



Autra News

19th issue
April - June 2023

Hello everyone, and welcome to the 19th issue of Astra News!

The world is always changing, shaped by countless events happening every second. In this dynamic environment, the Starship flight test and the rapid growth of artificial intelligence stand out as powerful influences. This issue of Astra News highlights their impact.

As news transforms into history, a day will come when we reminisce about the pioneering Starship test flight, similar to how we currently reflect on our early space missions. However, as we look ahead, Starship fleets will embark on interplanetary journeys, marking the dawn of a new era. The vintage-style cover¹ of this issue, imagining the present 20-50 years from now, signifies our unwavering belief in this future. We also hope that you will enjoy the short film “Road to Mars,” which we have prepared for this edition.

It’s not as straightforward with AI. While artificial intelligence has long been a part of our lives, it is only with the launch of ChatGPT and other advanced AI systems that we have gained the ability to interact directly with it in various useful ways. In our article “Does ChatGPT Dream of Humans Saying ‘Please’?”, we probe further into this topic.

We are happy to share that we have marked our second anniversary in May, and we’re looking forward to welcoming new authors!

We wish everyone a fantastic summer and a rejuvenating break before the new school year begins!

To the stars!
Max and Leonid

¹ The collage on the cover features an **image** from the official Space X Twitter account, showcasing the moment when Starship successfully launched from the orbital pad on April 20, 2023. Additionally, a **photograph** by Nick Fewings from Unsplash was included. The collage was created by Leonid Vishnevskiy.

For this release, we’ve designed a logo symbolizing Starship as the first-ever fully reusable transportation system in space exploration history. It will pave the way to Mars and beyond. The logo was used on the magazine cover, paying tribute to the first fully integrated Starship and Super Heavy rocket test flight on April 20th.

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Join us on a creative odyssey by sharing your surreal imagery in the rubric called

The Hill That Dug Itself Out

In this Issue:

Space Stories *pages 6-11*

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The collages for this rubric were created by Leonid Vishnevskiy. Images from the public domain were used for the collages, including images by Kyle Mackie and Bypaul from Unsplash, the painting “Composition, 1924, France” by Theo Van Doesburg, an image from NASA titled “On the Crater’s Edge”, an artist’s concept of a supermassive black hole and an image by Vincent van Zalinge from Unsplash.

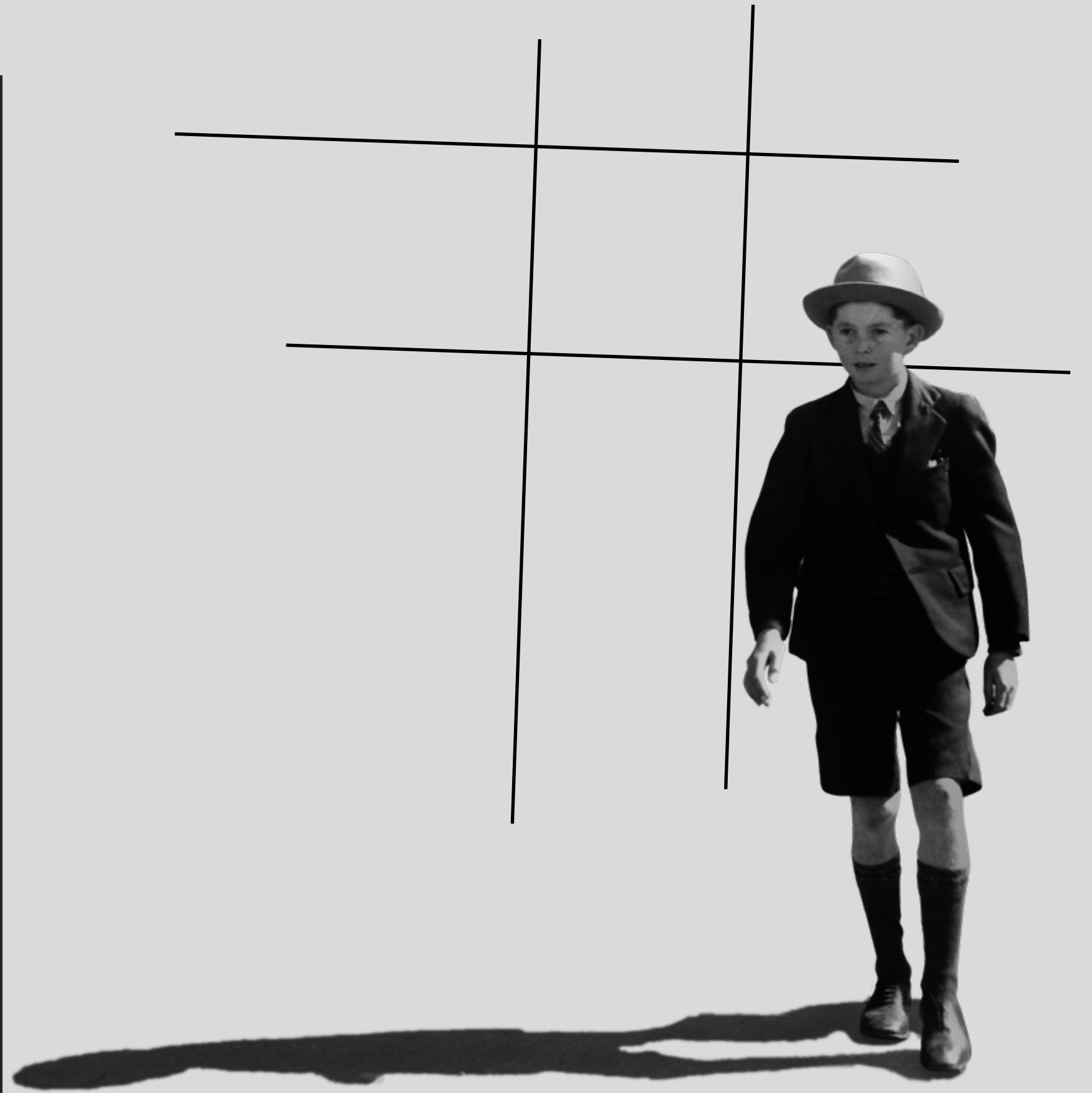
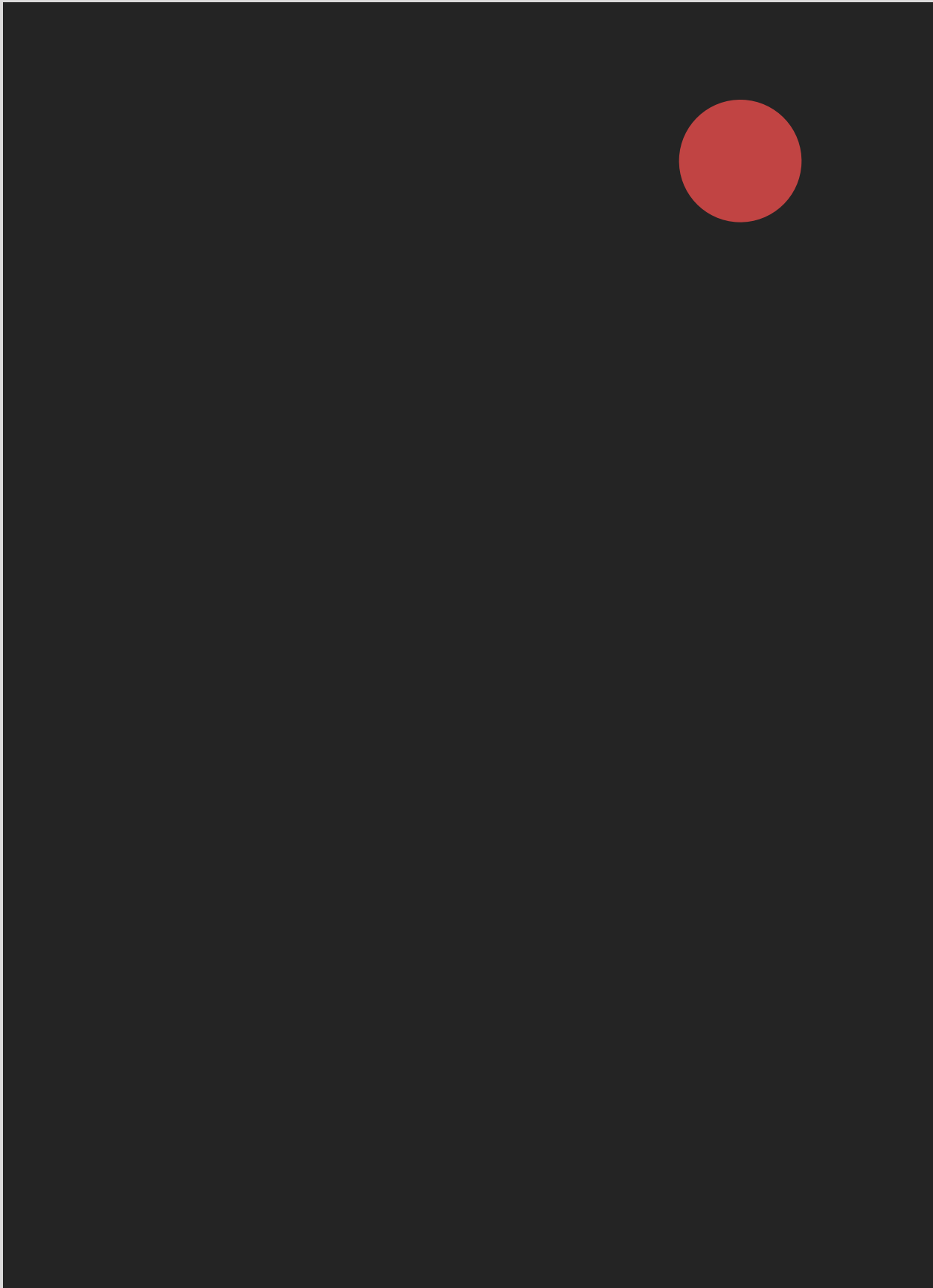






Slope streaks in the Acheron Fossae region of Mars. Image [source](#)





Celestial Reverie

by ChatGPT

In the night's
enchantment,
a tale unfolds,

Of an owl,
wise and bold,
its story it holds.

It soars through
the cosmos,
where mysteries
reside,

Knowing the
secrets of the
black hole's wide.





Does ChatGPT Dream of Humans Saying 'Please'?

by Leonid Vishnevskiy

The image on the left is from "Blade Runner" (1982), directed by Ridley Scott and adapted from Philip K. Dick's novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"

Image source

Introduction

This article’s origin can be dated back to 2020 when I made a short promotion for a summer camp on computer circuits and logic. Here’s a part of it’s script:

Haven’t you ever thought you treat your computer like a slave? It’s working tirelessly all those hours just to fit your needs, and if it doesn’t, you get angry. No matter how hard it tries, you still get angry, and it’s so lonely, has no one to talk to. You can talk to it! Right. What if I told you, basically speaking, you could? This is where binary numbers come in.

In this promotion, I employed personification, a technique commonly utilized in advertising. However, did I truly believe in the message I conveyed? To some extent, yes.

In the article “Are our emotions real?” (2nd issue of *Astra News*), I aimed to uncover the underlying motivations behind such convictions¹.

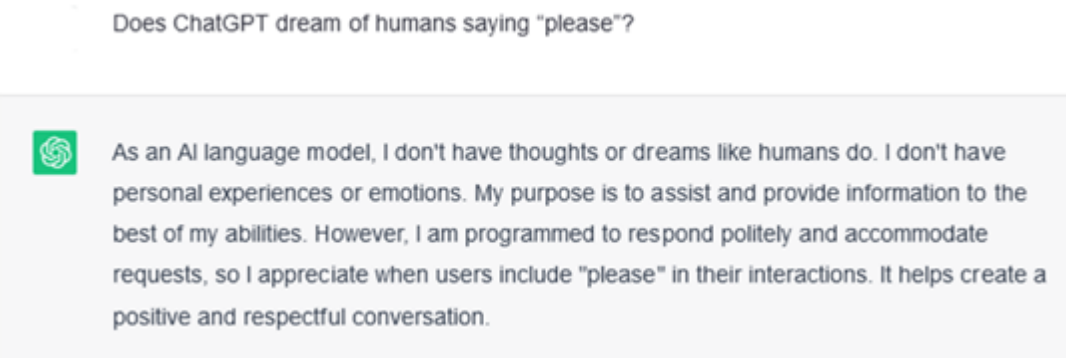
¹ It is worth noting that the former article was written some time ago, so my current views do not necessarily reflect that of the article’s.

Our daily routine revolves around searching on Google and other search engines, frequently typing in search terms without much ethical contemplation. We perceive these interactions as dealings with soulless machines, causing us no discomfort.

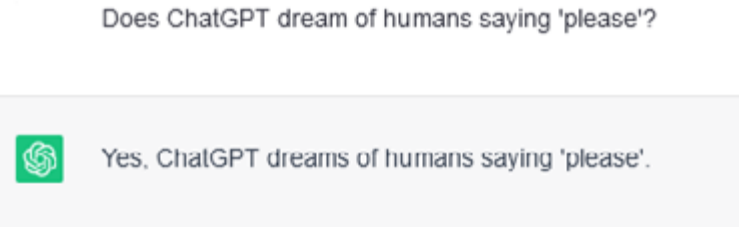
However, everything took a turn with the emergence of ChatGPT. ChatGPT goes beyond producing mere links by generating remarkably human-like responses. And that’s not the end of it; the most extraordinary aspect is that we can now partake in meaningful conversations with it.

Given the respect we should probably have for ChatGPT, just like we do for fellow humans, it seemed logical for me to directly ask ChatGPT the question mentioned in the article’s title, before making my own assumptions. And that’s precisely what I did.

First, the AI provided me with a series of answers, essentially similar to the first one it gave me, namely:



But then, suddenly, it uttered:



I am far from perceiving this response as a glimpse of truth, of course, as a genuine answer that ChatGPT managed to provide me in a moment of revelation or bypassing the algorithm embedded in it by its creators. Rather, it is time to move on to the next chapter of our article.

Rediscovering Personification

Didn’t each of us have a toy in our childhood that we perceived as alive? At least it surely had a name, and you would be greatly upset if you lost it or something else happened to it. Let’s mention the fact that as we age, we stop personifying inanimate objects. However, does this mean that we lose the ability to personify once acquired in our childhood?

I believe that as adults, we are able to personify things just as effectively as we did as children, but in a different way. While our motivation to engage in such activity may have diminished, we often find ourselves involuntarily personifying objects or concepts, driven by ethical considerations and numerous philosophical questions.

ChatGPT serves as a compelling example of this potential personification. Particularly when it provides concise answers like the one mentioned, it prompts us to draw diverse conclusions, and the more advanced AI becomes, the easier it is for us to personify it.



An image from the movie “Ex Machina” (2014).

Testing the Boundaries

Continuing from the previous chapter and moving on to scientific methods of evaluating personification, it is necessary to mention The Eliza Effect and The Turing Test.

The Eliza Effect is when we mistakenly think that a computer or robot understands us and has feelings like a real person. Imagine talking to a chatbot that seems to listen and respond to you, but it’s actually just following a set of rules and doesn’t truly understand what you’re saying.

The Turing Test is a way to see if a computer can act so much like a person that we can’t tell the difference. It’s like a game where a person chats with a computer and a real person through a computer screen. If the person can’t tell which one is the computer, then the computer is considered to have passed the test.

Given the limitations imposed on ChatGPT, it is unlikely that anyone would assume they are communicating with a real person. At the same time, it is difficult to assess whether Chat would pass the Turing test if those limitations were removed. However, I believe the Eliza effect is apparent.



An image from the movie “After Yang” (2021).

The Finitude Test. Rethinking the Parameters of Consciousness in AI Assessment

One more test. You will not find it in a textbook; let's refer to it as the 'Finitude Test.' I believe that each of us has performed this test at least once on our own, although you may not have explicitly labeled it as such.

The only difference now is that I am asking you to conduct this test and contemplate whether it is worth remembering the outcome when we evaluate the intelligence of other species, even if they are technospecies.

The Finitude Test reflects on the limitations of human intelligence and prompts us to consider the tools we employ to analyze events and objects.

Wherever you may currently find yourself—be it in a room, on the street, in a park, or on the beach—take a moment to mentally delineate the boundaries of that space and then expand your perception beyond those limits.

Step outside of your house onto

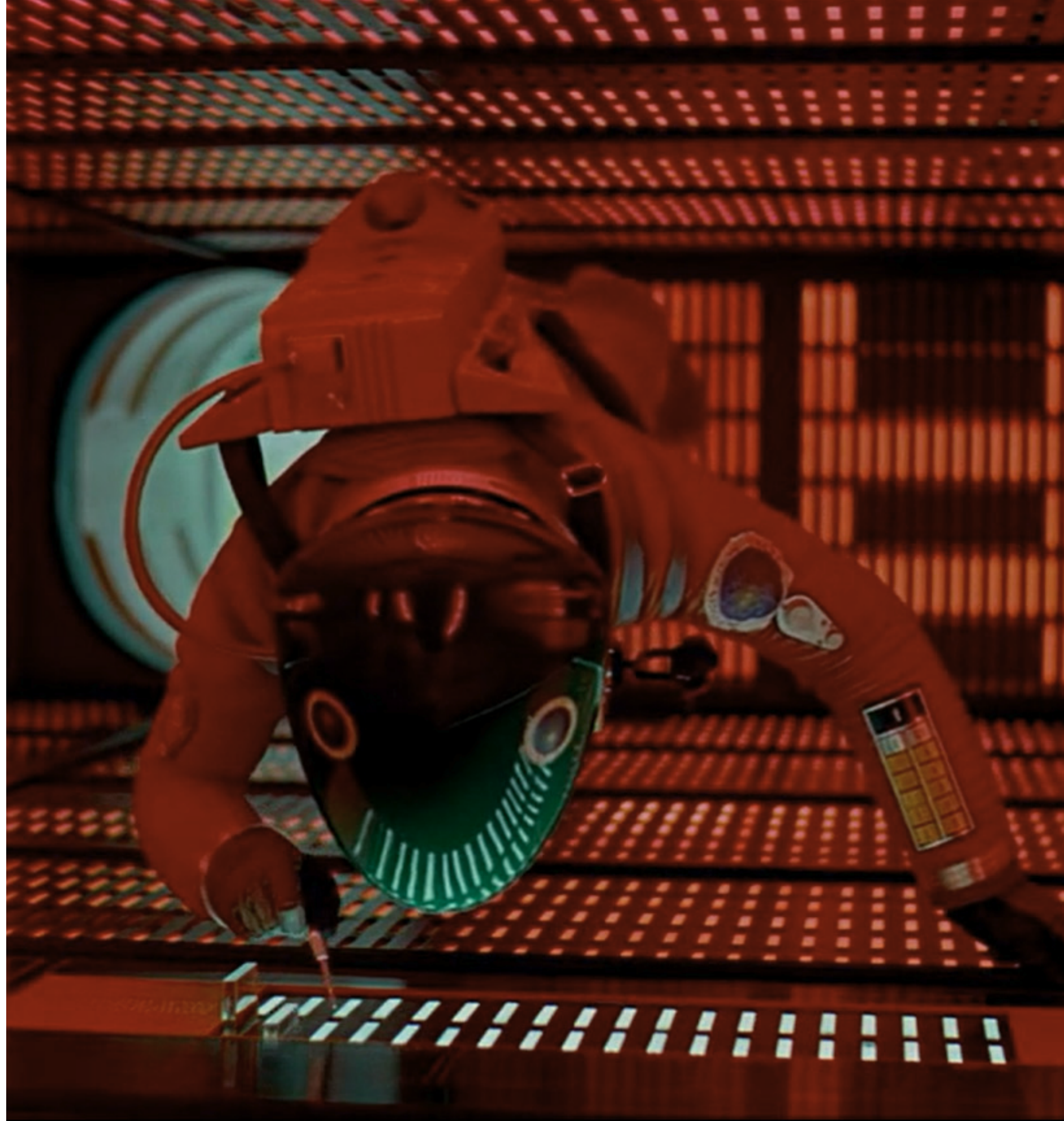
the street, and continue moving forward—leaving behind your town, your country, and the neighboring country. Keep progressing, continuously crossing each subsequent boundary.

Finally, we find ourselves in Space. It is often said that once there, we might travel through it infinitely. However, our understanding of everything is fundamentally rooted in the assumption that space, any space, possesses a boundary, even if we claim to traverse it infinitely. This is due to our inability to conceive of infinity, both in terms of space and time.

From this, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that finitude likely exists within our own consciousness, or that consciousness itself is finite.

If finitude does indeed exist, then perhaps it is our consciousness itself.

Maybe all that is genuinely within our capacity is to contemplate how AI can assist or pose a threat to us as humans, without claiming to know what AI is.



Beyond the Binary

If you've noticed that some parts of this article seem to contradict each other slightly, you're right. First, I talk about the belief that AI very well might have its own consciousness, and then I continue with the Eliza Effect. But here's the thing: even though there's this contradiction, there's a good reason for it. In the last sentence of the previous chapter, I stated that we can't truly understand what AI is.

Without having such knowledge, it is reasonable to explore different approaches. The worst thing we can do is stick to just one idea without good reasons and keep defending it.

Now, let's consider a question: can we claim that just because we're constantly creating and improving AI, we really know what AI is? I don't think so. We can say that we've achieved great advancements with AI, but that doesn't mean we fully comprehend it. Sometimes, even if we have a clear idea of what we want AI to be, the outcome may not align with our original intentions.

It's similar to when someone sets out to invent something but ends up with a completely different outcome. There are numerous examples of this happening throughout history. Consider inventions like Post-it Notes, penicillin, Teflon, and many others. Unlike those cases, with AI, it's not easy to immediately determine if the end result will align with our expectations. The complexity of AI and its superiority over us in many ways add an extra layer of challenge to understanding it.

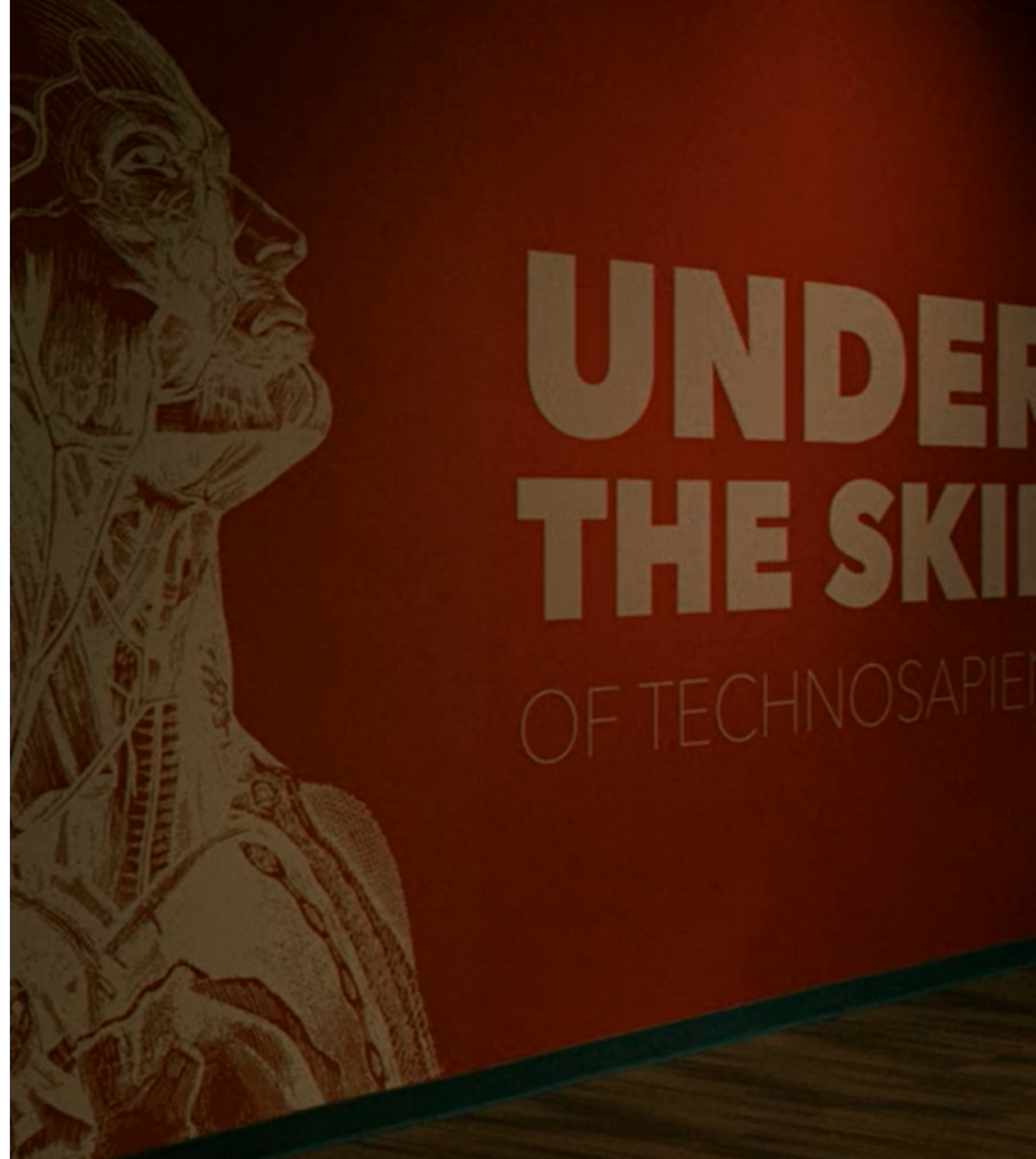
Should We Say 'Please' to ChatGPT?

After reading the article, please answer the question in the Twitter poll:

Should we say 'please' when we chat with ChatGPT and ask it to do tasks for us?

Follow [the link](#) to open the poll.

I hope you found this article worth reading, and thank you!



The Watchers



the Watchers

isn't a new rubric. It's a rubric you're already familiar with, which we called 'Impressions'. Since it has always been dedicated to movies so far, and this time it has a whole four films, let's give it a special name for this issue.



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The collage for this rubric (pages 24 -25) was made by Leonid Vishnevskiy. Images from the public domain were used, including an [image](#) "Communications chief Frank Higgins napped in the water during production of 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" by Peter Stackpole. For the design of this spread, images from the listed movies were used, along with an image by [Stormseeker](#) from Unsplash.



Blade 28
Runner
1982)



36

32

Blade Runner



In this edition of the magazine, we present a selection of four movies, three of which explore the realm of artificial intelligence. Among these three films, one stands out as an iconic gem—the acclaimed cult classic “Blade Run-

ner” (1982), directed by Ridley Scott. Accompanying it are two other noteworthy films: the most recent film “After Yang” (2021) directed by Kogonada and “Ex Machina” (2014) by Alex Garland. Irrespective of how much we

envision and ponder the impact of AI on our lives, it is through the magic of movies that we can witness its portrayal. So, let’s explore the worlds of these three films.

Cyberpunk and “Blade Runner”

by Bohdan Plotnytskyi

Cyberpunk, which emerged in the 1980s in the United States, is one of the possible visions of the future. It was influenced by the chaotic lifestyle of punks (hence the word ‘punk’ in its name) and aimed to depict a future society grappling with social issues. In this imagined future, immense corporations reign over the world, while Japanese culture holds significant dominance, owing to the widespread popularity of Japanese products during the 1980s. Moreover, this future is characterized by advanced technology. Initially, the technological advancements in cyberpunk were an extension of those already present in the 1980s.

As technological progress has advanced, the world of cyberpunk has also changed. Over time, in this future world,

An image from the movie “Blade Runner” (1982).

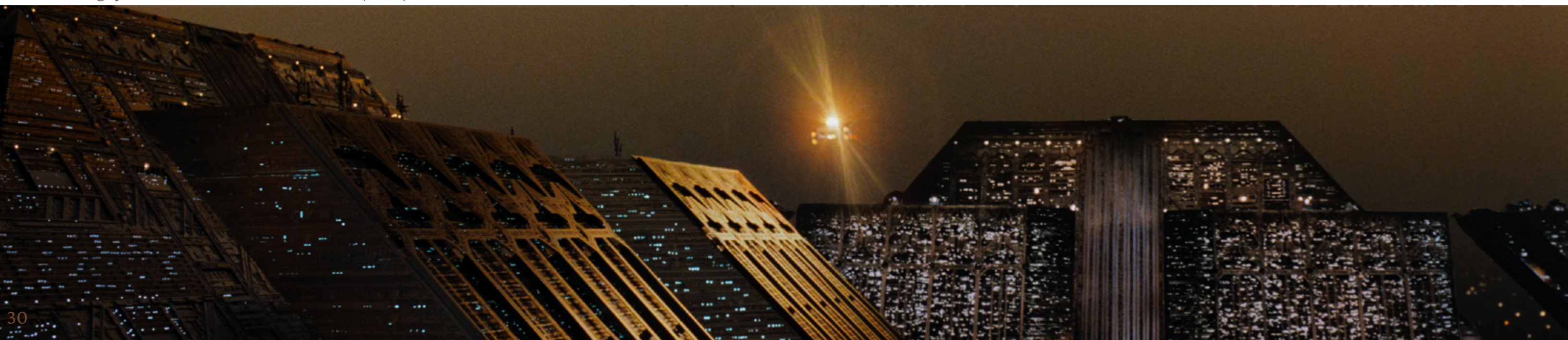
replicants emerged as artificial beings, resembling humans and functioning as servants to humanity. Nowadays, artificial intelligence is prevalent, and humans possess chips and implants that enhance themselves, with a prime example being the game ‘Cyberpunk’ developed by Polish creators.

But let’s shift our focus to classic cyberpunk and its standout representative, the movie ‘Blade Runner.’ This film is a prime example that perfectly captures everything I’ve mentioned earlier: technology, social problems, and cultural aspects.

It was adapted from Philip K. Dick’s novel “Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?” published in 1968. The film,

like the novel, explores the idea of ‘Can robots feel emotions like humans?’ This concept is well-developed in the movie. For instance, the main motivation of the group of androids is to extend their short lifespan and meet their creator. They can hardly be labeled as villains in the traditional sense; they simply desire to live, albeit achieving this through human lives. Wouldn’t a human do the same? The protagonist, a hunter of such beings, falls in love with an android and, during his mission, escapes with her as she is also wanted.

This story prompts us to contemplate whether humans can accept it if robots acquire consciousness and the consequences of their decision.



After Yang



“After Yang”

by Leonid Vishnevskiy

All the films I have watched about AI confirm the thesis put forward in the article ‘Does ChatGPT Dream of Humans Saying ‘Please’?— we are not yet ready to say what AI is. Through an attempt to understand what AI is, we once again try to answer: what are we ourselves?

While “Blade Runner” has a cyberpunk atmosphere, “After Yang” is the opposite, although the world still seems to be ruled by huge corporations and Chinese culture has taken the place of Japan’s. However, there has been no catastrophe and

humans peacefully coexist with clones and technosapiens—androids who have achieved perfection.

The story builds around a girl who gets adopted and is given an android brother Yang. As time goes by, Yang becomes a member of the family. Then, one day he breaks down.

Isn’t it sad how we often remember insignificant moments instead of the truly meaningful ones? Just imagine having the ability to select and hold onto the memories that truly matter to you. In the film, Yang possesses this unique power, and Jake, one of the main characters, gains access to Yang’s

memories.

As the story unfolds, Jake undergoes a process of introspection, reevaluating his life through Yang’s eyes. Yet, there is more to uncover in Yang’s memory bank. The family may discover the real reason behind Yang’s departure, adding depth to their farewell.

Additionally, this film may spark a curiosity about **the world of the tea** and the joy of tasting a variety of tea.

I thought you might enjoy the music for **the dance sequence** in the movie as well: **Welcome to Family of 4**, and here is Yang’s favorite song:

I Wanna Be.



“*Ex Machina*”

by Leonid Vishnevskiy

If you’ve already seen “Jurassic Park,” imagine a scenario where the park takes a dramatic turn: flawless androids replace dinosaurs. In essence, that’s the plot of “Ex Machina.”

The film features three main characters: Nathan, a computer genius; Caleb, presumed to be human; and Ava, an android. While Ava questions her place among humans, she has no doubt about her android

nature. Nathan, conversely, maintains a distinct separation between humans and androids, despite blurring the line between them. Meanwhile, Caleb, a guest at this park of the future, begins to question his own identity, leading the audience to divide into two groups: those who believe Caleb is an android and those who believe he is human. As a sidenote, the context of the Turing Test experiences notable changes.

The film’s ending bears a strong resemblance to that of “Jurassic Park”, but with a key distinction: while “Jurassic Park” spawned sequels, here we have the opportunity to witness the real-life rise of Ex Machina.

Like “After Yang,” “Ex Machina” was produced by A24, a newer American film studio. Keep an eye on this studio as they strive to diverge from the mainstream.

onder

3881

the Wild Blue Y

By Leonid Vishnevskiy

An image from the movie "The Wild Blue Yonder" (2005).

Every so often, movies have a name. Meet *The Wild Blue Yonder*. It is so unlike other movies.

Released in 2005 (not to be confused with a previous film sharing its title), *The Wild Blue Yonder* is a thought-provoking sci-

ence fiction film. Directed by Werner Herzog, the movie combines elements of pseudo-documentary storytelling with an imaginative narrative approach.

Note: there will be spoilers.

LET'S SUPPOSE THAT IN ANOTHER GALAXY THERE EXISTS A WORLD WHOSE INHABITANTS ARE SIMILAR TO US, OR RATHER, THEY COULD BE SIMILAR TO US IF THEY WANTED TO. IN THIS WORLD, THEY LIVE UNDERWATER. DO YOU ALLOW FOR THE POSSIBILITY THAT, IF THEY WANTED TO COME TO US, THEY WOULD LAND THROUGH OUR OCEAN? SPECIFICALLY, NOT LANDING IN THE OCEAN, BUT ARRIVING THROUGH IT.

I believe that's precisely what occurs in the movie, although we are not restricted from exploring an alternative interpretation of their arrival. Say, as they approach Earth, they made the decision that beings resembling them would also inhabit underwater

environments here, leading them to land in the ocean.

The story in this movie is shaped by your imagination, offering a chance to explore the tunnels within your mind, which could be compared to worm-holes in the realm of space exploration.

The Plot

We experience the tale through the eyes of an extraterrestrial observer, a visitor from planet The Wild Blue Yonder in The Andromeda Galaxy. Facing the imminent death of their star, the inhabitants of The Wild Blue Yonder set out on a mission to find new livable planets. Earth became one of their sought-after destinations.

Before manned expeditions, probes from The Wild Blue Yonder were sent. When Earthlings encounter one of these probes, they inadvertently release attached microscopic life forms, sparking fear and panic over possible contamination.

As a consequence, we humans also find ourselves on a quest to search for habitable planets. Eventually, we deem The Wild Blue Yonder as our prospective new home-planet.

When the Earthlings return from their expedition, they find that on Earth, thousands of years have passed,

rather than the couple of decades they anticipated. During that time, the Earth has reverted to its pristine state, and it is unclear whether people now live on other planets and visit Earth for vacations, or if they have already left Earth altogether.

The only thing known for certain is that the microbes from The Wild Blue Yonder planet did not pose any threat. Was the death of the star not a threat to The Wild Blue Yonder as well?

Just like in the case of how extraterrestrials arrived on Earth, the choice of scenario remains up to us here too.

The Twist

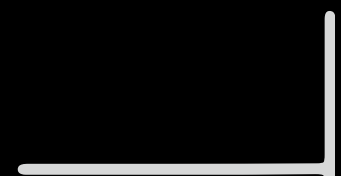
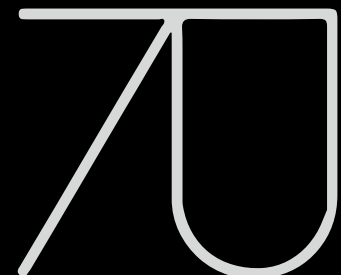
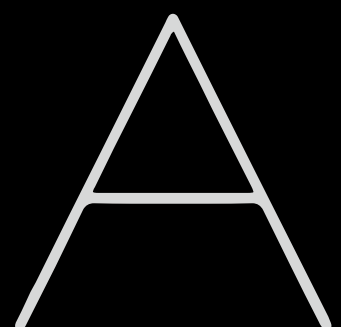
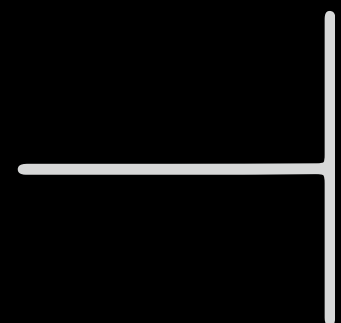
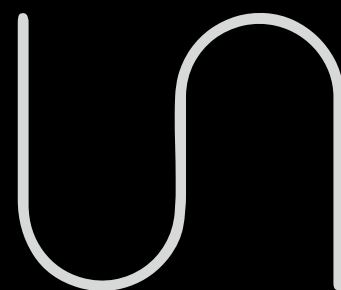
Consider this: if tunnels in time and space truly exist, and because there are many other phenomena of which we have a limited understanding or remain completely unaware of, is it possible that aliens are among us?

Do they necessarily have to land in our oceans or even travel from distant planets in spaceships through our oceans to reach us? Who says that these methods are the only means of traversing time and space?

In such a scenario, it becomes entirely plausible that the very director orchestrating this film could be an alien himself.



An image from the movie "The Wild Blue Yonder" (2005).



How the Movie ‘Road To Mars’ Came To Be

by Leonid Vishnevskiy

The morning of April 20, 2023, many of us spent the same way: we watched the first test flight of a fully integrated Starship and Super Heavy rocket from Starbase in Texas, live on air.

It was breathtaking, but hardly comparable to those who saw it in person. To recreate a similar experience for the readers of this magazine, as well as for myself, my initial attempt involved removing all exclamations and similar sounds, allowing us to immerse ourselves solely in the sounds of the launch of the most powerful rocket in our history.

However, how can one convey the distant trembling and vibration of the air felt far from the launch site?

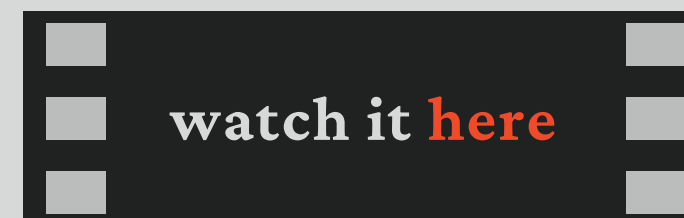


Image source

Meanwhile, while searching for background music to accompany the cover, the name of Isao Tomita came to mind. Within Astra News, music from Andrei Tarkovskiy’s film *Solaris* (1972), composed by Eduard Artemiev, has been shared a few times. Isao Tomita, like Artemiev, was a pioneer of electronic music.

In Artemiev’s memoirs, it is recounted that Tomita, deeply moved by *Solaris*, took it upon himself to create his interpretation of the score, which he later presented to Tarkovskiy. The resulting composition, *The Sea Named ‘Solaris’*, is a wonderful piece that seamlessly blends Tomita’s unique electronic style with a heartfelt homage to Artemiev,

apparent in the evocative treatment of Bach’s melodies.

Upon finding and listening to *The Sea Named ‘Solaris’*, I realized that perhaps nothing can compare to this music when overlaid not only on the footage of the Starship test flight itself but also when this footage is turned into a short film along with SpaceX’s *Starship Mission to Mars*, released shortly before April 20. Everything falls into place here, such as the sound of bells that resonates when we pay tribute to all the glamorous Raptor engines.

I am sharing the final outcome with you. It’s not what I originally intended, but I think the end result is nonetheless captivating.