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Why General Intent?

There are too many failing people.

Not just people who are poor or just people who are visibly in crisis. I believe it's people everywhere, people with exercised talent, intelligence, potential, sensitivity, ambition, discipline, and even love in them, who still somehow fall apart, get misread, stall out, drift, or die hopeless. I believe the name we've given this failure is "mid-life crisis".

Modern life has made this feel normal. We have grown used to "wasted human beings".

We explain failure with shallow language. We say someone lacked discipline or made bad choices, maybe they were unmotivated. We say they were not a fit. We say they churned, dropped out, burned out, relapsed, underperformed, became difficult, lost interest.

But these are just descriptions and they are often confused as explanations.

They tell us what happened after the failure occurs. They do not tell us what was happening inside the person before it.

I think one of the great unspoken facts of our age is that we know far less about human beings than we pretend to. We have built an advanced civilization on top of a very primitive understanding of the person.

You can move money globally in seconds. We can train machines to generate language, images, and code. We can optimize logistics across continents. But we still regularly fail to understand why a person withdraws, why they trust others, why they sabotage themselves or those around them, why they persevere through super crazy things, why they harden and become unapproachable, why they attach, why they leave, why they believe in things.

That should disturb us more than it does.

Because every society is downstream of what it believes a person is.

If you think a person is just a rational actor, you build one kind of world. If you think a person is just a bundle of preferences, you build another. If you think a person is mostly a machine for incentives, you build yet another.

But if the human being is deeper than our categories, if we can also assert that desire, fear, identity, memory, status, imitation, trauma, aspiration, meaning, belonging, and contradiction are all interacting below the surface, then most of the structures around us are operating with a pretty flawed model of reality.

And broken models do not just create intellectual errors, I believe they create casualties.

A great deal of suffering is not caused by evil in the dramatic sense. I believe it is caused by misreading people and by systems and cultures and institutions that cannot see finely enough.

A person is treated as a type when they are actually a tension.

The result is that people are handled badly at scale.

To me, this is the most important opportunity in the world.

It's not interesting to me merely because we can build better tools, but humanity and the systems it uses can participate in a correction. We can take this unique convergence of invention automation and creativity to help create a world in which human beings are interpreted with greater depth and seriousness. This world stops treating people as if the visible layer of their behavior is the whole context.

That is the reason for General Intent.

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That name is super important.

Intent is one of the most important and least understood forces in human life. Underneath behavior is intent. Underneath decisions is intent. Underneath expression, reaction, and movement is intent. People are not random. They are also not simple. They are coherent in ways that are often hidden, even from themselves.

I believe that to understand a human being is not merely to record what they did. It is to get closer to the mapping underneath the action.

That matters because civilization increasingly runs through mediated environments, products, institutions, interfaces, systems of selection, systems of judgment, systems of reward. And most of those environments still operate with embarrassingly thin assumptions about the people moving through them.

We are entering a period where intelligence itself is becoming infrastructure. That means one question matters more than almost any other: what kind of understanding will we embed into the world?

If our machines become more powerful while our model of a human remains shallow, we will scale misunderstanding.

But I believe there is another path.

We can use this era to push toward a truer account of human beings that takes seriously that people are internally patterned, psychologically dense, meaning-seeking, unstable and consistent at once, driven by things they cannot always name, and constantly revealing themselves through random fragments of information scattered across a vast web of data.

I think this frontier will define a great many important companies, institutions, and ideas in the coming decades.

Because every major human problem eventually runs into the same wall: we do not understand the person well enough.

Why do people leave what is good for them?

Why do they stay in what harms them?

Why do they ignore obvious truth?

Why do they respond to one message and resist another?

Why do some flourish under pressure while others break?

Why does the same environment call greatness out of one person and despair out of another?

General Intent begins from the belief that if you want to meaningfully change outcomes in the world, you have to take the human being more seriously than the modern world does.

There are too many failing people, and I do not think that is mainly because people are weak.

I think it is because we have inherited a world that can measure the surface of human life while remaining strangely blind to its depths.

General Intent exists because that blindness is expensive. Spiritually, socially, economically, civilizationally expensive.

The wager behind General Intent is that better human understanding is not a soft skill for machines. It is hard skill for a future that does not keep throwing people away.

Over.

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photos

17th March 2023

what does community mean to gen-z?

Kemi Levi © 2022-2025

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