Luc Julia, Tech for "Real People"

"Creating something useful for real people" is the mantra of Luc Julia, an inventor-finder specialising in artificial intelligence.

Temps de lecture : minute

---

26 January 2024

This article was _originally published in French on Maddyness_.

Luc Julia is one of those inventors with a cool, carefree demeanour, a penchant for floral shirts, and an impressive resume that would make many pale in comparison. From Apple to Samsung to Renault, not to mention the few companies he founded in the early 2000s. Behind this success is a child with nimble hands who, from the age of 5, dreamt of becoming a researcher at _CNRS_. In his youth he created a machine that made his bed for him and dismantled his first computer.

"When I was around ten, I dabbled in electronics and electricity. Computing became an obvious choice for me. I wanted to create things that would benefit real people. I was driven by that." Driven also by the desire to contribute to the search for innovations, he joined CNRS in 1989 in a unit affiliated with Télécom ParisTech, as he had dreamed of as a child. However, he quickly realised that the reality was quite different from what he had imagined. "I realised that I didn't want to be a researcher but a finder." On his website, he states that he is an "innovator at heart (...) interested in all kinds of technologies aimed at improving human life."

The rush for technological nuggets

With this in mind, he decided to leave CNRS to pursue his thesis at MIT in

the United States. He eventually joined SRI International, a company affiliated with Stanford University, where he engaged as a researcher in the field of voice interfaces. It was there, in 1997, within his own laboratory, that he created the patents that 10 years later would become Siri. Annoyed that journalists still ask him about it in interviews, he is still proud of what the voice assistant has become. "Siri now has 500 million users."

This project was only the first on a very long list in Silicon Valley. "I found a real spirit of collaboration there, far from preconceived ideas. In Silicon Valley, we create systems, even if we don't push them to the end. But at least we try, a lot." He discovered the "American melting pot" - composed of over 60% foreigners - descendants of the gold rush when people from around the world moved in search of gold, they are now in search of technological nuggets. An "absolutely extraordinary place of inspiration" that he leaves every month "to return to France to eat sausages," he jokes.

Luc Julia, Decade after Decade

Luc Julia's career could be summed up in one number: 10. Ten years of research - "we don't have money, but we create fun things" - followed by ten years of startups - "we don't have money, but we create fun things for real people." The startup he is most proud of? Orb Network, "a technology that allows users to play any media on any phone, anywhere," he says. "We were the first to do play shifting. 13 million geeks around the world used Orb Network."

Finally, ten years in large corporations: "We have money, and we create things for real people, so that's the best. Having larger research and development budgets than in a startup makes, among other things hiring easier." In 2011, Luc Julia joined Apple to work on the Siri project again. He stayed only a year and then joined Samsung in 2012 as vice president.

There, he was in charge of innovation and led the dedicated centre in California. In 2017, he proposed to "do something for France" by setting up an artificial intelligence laboratory in Paris.

Renault: "Another way to touch people"

In 2021, he left Samsung for Renault: "Another way to touch people and make technology in a field that has been around for 100 years and has many opportunities to be improved by tech." His goal: "To make the car safer, easier to drive, and affordable."

For this, Luc Julia is in charge of the "Software Republic," an ecosystem whose founding members include Renault, Dassault Systèmes, Thales, Orange, Eviden, and STMicroelectronics. This group was created to address a vision: that large companies cannot achieve certain projects on their own. "Software Republic enables collaboration between large companies. The six founding companies try to find projects that could involve two or three other members, as well as startups and the academic world. This creates a kind of mix that allows for real projects like a car and its electric charging station that allows the vehicle to become the source of electricity for the home."

Luc Julia is not stopping there. The next project: a startup whose technology should replace cookies and allow people to make money by watching ads on the internet. Does he fear failure? "When you create, of course, you experience failures." But he remembers the main lesson learned in Silicon Valley, where "the culture of failure is not prohibitive; on the contrary, we always learn something."

Article by Morgane Ruvetti