaton Unemployment Compensation. Or Food Stamps. Or even if such assistance will be paid in wafer-thin silicon wafers and, um, rare-earth-chip cookies. Although, from first glance, such steps might well compute just fine, thank you.

No one's guess which way anything may go after those first baby steps in robotic strides. We might even end up with a locus of artificial intelligence in Congress, which would of course be most welcome, given the lack of basic humanoid smarts that are present on any give day of the week -- those days with Ys in them.

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It's another version of outsourcing, this time stood on its head and made to do the conveyor-belt, assembly-line mechano-tango. Instead of human jobs moving to other continents and hemispheres, the jobs might well remain on shore, but be commandeered by The Tireless Ones.

You think your grim overlords and task masters have no sense of humor *now*, just wait. Try explaining anything at all to your nearest Interface Point.

Remember how those service-economy jobs were once all the rage, despite their depressing pay and gruesome working hours, because at least -- the thinking was, *past tense* -- those jobs wouldn't head off to China, Malaysia, and India?

For a while there, it was a human-drawn line in the sand; now it's morphed into a set of tooled scribe lines on sheet metal drawn by no human hand or foot. Even those same, formerly *safe* service jobs are on the warp-speed escalator to Mechanization Land.

Meanwhile: You just have to know that Big Business will be looking at the cost-benefit analyses for such a change because, as you are all too well aware, there are cost-benefit analyses going on constantly, looking for way to save a tenth of a penny per sale, per million sales, amortized across time zones, around the world and back, and out into space itself.

Robots offer savings. Robots also need no coffee. So, prepare to make a last stand at the brewpot in the company kitchen. Before long, all employees will need to buy their own coffee and water and brewing machines and metered electricity and...

If those employees are human, that is. And there's the rub. And the crux of the biscuit, to throw a little business the way of Shakespeare and Zappa, two fine flesh-and-blood human beings of great talent who are unlikely to be equaled or excelled anytime soon by robots.

Probably.

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(Thanks for allowing a little flesh-and-bone grandstanding here, championing the humanist perspective. While we can. Before the machines say *NO*.)

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It is no longer enough, apparently, for CEOs to reap vacation homes, private planes, and jewel-encrusted parachutes from such cost-benefit savings, especially as those same plans worked for them so well before, back when an artificially-buoyed bottom line could be had at the drop of the axe of, say, a quarter of a million jobs here or there. This allowed private, personal enrichment carnivals to be triggered in all multi-tome contracts, and caused vast sums to be directed to individual accounts -- whether the company prospered stratospherically or crashed abysmally.

Yes, well... but what of jobs like cab drivers and medical diagnosticians, even telemarketers and agricultural workers and truck drivers and loan officers and...

Never mind. Not looking good.

Robots, need it be said, have no pension plans. But then, come to think of it, nor do humans. Not any longer. Moot point, already a push. Robots and Humans are already neck-and-neck, racing to the lowest common denominator. Robots need no unions. Or health care. Or 8-hour days and 40-hour weeks. Or...

OK, bad examples. Humans today have almost nothing left in their jobs any longer from hard-fought labor victories in the past. Robots and employers will both tell you, *To hell with the heyday of the late 50s and early 60s*.

That's when there were more jobs than people to fill them, and employers actually needed to court prospect employees, treat them well, and pay respectable wages and benefits.

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Those days of human value are long gone. People are now a dime a dozen, and jobs are a thousand bucks apiece, to start. Get ready for a whole new era of exploitation, discrimination, and general upheaval throughout society -- a ruckus that won't soon make nice, sit back, and relax in the rumpus room with a highball.

Things may not settle down until it's a robot stretched out in a La-Z-Man, sipping electrified ambrosia while having one's shell and wiring gently massaged by a very much updated version of Magic Fingers, after a long day at work. By then, Time may have short-sheeted the calendar, and humans may well be the servants, fetching figurative martinis and slippers for their masters.

How long before Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics are tweaked and *twerped* to some leverage buyout specialist's specifications? How long before vulture capitalists stop feeding on gutted companies and start feeding on the workers, their pension programs, the value added over the years by workers, stripping wealth out of the...

OK, sorry. Another bad example. Already happening. *Never mind.*

Where to run for cover? Well, it appears that clergy, poets, nurses, and choreographers are safe -- for the moment. So, um, just for practice, now: How do you feel about working as a *Firs t-Aid Poet Monk* in our dance studio, mister and mizz...

*Sorry -- what was your name again?* It's illegible. It was taken down by my receptionist, a human. And, just between you and me, you know how *th*  
*ey*  
are.

\* \* \* \* \*

Oh, and, by the way: There is absolutely no truth to the rumor that this piece was conveyed into humanistic communication symbols via processed keyboard strokes according to pr

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- *whack whack whack sproing chug-a-chugga clack-clunk pika-pika-pika zzztzz tink!*

to the rumor that this piece was written by a robot. Thank you very orange orange orange orange. Orangeorange. (Orangeorangeorangeorange?) orangeOrangeorange; orange orange orange orange orange! Orangeorange-orange/orange = orange orangeorangeorange orange."

End WritePhase

Begin Approval Scan

\* R \* U \* N \* P \* R \* O \* G \* R \* A \* M \*

- *Human Override Protocol 239a014k852-vb-73*
- *Mask Camo Program Delta Nine MARK Eleventy!!*
- *Update Compliance Completed per JGM // // Counsel // Council // et al*

::: *Poseidon's Dinghy* :::  *Password Confirmed*

Display & Allow Access To Following:

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Bots: <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-26614051>

and: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-03-17/how-to-keep-your-job-when-you-re-boss-is-a-robot.html>

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and: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three\\_Laws\\_of\\_Robotics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Laws_of_Robotics)

Bux: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulture\\_capitalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulture_capitalist)

Kix: [http://www.retrothing.com/2007/06/magic\\_fingers\\_v.html](http://www.retrothing.com/2007/06/magic_fingers_v.html)

*Today's Bonus:*

*Animusic:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCt3bsaOwoQ>

*And again:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mH1XTEFVuTA>

*Orchestrion - a human-machine hybrid? A mechano-algorithmic robot band?*

*A report:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtTzvr8y7I>

*An improvisation:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dzxlr9LPDY>

*Pat explains:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRYPdsKzIRc>