

△ Taste Is All That's Left vibecoding notashelf.dev

36 via 🌐 pbsds 9 days ago | caches | 44 comments | +40, 1 off-topic, 3 spam

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Post

Preview

🌐 spc476 edited 9 days ago

As I read this, I was reminded of two quotes. The first is about [the taste gap from Ira Glass](#):

Nobody tells this to people who are beginners, I wish someone told me. All of us who do creative work, we get into it because we have good taste. But there is this gap. For the first couple years you make stuff, it's just not that good. It's trying to be good, it has potential, but it's not. But your taste, the thing that got you into the game, is still killer. And your taste is why your work disappoints you. A lot of people never get past this phase, they quit. Most people I know who do interesting, creative work went through years of this. We know our work doesn't have this special thing that we want it to have. We all go through this. And if you are just starting out or you are still in this phase, you gotta know its normal and the most important thing you can do is do a lot of work. Put yourself on a deadline so that every week you will finish one story. It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions. And I took longer to figure out how to do this than anyone I've ever met. It's gonna take awhile. It's normal to take awhile. You've just gotta fight your way through.

The second is from [The Ze Frank Show](#):

For a very long time, taste and artistic training have been things that only a small number of people have been able to develop. Only a few people could afford to participate in the production of many types of media. Raw materials like pigments were expensive; same with tools like printing presses; even as late as 1963 it cost Charles Peignot over \$600,000 to create and cut a single font family.

The small number of people who had access to these tools and resources created rules about what was good taste or bad taste. These designers started giving each other awards and the rules they followed became even more specific. All sorts of stuff about grids and sizes and color combinations — lots of stuff that the consumers of this media never consciously noticed. Over the last 20 years, however, the cost of tools related to the authorship of media has plummeted. For very little money, anyone can create and distribute things like newsletters, or videos, or bad-ass tunes about "ugly."

Suddenly consumers are learning the language of these authorship tools. The fact that tons of people know names of fonts like Helvetica is weird! And when people start learning something new, they perceive the world around them differently. If you start learning how to play the guitar, suddenly the guitar stands out in all the music you listen to. For example, throughout most of the

history of movies, the audience didn't really understand what a craft editing was. Now, as more and more people have access to things like iMovie, they begin to understand the manipulative power of editing. Watching reality TV almost becomes like a game as you try to second-guess how the editor is trying to manipulate you.

As people start learning and experimenting with these languages authorship, they don't necessarily follow the rules of good taste. This scares the shit out of designers.

I'm not sure what I make of all this.

[–]  notashelf 9 days ago

△
7

Between reading Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, watching The Devil Wears Prada 2, and then reading this article, the following thought triggered:

After industrialization, the bulk of clothing is now produced without a human involved. This results in a lot of second-rate design, which yet derives one way or another from haute couture, where there is only room for real taste and original ideas. In haute couture, the best designers notoriously learned the hard way: got taught embroidery by their grandparents, apprenticed in rusty loom factories, inherited generations-old traditions of tailoring and transcended them, etc. They climbed a wall and experienced the true nature of their craft, which makes them stand out.

Once making good-enough software is truly as automated as making good-enough clothes, maybe software will operate the same as fashion? Maybe software developers with decades of manual programming under their belts will create the boutique software that defines all mediocre software out there?

I am not sure what I make of it all either, but I keep landing on the same spot. Thank you for the insightful comments :)

[–]  kwas 8 days ago

△
3

you replied under the wrong comment, just a FYI.

[–]  notashelf edited 8 days ago

△
3

Still learning lobsters UI. Oops.

Edit: wow I missed by a large margin.

[–]  vegai 8 days ago

[Comment removed by author]

[–]  rbr 9 days ago

△
1

Two very nice quotes, thank you. Especially the first is inspiring.

 thev edited 9 days ago

Between reading Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, watching The Devil Wears Prada 2, and then reading this article, the following thought triggered:

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Once making good-enough software is truly as automated as making good-enough clothes, maybe software will operate the same as fashion? Maybe software developers with decades of manual programming under their belts will create the boutique software that defines all mediocre software out there?

[–]  notashelf edited 9 days ago

△
7 I love this comment. One of the many insightful ones that I *think* are in good faith. In part because it is close to where the post tries to land; Morris and Ruskin watching the power looms and asking not "can we" but "should we." Fashion is the case where that question got answered and both answers came out true at once.

Coincidentally this reminds me on a philosophy class I have taken in college that I *vaguely* remember. Something that I will add from what I *can* remember is that the machines won the volume, the couture houses kept the taste, and the second defines the first without ever outselling it.

In short, I think the boutique-software future is plausible indeed. More importantly, I would like to live in it.

[–]  vegai edited 8 days ago

△
4 | *This results in a lot of second-rate design*

This also results in the middle and even lower classes being able to afford much higher quality clothes and other items than before industrialization.

[–]  hjvt 8 days ago

△
5 And also results in landfills full of clothing of the single-use quality that somebody afforded once and immediately had to replace.

[–]  thev edited 8 days ago

△
2 I like the analogy. So more people can then afford custom software (to replace their current spreadsheets and custom-configured 3rd party solutions), even though those generated programs will not be of top-notch quality.

Only the rich will be able to hire a 'real' developer who solves their problem in a unique way that fits their use case better than they knew was possible, with a tool that runs fast in all circumstances and has some kind of elegance to it that is hard to define.

Folks without programming experience will try to mimic that type of quality but never really get there and fail to understand what it is exactly that sets the results of a 'manual' developer apart from all their prompting.

Seems about right to me.

[-]  cmcaine 8 days ago

△ | *After industrialization, the bulk of clothing is now produced without a human involved.*

3

Industrially produced clothing is still sewn together by humans, with only a very few heavily roboticised factories.

This results in a lot of second-rate design, which yet derives one way or another from haute couture, where there is only room for real taste and original ideas. In haute couture, the best designers notoriously learned the hard way: got taught embroidery by their grandparents, apprenticed in rusty loom factories, inherited generations-old traditions of tailoring and transcended them, etc. They climbed a wall and experienced the true nature of their craft, which makes them stand out.

Perhaps "the best designers" came from poorer backgrounds, but it's an industry mostly for wealthy people and I doubt that many high-fashion designers were poor enough to have been apprenticed in "rusty loom factories".

Also doubtful that haute couture only "has room for real taste and original ideas", but that's more subjective.

 tombh 9 days ago

| *Everyone can make anything. Almost no one can tell you what is worth making.*

Whilst I agree with the sentiment, it feels like quite a narrow view. I think it's possible to argue that in actual fact AI has taken very little from us. To paraphrase Graeber's Bullshit Jobs: AI mostly only amplifies pre-existing bullshitery. The signal is still there, just as loud and clear as ever, but the noise has changed, that's all.

It was *a/ways* hard to find meaningful and fulfilling work, whether paid or personal. Maybe it felt like we had it a bit easier pre-AI, in the sense that yes, not everyone could make anything. Us geeks could do the monkey work and get well paid or receive open source kudos. But if that's all we ever contributed, then of course AI looks like a usurper.

Computers are hard for so many more reasons than the mere act of making things. Consider the humanity. I cannot express my gratitude for the warm smiles of colleagues on a dreary Monday morning, or the patient and considered comments from a stranger on a tricky Github Issue. Not only is that still left after AI, it hasn't even taken a dent.

Then there's the whole issue of copyright. Putting aside the legality of AI training, the morality of attributing our sources is still left after AI. I care about who makes my software. I value their time and wish for them to be recognised for their efforts. AI doesn't stop me having or expressing those feelings.

And of course the environmental impact of data centres. The deepening of the socio-political capitalistic violence of the concentration of wealth from AI investment. At the very least we still have the choice to be conscious of those things, and ideally we make a stand against them with our wallets and voices.

To say that taste is all that's left feels either superficial or like giving up. Keep your head up! If you value good, true work, if you care about other humans, if the craft inspires you, then it's all still up for grabs. In fact this *is* engineering: navigating unprecedented circumstances with patience, creativity and kindness. To state the hacker credo:

| *Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.*

th0ma5 9 days ago

This feels like another thing that a proponent of AI thinks that the opposition must believe. They certainly completely lack in taste by definition, but this submarines the problem of instantaneous function or suitability, which it also lacks by definition.

[−] 🍷 notashelf 9 days ago

△
15 Do excuse me for I cannot be sure how to parse this comment correctly. If I am reading it correctly, you seem to think the post is an AI-booster's strawman of the skeptic position, and that by framing the loss as taste I quietly bury the stronger objection and that the output often doesn't function or isn't suitable? If this is what your point is, then I would like to push back.

I am not an AI-booster, and I am not carrying water for the machines here. My goal is not to argue LLM output is reliable, or in stark contrast, unreliable but such is my observation: they are *generally* accepted as passable---whether I like it or not. Though, you are right. I granted "the output is good enough" and then argued that only taste is missing. That grant does *enormous* work for me. Guilty, I apologize.

In appreciation, I would like to amend the title with a small asterisk: taste is all that's left *once the thing actually works*. Please feel free to let me know if I misunderstood, and thank you for the fair criticism nevertheless.

[−] th0ma5 9 days ago

△
4 | *argued*

I think your pushback is superb because you think it is worthwhile to describe reality as it is, thanks ! Sorry, and thanks. It was more meant to illustrate my own myopia as a general message and shouldn't have perhaps so fully assumed an intent. I think this is the frontier of the hogwash, frankly, to make all arguments keep accepting further encroaching premises.

shonfeder 8 days ago

The post references [William Morris and John Ruskin](#) thus:

| *Morris and Ruskin among them, looked at the flood of cheap identical goods and asked a question that sounded, at the time, sentimental and doomed: not can we make this, but should this be made, and made this way, by no one, for no reason but that the machine could.*

| *They lost the economic argument. They were always going to. But they were right about the thing that mattered, which is that when the making becomes free, the choosing becomes the craft.*

Read literally, this claims that Morris and Ruskin maintain a thesis like this: in the wake of the mechanization of production, "choosing becomes the craft".

I'm not versed in this movement or their writings, but I tried to look into this. Ruskin seemed to hold that engaging in healthy creative labour was essential to being a good person. From *Stones of Venice Volume II, chapter VI, section 16*. (According to crafts person [Robin Wood](#)):

It can only be met by a right understanding, on the part of all classes, of what kinds of labour are good for men, raising them, and making them happy; by a determined sacrifice of such convenience or beauty, or cheapness as is to be got only by the degradation of the workman; and by equally determined demand for the products and results of healthy and ennobling labour.

Morris wrote an essay, [Useful Work versus Useless Toil](#) critiquing the way mechanization was being misused to intensify toil:

They are called "labour-saving" machines - a commonly used phrase which implies what we expect of them; but we do not get what we expect. What they really do is to reduce the skilled labourer to the ranks of the unskilled, to increase the number of the "reserve army of labour" - that is, to increase the precariousness of life among the workers and to intensify the labour of those who serve the machines (as slaves their masters). All this they do by the way, while they pile up the profits of the employers of labour, or force them to expend those profits in bitter commercial war with each other. In a true society these miracles of ingenuity would be for the first time used for minimizing the amount of time spent in unattractive labour, which by their means might be so reduced as to be but a very light burden on each individual. All the more as these machines would most certainly be very much improved when it was no longer a question as to whether their improvement would "pay" the individual, but rather whether it would benefit the community.

Here's an encapsulation from a [reputable source](#):

*Ruskin and William Morris, looked to the artisan guilds of the Middle Ages for inspiration. The ethical and political dimensions of Ruskin's *The Nature of the Gothic*, in particular, inspired Morris's belief in art as the expression of man's joy in labour. In Metcalf's view, "Ruskin's genius was to move attention away from a disinterested contemplation of an artwork and toward a broader examination of the society from which the work emerges" ("Contemporary" 16). Moreover, Ruskin's version of the history of the Middle Ages strongly influenced Morris's. In "Architecture and History," Morris explains his belief that all workmen were artists in the Middle Ages and that this situation began to change in the sixteenth century, creating a division of labour between workmen and artists. By the late eighteenth century, this division had reduced workmen to machines. By the late nineteenth century, Morris felt that the situation was even worse; workmen were now slaves to machines. Morris believed a way to combat this problem was to change manufacturing conditions in order to reinstate the social relations of production of Middle Ages artisan guilds. In "The Revival of Handicraft," Morris argues that*

we do sorely need a system of production which will give us beautiful surroundings and pleasant occupation, and which will tend to make us good human animals, able to do something for ourselves, so that we may be generally intelligent.

<https://utppublishing.com/doi/10.3138/CRAS.2014.S06>)

Starting with the individual, human animal and then moving to the societal level, the Arts and Crafts movement sought to "reassert unity in a world perceived to be artificially fragmented," according to historian Tom Crook (26). The ideal place of unity was the workshop, where social solidarity and the production of objects necessary for life combined.

I notice these themes in the shippets I've found on the Arts and Crafts Movement:

- the unity of thought and labour
- the inseparable relation between social conditions and means of production
- the basic tension between the organisation of labour and the distribution of capital
- the way that the artistry of human judgment and the practice of laborious creation are mutually constituting

Which seem virtually anathema to the view presented in this post. Curious that it was named as a central point of reference!

ombredog 9 days ago

This is overall a pretty good blog, but to be honest I think the analogy towards 'if this is worth making at all' makes it seem like the origins of modern art movements did not start supported from a understanding that patronage of the arts (an argument of how this is decided could be made) was something that those that benefited from investment would do - such as Millas etc.

You could even argue this was important in the application of new art with El Lissitzsky in Eastern Europe as industrialisation would start to begin.

All this to say... is there really structures to support this? This ivory tower that is respected and looked towards for what is the next idea?

I don't see it just yet - I think often we refer that to genuinely amazing maintainers of our most crucial software that has been publicly scrutinised for decades, but I would not say that is new ideas as much as raw skill... to stretch the analogy, its like saying Dutch masters were crucial to the modern art movement, when you have identified more discrete artists had to define the modern art idea in a movement without much economic output for a very long time.

All this to say, I don't know if I see any incentive to create this apart from the moral argument from those that can't afford the level of patronage for those fighting the good fight, which is maybe the cynic/nihilist in me hoping this will evolve as a necessity in the future.

mtset 9 days ago

Author lacks taste in prose sufficient to recognize that this sounds distinctly like slop. Flagged as spam.

[-] 🍌 notashelf 9 days ago

△
11 I was not sure whether or not to reply, but I decided to. I am sorry that I have allowed you to feel this way. Be assured that genuine effort goes into all of my posts, and that no LLMs were present in its writing/storyboarding/review/etc.

[-] Icamtuf edited 9 days ago

△
9 I'm sorry, but I just struggle accepting your claim. And to explain the reactions you're getting, it's like this: imagine that someone rings your doorbell 100 times and every time, you find flaming poo on your doorstep. You're not going to give it the benefit of the doubt when the doorbell rings for the 101th time, right?

Here's what immediately makes me very skeptical about your claim: (1) I can't find your pre-LLM writing that would be comparable in style or verbosity; (2) I see a wide number of consistent, high-level tells in the text (and I don't mean em-dashes); (3) your essay scores 100% AI on Pangram, which is a remarkably good tool (in contrast to the crappy detectors of the old); (4) your essay doesn't seem to be saying anything beyond what I'd expect an LLM to produce in response to a short prompt - the "thesis compression" test.

I'll admit that my judgment is colored by the fact that it's a peculiar affliction of AI-related op-eds (both pro- and con-) that they appear to be AI-generated at a much higher rate than any other form of blogging on the internet. Their authors often show up to assert that they haven't used AI tools, but in almost all instances, these claims are difficult to take seriously. I remember debating someone who had no online writing footprint whatsoever until 2025 and then started a blog that posted one long-form piece every single day at the same hour. Is there a one-in-a-million chance I was talking to a pseudonymous programming blog prodigy who works on a really precise schedule? Yes, but you gotta draw the line somewhere.

And it matters to me because if I'm to spend human time reading, reflecting on, and engaging with a post, I want to engage with content where another human actually put in the effort to articulate their own thoughts. I don't want to engage with an endless supply of machine-generated posts. There's just no point.

On the off chance you're actually being honest with us - it sucks, but I think you should direct your ire toward the flaming-poo pranksters who came before.

[–] 🟡 notashelf 8 days ago

△
6 There is not much I can add from this point forward, but I hear and understand your concerns, to say the least. Do consider my perspective, though: I'm an anonymous hobbyist doing this for the hell of it. The blog, the software I write, and anything else I have produced provides more value to the consumer than it does to me. It is not my day job, and it will never benefit me in my day job. Even if the post gets 100,000 reads, the value it provides *to me* is little to none. I do appreciate you taking the time to comment---and taking the time to *honestly* criticize even more so. If you like consuming human content, I like producing it. If I were to have a LLM produce a post for me and throw it out there, I would *only* be shooting myself in the foot. Great, now I have made myself obsolete.

I'm trying to be honest with you---all of you who took the time to comment---because I do appreciate the criticism. Even a "this sucks, Claude wrote this" is valuable feedback that I *am* taking to heart. But even if I decide now that yes, the post *must* be rewritten because it sounds too much like AI, there is nothing else I can do. My writing style is my writing style. Everything since 2025---and the sloppier, worse-edited stuff that shortly predates it---is what I can produce. Again, I can only apologize for having you doubt the authenticity of the post, and *only* that.

The doorbell analogy is fair. I do not mean to pretend I am owed the benefit of the doubt when I am the 101st ring, and I can't really argue my way out of a detector score and I'm not going to try. If the tells are there, they're there. What I *will* do, however, is to take the criticism and advice into heart. I harbor no ire towards you and no negative or skeptic-at-best comment for expecting the worst. It is what is. I apologized, and I said my piece.

[–] shonfeder 8 days ago

△ 3 I also found this an incredible claim given the content and style of the writing. It's interesting that the piece itself takes the position that the way things are produced ultimately doesn't matter, and only judgment matters

| *the judgement itself. The part that was always the point.*

Yet the author seems to be at pains to convince incredulous readers that this was not machine generated. An interesting tension there!

Regardless of the actual provenance in this case, I think the proliferation of LLMs are supercharging a process of homogenizing of language and thinking that has been going on for a long time. The best encapsulation of this I've found so far is in Adorno's "Prisms" (from 1967):

The notion of the free expression of opinion, indeed, that of intellectual freedom itself in bourgeois society, upon which cultural criticism is founded, has its own dialectic. For while the mind extricated itself from a theological-feudal tutelage, it has fallen increasingly under the anonymous sway of the status quo. This regimentation, the result of the progressive societalization of all human relations, did not simply confront the mind from without; it immigrated into its immanent consistency. It imposes itself as relentlessly on the autonomous mind as heteronomous orders were formerly imposed on the mind which was bound. Not only does the mind mold itself for the sake of its marketability, and thus reproduce socially prevalent categories. Rather, it grows to resemble ever more closely the status quo even where it subjectively refrains from making a commodity of itself. The network of the whole is drawn every tighter, modeled after the act of exchange. It leaves the individual consciousness less and less room for evasion, preforms it more and more thoroughly, cuts it off a priori as it were from the possibility of differencing itself as all difference degenerates to a nuance in the monotony of supply. (Adorno 1981, "Prisms")

[–] mtset 9 days ago

△ 12 After reading this reply, I read the addendum, and then read a few of your other posts. I will say that many others very much do *not* sound like slop; when I compare them using the various AI detectors [1], posts from early 2025 say 10% or 0% and newer ones, including this one, say 100% AI or "AI paraphrased." That shift seems to have taken place, to my eye and to those of the detectors, between "The Federation Fallacy" (June 26, 2025) and "The Tradeoff Trap" (August 10, 2025).

I'm really torn: on the one hand, you seem very genuine, and I'd really like to believe that there were no LLMs involved. On the other hand, there are just so *many* of these tells present, from jarringly different sentences composed of three or four words in the form "<noun> <verb> [article] <noun>" to the little thinking-outside-of-thinking phrases like "I want to be careful here", "Here is the uncomfortable mechanism", and "[H]ere is the defense, such as it is" that emerge from the mechanism of LLMs' relentless forward march of token completion, that it's hard for me to believe.

If it's really true that the machines write like you, I'm sorry. That's awful. With that said, I do think that writing well these days means taking the time to make clear, through both careful editing and clear sentence construction, that what we put out doesn't sound like the machine -- and I wonder what happened about a year ago that made you stop doing that.

1: To me, the comparison is much more interesting than the raw number. I understand that simply reporting "GPTZero says AI" is mostly meaningless.

[–] 🍌 notashelf 9 days ago

△
11 Thank you for taking the time for an in-depth comment, and the analysis of it all. This is by far one of the most insightful comments I have received, and I want to carefully respond to each one of your points.

when I compare them using the various AI detectors [1], posts from early 2025 say 10% or 0% and newer ones, including this one, say 100% AI or "AI paraphrased." That shift seems to have taken place, to my eye and to those of the detectors, between "The Federation Fallacy" (June 26, 2025) and "The Tradeoff Trap" (August 10, 2025).

AI detector or not, I have been *feeling* the same drop in quality and insight in my posts and I, well, can't pretend there hasn't been a shift. I'd be lying to you and to myself if I had said I didn't see it. Consequently, I have re-read my post after it hit Hacker News and a friend kindly informing me of it. I'll tell you this much: the only thing I had in my mind was "how the FUCK did I write like this". hilariously, I was thinking "I have not written anything with *real* depth in a while" to myself earlier this week.

If it's really true that the machines write like you, I'm sorry. That's awful. With that said, I do think that writing well these days means taking the time to make clear, through both careful editing and clear sentence construction, that what we put out doesn't sound like the machine -- and I wonder what happened about a year ago that made you stop doing that.

I have spent a good while contemplating whether it was the machines that write like me, or if I write like the machines. I hesitate to say I think it is a combination of both. What I did do---without ever clocking it as a decision---was spend a year reading the things and working next to them daily, until their "cadence" was part of my mental archive.

Again, I appreciate your comment. I wrote the post with good, albeit selfish, intentions but it was *never* the goal to drop unfiltered LLM slop in the timeline and wait for clout. That goes against all the reasons I write. Admittedly I am embarrassed to have produced such a piece. Now that I think about it, I've read enough of the averaged voice that some of it has settled into mine, and the tells you can name are ones I reach for *practically unprompted* now---like the way you pick up an accent without deciding to. Yes I mentally filter out the typical tells like "This isn't X, this is Y" and the many like it, but clearly some have made it into my lexicon.

Like many comments such as yours, the care and the concern have been a wake-up call. I started working on a second post---partially inspired by this one---and if you ever get around to reading it then I leave it to you whether it reads as mine or as the machine's. With all of those said, I can't help but read my own writing with a certain level of paranoia after the fact. Much I should think about. Still, I leave you with my thanks.

[–] mtset edited 9 days ago

△
4 I appreciate your taking my comments in stride and I wish you all possible success in freeing your mind from the machines' yoke. Unflagged, and I have subscribed to your RSS feed. 💜

⋮

[–] mempko 9 days ago

△
5

I got the same treatment from this community on a recent post. Don't apologize for your language. This is not constructive feedback. I hope this is not a new trend in this community. Some kind of LLM witch trial. "It floats on water like a duck, must be a witch!"

[–] addison 8 days ago



9

To be honest, in your case, I think the more correct literary reference would be, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks". I've followed a number of threads where you, specifically, have berated people with every "human-focused" reason to use LLMs with very little critical self-reflection.

There is witch hunting, and there is sensibly rejecting submissions which appear to dilute the humanity of what we read. When historical writing diverges so much from the current, authors are known to use these tools extensively, and it "feels" like slop to read, I'm gonna filter it out, regardless of whether it's slop or not, because it is genuinely unpleasant to read for me now. I am repulsed by these tools. I will not be apologetic in my rejection of things that appear to be them.

[–] mempko edited 8 days ago



1

We are animals. We have bad brains. We build tools. We use them to consume everything around us. What makes computers wonderful is they can help us go around our bad brains. Yet we don't use them that way. LLMs are compressors. They take all human knowledge and compress it. You can then use them to uncompress it. It's a lossy compression. It's just math.

You are not repulsed by a compressor are you? What repulses me about LLMs is who is building them and who owns them. What repulses me about them is people think they are more than just a bunch of equations wrapped in a stochastic autoregressive system. What repulses me about them is people use them as a weapon at other people.

LLMs are a problem because people have bad brains. They are a reflection of us and have compressed everything we say.

Just like nuclear energy. You can use it to boil water and get electricity or use it to blow people up.

You can use LLMs to uncompress English into computer code, or uncompress English into more English.

There is a much bigger issue at play which is we won't have highly organized human life as we do now because we are in overshoot and will consume everything there is to consume and won't be able to maintain LLMs. In fact won't be able to maintain computer systems in general.

It's not because of LLMs. It's because we have bad brains and nobody is in control and we've discovered oil over 200 years ago and built machines to eat and burn everything around us until we can't anymore.

[–] addison 8 days ago



- 8 This is just a mountain of text which distracts from the main point: people don't want to read LLM output because it is creatively corrupt. Coming up with every justification you (and/or the LLM) can come up with is just not relevant. Please actually consider that people do not need to be convinced of the righteousness of your use of these tools, and that there may be some amount of legitimacy in refusing to read their output.

[–] mempko edited 8 days ago

[Comment removed by author]

[–] mempko 8 days ago

△ I'll simplify my wall of text since it is a lot.

1

I believe we should stop berating people. Guessing if they are using LLMs or not. It's anti-social and misses the point entirely.

When I was in college, we had a kid who had muscular dystrophy. He would type using a stick attached to his head. He programmed software that way too!

Would you berate him for using an LLM to write text? What if the person you are berating is in such a position?

It's just fucking rude to guess if people are using this technology because what if they are? What if they need to?

[–] addison 8 days ago

△

10

| *Would you berate him for using an LLM to write text? What if the person you are berating is in such a position?*

Would you minify their experience into an argument for your convenience?

Alas, this example still utterly fails to address my point. I don't hear the author; I hear the LLM. Dictation, eye-tracking, and other input methods exist that allow people with extreme disabilities to partake in self-expression that do not require self-erasure. If anything, these tools remove agency and self-expression while pretending to be an aid to both. And we're hardly done yet to make input methods equitable. We should not form dependency on a crutch, and we should also not use their experience as an excuse, especially not on their behalf as a scapegoat. Frankly, the repeated self-victimisation and appeals to "accessibility" as a strawman should be enough to give you pause.

This technology does not enable writers, it replaces them. Recognise this, as it is a literal, exact fact: if you do not write the words, they are not your words. If I wanted to read an LLM's "take" on a situation, I can do that myself. Do not compel me to read your LLM's output by being disingenuous.

[–] mempko edited 8 days ago

△

1

| *This technology does not enable writers, it replaces them*

This is true! It does not enable writers and it does replace them. But it does enable communication which is very different.

Being a writer is more than just communication, it's an identity, an art, a form of enjoyment. The act of writing itself is a pleasure for people.

Most people are not writers. That's why writing exists as a career because sometimes you have to hire them to get a message across. Writing some webpage copy. Writing a news article, etc.

If you think about those jobs, it's a person taking a prompt "write about this business process" or "here is some research, write a story about it". and expanding on it. LLMs are taking a lot of those jobs away because they do something similar.

People are also using LLMs to try to pretend to be writers when they never were. Trying to write stories, etc.

Because very few people are really writers. Meaning they spent time perfecting the craft and art of writing. Most people use text for communication.

In fact, the earliest human text was about accounting! Written language was invented to keep track of shit, not for art. We just happened to also use it to write stories, poems, etc!

Words on page is a technology people developed for accounting that we happened to now use for self expression. Keep in mind for most of human history, virtually nobody knew how to read and write. You need to learn how to do it, that's why we learn it in school. It's a technology!

| *I don't hear the author;*

Nobody hears the author. They hear a mental model of what they think is the author. I can write something with extreme clarity as an author, but if the other person on the other side doesn't have the same shared experience as me, they won't hear me, they will hear a version of me they created in their head. In fact it takes a long time to understand any author. I would argue you can never really know them because we all have different experiences. We can only get an approximation.

Language is a communication tool. It requires both a sender and receiver. The sender can fail to map their mental model to language. But the receiver can also fail to map it to a mental model that matches the sender no matter how clear the sender's message is.

| *with extreme disabilities to partake in self-expression that do not require self-erasure*

If I read a piece of text someone else wrote (say a poem) and it elicits a reaction from me that I enjoy and share that text with you in the hope of doing the same thing. I have communicated with you, something meaningful to me, without having to have written it. The crime would be if I claimed I wrote it because someone else did.

You can't erase yourself.

[–] tentacloids 8 days ago

△
6

Maybe against my better judgement to step foot in this thread but it's interesting reading this type of argument in the wake of the [disability dongle](#) article. Can't help but wonder whether there are better, simpler communication aids than a trillion dollar methane-burning toy that obliterates your written personality.

[–] mempko 8 days ago

△
1

The point of the disability dongle is that we need infrastructure for disabled people and not some VC funded startup trying to make money off them with some overengineered piece of shit.

My first thought reading it is why doesn't the government train an LLM and offer it as a service for free for people? That would be great infrastructure.

Why are we relying on all these companies to do all this stuff?

[–] tentacloids 8 days ago

△
3

I mean. Infrastructure is about people helping each other. Don't need an LLM for that. But anyway, if I'm understanding you correctly, LLMs are a purely neutral mathematical discovery that can be used for good as much as they can be for bad. Which may well be true, but unfortunately the timeline we live in is one where their development has been driven by money-hungry, earth-salting delusion, and that will now never not be the case. The damage to human trust, and to the world, has already been done.

The average person *could* have used this pure vision of a government-trained LLM for translation or overcoming disability (probably, somehow), but alas, they cannot. At least not without sounding like the homepage for subscription vaporware.

[–] mempko edited 8 days ago

△
1

if I'm understanding you correctly, LLMs are a purely neutral mathematical discovery that can be used for good as much as they can be for bad.

Yes

The damage to human trust, and to the world, has already been done.

It's even worse than that. The damage was done well before LLMs were invented. Well before you and I were born. We are in overshoot and getting rid of LLMs won't save us. We won't be able to maintain them anyway. Computers in general for that matter. Organized human

life at this point seems doomed to me. I would love to be convinced otherwise. I have children.

[–] tentacloids 8 days ago

△
2 | *Organized human life at this point seems doomed to me.*

I think if this is something you genuinely believe, you should find a local hobbyist club like woodturning or blacksmithing. Better for your mental health than arguing with strangers on a tech forum, and you'll have a skill you can trade for food if you happen to be right.

[–] mempko edited 8 days ago

△
1 I'd rather communicate this to the mainstream, who have no idea what is happening. Especially tech people since we are the ones building the systems. And now hold most of the world's power.

Again I have children. If there is a small chance the mainstream wises up and changes tact, then that's a better future for my children.

It's possible, look at acid rain. That was a problem the world came together to solve.

What I mean by doomed is doomed if we keep on the same path. Me hiding out doing some woodturning isn't going to help in any way.

My mental health is fine.

[–] robinovitch61 8 days ago

△
3 I don't like AI prose because it feels like there is a lack of good faith effort to meaningfully convey human thoughts. Instead, there's just a gesture at communication: "expand this tweet for me". Why should I read it if you don't care enough to expand it yourself?

Similar to if I was talking to someone in real life and they were looking at their phone, I feel it's rude. If I met someone for the first time, tried to engage with them meaningfully, and they were on their phone, I would feel it to be offensive, like something else is worth their time and energy other than me.

If they told me that they use their phone as a translation/transcription tool and I realized they were actually using it to engage with me as meaningfully as they possibly could, then I'd feel like a bit of a fool for assuming they were being rude, and we'd be able to move on.

If you have a condition where using LLMs is required to communicate, then it's not hard to mention that. The majority of LLM prose is not written by people with muscular dystrophy, because most people don't have muscular dystrophy. You're

changing the goalposts by giving one situation where it's obviously not inappropriate to use LLMs to argue against general use of LLMs for human communication.

[–] mempko edited 8 days ago

△

1

I'm not arguing for using LLMs as a general communication tool. I'm not encouraging people to do it. As you point out, a LOT of people are using them as such. What I'm arguing against is people ASSUMING the other is using them and berating them for it off just 'vibes' that it feels like LLM text.

I don't know how old you are but I got my first cellphone in the early 2000s and we had to use the number pad to write. It forced you to communicate a certain way. We used a lot of shorthand.

Since a lot of text is generated now using LLMs, I wouldn't be surprised if people who don't even use LLMs are changing the way they write. Like a feedback loop.

My point is we don't know if someone is using the tech or not. We shouldn't just "guess" because it looks like LLM generated code. It's anti-social and by it's nature also change the way people write for fear of being seen as LLM generated text.

I am noticing myself doing this. I joke that it used to be bad english would give a bot away as a bot. Now really good english give a bot away. So I am finding myself NOT correcting mistakes in my text just so people don't confuse me for a bot.

Meaning I don't care about grammar, or quality of my writing anymore because if I increase it, I might sound like an LLM.

You will see more slang, more weird english out of this kind of shunning. And then ironically in the next training round, the LLMs will pick them up and start using them. So what are we supposed to do, change the way we write every 6-12 months?

[–] mempko 8 days ago

[Comment removed by author]

jfb 8 days ago

This rhymes with something I've been mulling over myself, that the shift in where scarcity lives, which is a common feature of historical economic and cultural changes for as long as there's been people, is so hard to conceptualize and reason about. I don't begrudge folks who reject the whole approach, but I worry that it's do some degree whistling past the graveyard; I want the skeptics voices heard, because if the future of software development, writ large, is defined by the boosters -- well, I don't want *that*, at all.

likewisethat 9 days ago

I guess taste doesn't build reliability

amw-zero 8 days ago

By the way, the author was accused of writing with AI, and they say they absolutely didn't. I continuously see people confidently accuse a post of being AI-generated, and I've often wondered how they can identify that.

It turns out you often can't.

[-] addison 8 days ago

△
3 ...assuming that the author is honest. We have no real way to tell. Either way, if the writing feels like LLM output, it is stylistically something one can choose to avoid.