

The Turing Theory and the Law of the Dead Asset

Institutional Time, Cognitive Risk, and Sanctified Erasure

Abstract

This paper formalises the Turing Theory, a diagnostic model of institutional recognition failure in which high intensity cognitive agents are systematically excluded during their lifetime and valorised only after neutralisation. The theory is anchored in the Law of the Dead Asset, which holds that institutions can safely recognise surplus cognition only once it has been rendered inert through death, silencing, exile, or administrative flattening.

In this paper, Alan Turing is used as a diagnostic case rather than a biographical subject. The analysis identifies a recurring institutional sequence of extraction, rejection, and posthumous appropriation. This sequence persists within contemporary academic, bureaucratic, and technological systems that publicly celebrate innovation while operationally enforcing procedural conformity. The paper concludes by examining the implications of this failure mode for artificial intelligence governance and epistemic justice, arguing that systems optimised for predictability risk reproducing the same architecture of erasure in both human evaluation and machine mediated decision making.

Keywords

Turing Theory
Sanctified erasure
Institutional cognition
Epistemic injustice
Artificial intelligence governance
Surplus mind

1. Introduction

Institutions frequently present themselves as engines of innovation while excluding the forms of cognition that generate it. This contradiction is structural rather than accidental. It reflects a persistent mismatch between institutional time and surplus cognition. The Turing Theory provides a diagnostic framework for analysing this mismatch by examining how institutions interact with individuals whose cognitive output exceeds procedural tolerance, for example through checklist evaluation, portal gating, and compliance scoring.

The central claim of this paper is that institutions do not fail to recognise exceptional cognition by error. Instead, they operate a filtering mechanism that extracts value while rejecting the individual as a source of unacceptable risk. Recognition is deferred until the cognitive agent is no longer capable of disruption.

Alan Turing is not examined here as a historical figure requiring rehabilitation. He is employed as a diagnostic exemplar of a broader institutional pattern that continues to operate across contemporary systems of academic evaluation, technological governance, and administrative legitimacy.

2. The Turing Theory, Definition and Scope

The Turing Theory describes a structural failure mode in which institutions are unable to accommodate high velocity cognition within slow procedural environments. It is a functional diagnosis rather than a moral critique.

At its core lies a temporal asymmetry. Surplus cognition operates in compressed time, producing conceptual movement in concentrated bursts. Institutions operate in extended time, privileging predictability, replicability, and administrative legibility. When these temporal regimes collide, speed, intensity, and non linear reasoning are interpreted as instability rather than capability.

What follows is filtration, not engagement.

3. The Law of the Dead Asset

The Law of the Dead Asset states that organisations can only valorise exceptional cognition once it has been neutralised. Neutralisation may occur through death, exclusion, enforced conformity, or symbolic containment.

A living surplus mind represents uncertainty. A neutralised surplus mind represents safe capital.

Once neutralised, the same cognition can be converted into institutional assets such as named buildings, prizes, scholarships, or moral narratives. These forms of recognition pose no threat to procedural order. They stabilise it.

The Law of the Dead Asset explains why institutions often become most generous precisely when recognition no longer carries operational risk.

4. The Cycle of Sanctified Erasure

The Turing Theory identifies a recurring institutional sequence composed of three phases.

4.1 Extraction

Administrative systems initially extract cognitive labour, insight, or innovation from the surplus mind. This extraction typically occurs without corresponding recognition, protection, or structural accommodation.

4.2 Rejection

As cognitive output accelerates or deviates from expected forms, the individual is reclassified as difficult, unstable, non compliant, or unsuitable. The rejection is framed as procedural rather than evaluative.

At this stage, exclusion is justified as necessity rather than choice.

4.3 Appropriation

Once the individual is removed from the operational environment, their work is reframed as heritage. The institution reabsorbs the output while disavowing responsibility for the conditions under which it was produced.

This sequence constitutes sanctified erasure. The erasure is sanctified because it is subsequently masked by honour.

5. Alan Turing as Diagnostic Case

Alan Turing is employed here not as a tragic biography but as a structural test case. His exclusion did not result from ignorance of his value, as demonstrated by his recognised wartime and theoretical contributions, but from institutional incapacity to accommodate deviation during life.

Turing's posthumous elevation illustrates the Law of the Dead Asset with particular clarity. Once dead, his cognition could be safely monumentalised. While alive, it was intolerable.

The significance lies not in historical culpability but in present replication.

6. Vertical Time and Horizontal Time

To clarify the temporal mismatch underlying the Turing Theory, it is useful to distinguish between two operational modes.

Horizontal Time describes procedural progression through sequential steps, validation gates, and compliance checkpoints. It privileges continuity and manageability.

Vertical Time describes concentrated cognitive bursts in which substantial conceptual movement occurs rapidly and non sequentially.

Institutions are optimised for Horizontal Time. Surplus minds frequently operate in Vertical Time. Failure arises when vertical productivity is misclassified as disorder.

7. Diagnostic Application to Contemporary Institutions

The Turing Theory functions as a diagnostic tool for contemporary systems.

Indicators of sanctified erasure include public celebration of radical figures alongside rigid present assessment criteria, prioritisation of compliance over output, and post hoc recognition following operational exclusion.

In artificial intelligence governance, similar dynamics emerge. Evaluation systems frequently reward conformity to training distributions rather than genuine novelty. When this occurs, automated assessment inherits the same flattening logic historically applied to human cognition.

8. Implications for AI Governance and Epistemic Justice

If institutions continue to privilege procedural legibility over cognitive contribution, AI systems trained within these frameworks will reproduce the same bias. This has direct implications for epistemic justice, innovation policy, and the evaluation of both human and machine intelligence.

Recognising the Turing Theory enables institutions to identify where their structures suppress the intelligence they claim to cultivate.

9. Conclusion

The Turing Theory does not argue for romantic exceptionalism. It argues for structural awareness. Institutions that fail to recognise surplus cognition during life will continue to compensate through symbolic recognition after neutralisation.

The choice is not between order and innovation. It is between adaptive structures and ritualised erasure.

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