**Deceitful media: Foreword to the Chinese edition**

(Article begins on next page)

13 July 2024

Foreword to the Chinese edition of *Deceitful Media: Artificial Intelligence and Social Life after the Turing Test*

Simone Natale

It is only two years since *Deceitful Media* appeared in the English language, yet much has happened since then in the world of Artificial Intelligence. New generative AI systems have demonstrated enhanced abilities to produce text and images and to enter in conversation with human users, exceeding everything that could be observed in the AI landscape at the time this book was originally published. Despite having still significant limits, language models such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Bard – and more recently, systems developed by Chinese companies such as Baidu's Ernie – demonstrated that AI programs can be trained to generate texts and responses with the potential to be exchanged for human and, even more importantly, to assist human work in writing, brainstorming and other intellectual activities.

Yet these new developments do not make the perspective advanced in *Deceitful Media* less relevant; on the contrary, they make it even more significant. Continuing a trajectory that, as this book shows, originated at the very beginning of Artificial Intelligence in the mid twentieth century with Alan Turing's proposal of the Imitation Game, new generative AI systems become more and more capable to pass as humans. This encourages us to consider the circumstances and dynamics that lead human users to project intelligence, sociality, humanity, and creativity onto machines. More than ever before, therefore, the deciding question we should pose is not if computers *are* intelligent, but if, to what extent, and through which dynamics they *appear* intelligent.

It is for this reason that designers, computer scientists, and experts have started to give more and more emphasis to design choices that might at first instance appear irrelevant, or "banal" (to use a term that, as the reader will discover, is central for this book). For instance, the fact that many generative AI-based chatbots are programmed to talk in the first person singular ("How can I help you?") has a role in the extent to which users anthropomorphize them. Similarly, the fact that their interface is often designed so that responses appear progressively, as if the chatbot was spelling them word by word, informs the user's perception of the system and thus its interactions with it. The concept of "banal deception," in this regard, provides a valuable theoretical and analytical lens to consider some of the most consequential discussions in areas such as AI ethics and design for the new wave of generative AI. Even if we remain aware that we are talking to machines and not to humans, in fact, more subtle and hidden layers of deception still characterize the relationship we are building with computing systems at the time of generative AI.

Thanks to this translation, this book will be available to a large potential public of Chinese readers. This is a reason of gratification especially because I regard the importance of considering AI across different cultures as one of the key implications of this work. As the book shows, humans inform the effect and impact of AI through their distinctive ways of perceiving it and interacting with it; it follows that AI is plural exactly like human cultures are plural. It is crucial that we consider AI not as a universal entity, but as something that is always situated and contextualized in specific cultures, including the many cultures and

subcultures that make up contemporary China. If generative AI is already shaping human cultures of meaning-making, moreover, humans can make much to direct and inform its effects. As I argue in this book's conclusion, the banal deception of AI should stimulate us to become more sophisticated users. We can find different ways to work in this direction, and I have no doubt that Chinese developers, designers, and users – starting from the ones who are reading this text – will find their own distinctive approaches and strategies to develop, design, use and make sense of generative AI.

Let me conclude this foreword with a personal note. I am writing in the house where my grandfather Enrico Natale spent part of his life; through the window in front of me I see the Tigullio gulf near Genova, a view that he must have enjoyed numberless times. I have never known him, as he died before I was born, but he left in this house a number of objects that remain vocal signs of his presence. These are Chinese vases and ceramic figures, which he collected during his travels to China as his small company imported Chinese textiles to Italy in the 1960s and 1970s. I hope I will be excused for this little play of imagination: I like to imagine that a few or even just one of this book's readers are connected to those who welcomed Enrico or met him during his travels in China before I was born.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Rang Wang, who translated this text, to the editors and everybody at Fudan University Press who contributed to preparing this edition, and to its readers.


San Pietro di Rovereto (Genova), Italy, August 2023