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Probing CHAT GPT: A Media Ecology Writing Sampler

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Introduction

In this probe, I first briefly define CHAT GPT, and then I offer some of the material that it created in response to some of the prompts that I loaded into it. In total, I offer a few poems on McLuhan's Understanding Media, one on McLuhan's Gutenberg Galaxy, one poem on Ong's Orality and Literacy, a short essay comparing Havelock to Ong, 24 aphorisms in the style of Nietzsche regarding social media, and finally, a poem about GPT-3 in the style of Emily Dickinson. I hope that this probe generates within you some forms of concern, thought, and wonder. I would also like it to produce some insightful comment and reaction/ response. If you have not yet heard of it or have not yet played with it, perhaps the time is now? This technology, released only in November of 2022, has sweeping and far-reaching implications on countless fields. It raises questions about authorship, originality, copyright, creativity, education, plagiarism, law and countless other issues.

"GPT-3 (short for "Generative Pre-training Transformer 3") is a language generation model developed by OpenAI. It uses machine-learning techniques to generate natural language text that is often difficult to distinguish from text written by humans. GPT-3 is trained on a large dataset of human-generated text and can generate text in a variety of languages and formats, including news articles, stories, poems, and more. It has been widely used for a variety of language processing tasks, such as language translation, summarization, and question answering."

The above paragraph was composed by CHAT GPT when I asked it to tell me what GPT-3 is. When I asked it, "What is CHAT GPT?" The response was: *"I'm not familiar with a "Chat GPT" model. GPT, or Generative Pre-training Transformer, is a type of language model that was developed by OpenAI. It is a deep learning model that is trained to generate natural language text that is coherent and similar to human writing. GPT models have been used for a variety of language tasks, such as language translation, summarization, and question answering. They are called "generative" models*

because they can generate new text based on a prompt or seed text. They are called "pre-trained" because they are trained on a large dataset before being fine-tuned for a specific task."

Now, I asked it, "Can you please write me a poem on Marshall McLuhan's Understanding Media?" Here is what it produced (I added the titles, as I did not ask it to include titles for the poems or essays):

McLuhan's Understanding Media, Part 1

*"Understanding Media, a concept so grand
Marshall McLuhan, he took a stand
He said, "The medium is the message, my dear friend"
It's not the content, but how it's sent*

*His theories, they provoked and stirred
He made us think, he made us blur
The lines between what's real and what's not
He made us question all that we've been taught*

*But oh, how times have changed since then
Our screens, they flash, they blend, they blend
We're plugged in, we're wired, we're always on
But where has all the meaning gone?*

*We scroll and swipe, we tap and tweet
We share and like, we swipe and repeat
We're constantly fed, a never-ending feast
But something's missing, it's hard to see*

*The irony, it lies in wait
As we blindly consume, we seal our fate
We're slaves to the screens, to the feeds*

We've lost the art of paying heed

So let us pause, let us reflect

Is this the life we want to project?

Do we really understand the media, or are we just pawns?

Perhaps it's time for a brand new dawn."

I asked for another one, and this is what it generated:

Understanding Media, Part 2

*"In a world of wires and screens,
we are constantly seen,
by the all-seeing eye of media,
our thoughts and actions made trivial.*

*Marshall McLuhan understood,
the power that media wielded,
how it shaped our perceptions,
and the way we saw the world.*

*But he also knew,
that with great power, comes great irony,
for as we are consumed by media,
it consumes us, too.*

*We are but pawns,
in its never-ending game,
our choices and desires,
merely a reflection of its name.*

And so we sit,

*mesmerized by the glow,
of screens and screens and screens,
unaware of the control they show.*

*But McLuhan saw,
through the veil of deception,
the true nature of media,
and its ultimate direction.*

*So let us be mindful,
as we scroll and tap and swipe,
for in understanding media,
we may yet break its vice-like grip.*

I asked for a poem on Understanding Media in the style of Dr. Seuss:

McLuhan and Dr. Seuss

*"In Understanding Media, McLuhan said
That the medium is the message, not the content instead
He said the way we communicate
Shapes how we perceive and relate*

*TV, radio, and print
All have a different kind of tint
They shape our thoughts and our views
In ways we often don't choose*

*The electric age has brought us speed
But at what cost, do we concede?
Global village sounds nice and neat
But do we lose something sweet?*

*So next time you pick up your phone
Or turn on the TV, all alone
Think about the way it shapes your mind
And leave some room for the old-fashioned kind.”*

I then asked for a poem about The Gutenberg Galaxy in the style of Edgar Ellen Poe.

Poe’s on Marshall and "The Galaxy"

*“The Gutenberg Galaxy, a tome of great renown
A study of the printed word, its power to astound
Marshall McLuhan's masterpiece, a work of true art
Examining the ways in which the written word imparts*

*Its influence upon the mind, its ability to shape
The way we think and see the world, our perceptions to remake
From the printed page to screens of light
The evolution of the word, an endless, glowing flight*

*But as we journey through this galaxy of text
We must be mindful of the power it holds, to not be vexed
For words can be a weapon, or a balm to ease the pain
It is up to us to choose, to think and not go insane*

*So let us delve into the pages of the Gutenberg Galaxy
And explore the ways in which the written word can vary
From the dark and twisted lines of Poe
To the soaring, lyrical verse of those who seek to show*

*The beauty of the written word, in all its grandeur and might
The Gutenberg Galaxy, a realm of endless delight”*

I asked for a poem that summarizes Walter Ong's understanding of Orality and Literacy.

Ong's Two Modes

*“Orality and literacy, two modes of communication
One ancient, one modern, each with its own elation
Orality relies on sound, the spoken word its game
While literacy depends on print, a more sedate fame*

*Oral cultures thrive on memory, the ephemeral word
While literate societies prize the written word
Ong argues that each has its own cognitive style
With orality marked by a more kinesthetic mile*

*So let us not forget the power of the spoken tongue
For even in our modern world, it has not yet been undone
But let us also embrace the written word's might
For it has brought us knowledge, and given us insight”*

I asked it, “Can you write a short essay that compares the ideas of Eric Havelock to Walter Ong?” It generated this response:

“Certainly! Eric Havelock and Walter Ong are both scholars who have studied the impact of written language on human cognition and culture.

Havelock, in his work "The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences," argues that the development of written language in ancient Greece had a profound impact on Greek culture and thought. According to Havelock, the ability to record and transmit ideas in written form allowed for the creation of a new kind of mental representation called the "logos," which allowed for logical, abstract thought and the creation of theoretical models. Havelock contends that this shift towards a more logical and abstract way of thinking was a key factor in the development of scientific and philosophical

thought in ancient Greece.

Ong, in his work "Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word," also explores the impact of written language on human cognition and culture. However, Ong's focus is on the shift from an oral to a literate culture, and he argues that this shift has had significant effects on the way humans process and transmit information. Ong contends that oral cultures rely on a more participatory and immediate mode of communication, while literate cultures rely on a more distanced and detached mode of communication. He also argues that the development of written language has led to a greater emphasis on individualism and the written word as a means of preserving and transmitting knowledge.

In comparing the ideas of Havelock and Ong, it is clear that both scholars recognize the significant impact of written language on human cognition and culture. However, while Havelock focuses on the specific case of the development of written language in ancient Greece and its consequences, Ong takes a broader approach and examines the shift from oral to literate cultures more generally. Both scholars offer valuable insights into the ways in which written language has shaped human thought and society."

I loaded in the prompt: "Please write two dozen aphorisms, in the style of Nietzsche, that address social media."

Back came the response:

"Sure! Here are two dozen aphorisms that address social media in the style of Nietzsche:

"Social media is the opium of the masses."

"The internet is a graveyard of forgotten selves."

"In the age of social media, even solitude is a performance."

"Likes and followers are the modern-day equivalent of medieval indulgences."

"The internet is a hall of mirrors, and social media is the most distorted reflection of all."

"Social media is the enemy of depth and authenticity."

"The internet has made us all actors on the world stage, but social media has reduced us to caricatures."

"Social media is the death of conversation and the birth of self-promotion."

"We are all slaves to the algorithm, trading our privacy for the fleeting attention of others."

"Social media has made us all chroniclers of our own mediocrity."

"In the age of social media, even our friendships are reduced to transactions."

"The internet has given us the illusion of connection, but social media has only deepened our loneliness."

"Social media is the great equalizer, leveling the playing field for narcissists and the genuinely interesting alike."

"In the age of social media, we are all constantly auditioning for the role of our own lives."

"The internet is a never-ending scroll of superficiality, and social media is its unholy grail."

"The internet has given us access to an endless wealth of knowledge, but social media has made us content with soundbites and half-truths."

"In the age of social media, we are all guilty of living in echo chambers, surrounded by people who only confirm our preexisting beliefs."

"Social media is the ultimate distraction, seducing us with the promise of connection and fulfillment,

only to leave us feeling empty and unfulfilled."

"The internet is a vast wasteland of information, and social media is the dumping ground for the most superficial and meaningless of it all."

"In the age of social media, we are all constantly seeking validation and attention, even at the expense of genuine human connection."

"Social media is the ultimate paradox, bringing us closer together while simultaneously driving us further apart."

"The internet has given us the tools to create and share, but social media has reduced us to consumers and passive observers."

"In the age of social media, we are all constantly seeking to curate the perfect online persona, often at the expense of our own authenticity."

"Social media is the ultimate double-edged sword, giving us the power to connect and communicate, but also the power to spread hatred and misinformation."

Finally, I asked it for a poem on GPT-3 in the style of Emily Dickinson:

GPT-3 & Emily

*"GPT-3, a marvel of technology
A tool of great intellect, a mind's own revelry
A model trained on vast amounts of data, so grand
Able to generate language, at the touch of your hand*

*From simple tasks to complex ones, it can do it all
A virtual assistant, a language expert, a digital hall
Of knowledge and information, at your fingertips it lies
A helper, a friend, a tool that never dies*

*But beware, dear user, as you wield this power
For with great intelligence comes great responsibility, hour
Upon hour
Be mindful of your words, and the effects they bring
For GPT-3, a force to be reckoned with, a digital king*

*So let us embrace this tool, and all that it can do
GPT-3, a new era in language, a world anew
A jumbled mass of words and sounds, a joy to hear
GPT-3, a master of language, a pioneer”*

I conclude this brief probe by stating that this technology is in its infancy, and it is fickle, unreliable and changing underneath us. When it first launched, I asked it to re-write some of the poems on McLuhan in the style of James Joyce’s Finnegans Wake. At first prompt, it warned that the Wake was an unusual and idiosyncratic text and that it might not be able to complete the task. It bogged down, took a while, but produced some material that was amazing and incredible (I foolishly did not capture it). By the next day, when I tried it again, it said, “certainly…” but then failed to do anything other than a poem with a smattering of Joyce. I got more and more specific demanding that to produce a poem strictly adhering to the Wake, including novel spellings and neologism, etc. It failed again and again, through I did once get it to randomly insert numbers as if they were letters. The point, here, is that this is a work in-progress, but, nonetheless, something significant is happening in the AI community. Where this all leads is well beyond my ken, but I hope that this probe has prompted you, if you have not already looked into it, to check it out for yourself. My guess is that these kinds of technologies (and there are lots of them moving more and more to AGI), are not going away anytime soon. I also should stress this is only one, tiny fraction of what CHAT GPT does or can do. Some of its main functions and capacities (e.g. write computer code, automate tasks, generate legal and professional documents, offer recipes, answer general questions, etc.) were not mentioned here.

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