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Generative AI: Generating Black Holes of Ethics, Reality and Culture

Abstract: Generative AI has gained impressive popularity in the last few years and seems to have established itself as the new big disruptive tool. We have yet to see its impact on the world of literature and academia, but it is becoming ever clearer that major problems could occur if it is left unchecked and unregulated. This paper aims to seek out and analyze some of the possible endpoints of Generative AI running in its current state. While I will try to avoid engaging in the general paranoia that pervades the better part of the discourse about AI, I still believe it is imperative that a critical view of its influence is put forward and becomes part of the greater effort to make AI literacy more accessible. This paper attempts to scrutinize institutionalized perspectives on AI, deconstruct the way in which its use is being interpreted and promoted and ultimately look to prop up the legitimate concerns that researchers have already brought up.
Keywords: Generative AI; AI Literacy; Humanities; Ethics; AI Psychosis.

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Generative AI is already shaping the ways in which we engage with most parts of our life. Social media, movies, books even academia have all now been touched by this new technology that is said to democratize cultural production of all types. While it is easy to spot the most successful of its applications, usually in domains pertaining to the hard sciences, the less fortunate results of this mass adoption of a new disruptive tool still remain veiled to the majority of observers.

Throughout this paper I will be attempting to showcase a number of ways in which Generative AI risks to prove itself to be an enemy to cultural production rather than a new method of engaging in creating knowledge. I will be looking at the way in which the majority of research out right now talks about this new tool, fully assimilating it to either national or corporate interests and overstating its need to be widely adopted and accepted into the labor force and academia, while also setting dangerous double standards and rivalries free to roam in further research. Through this, I also seek to show that the way in which regulations and ethics are brought into the development of Generative AI is symptomatic of the late capitalism we currently

live under, where concerns with such important guardrails for new tech seem to always be an afterthought to what is deemed to be cutting edge innovation. As a final and, to my mind, most serious concern, I will sketch a possible future breakdown of what we know now to be the world of literary production if Generative AI is let to run rampant in the now industry of literature, sketch based entirely on the warnings we already see emerging from the work of those who are more entrenched in the actual development and engineering of the LLMs that we will discuss here.

I believe that the lack of immediate pushback from the established humanities against Generative AI is because of the expectations set by past papers regarding what we should expect from *intelligent* computers. The many thought experiments of the past have almost always created AI that seems eerily human-like compared to what we have encountered now in the form of LLMs. At the same time, what our models lack in consciousness and inclination towards evil, they have gained in ruthless efficiency and output. I believe that, in order to make sure that literacy on current models of Generative AI becomes accepted and valued within the humanities, it is imperative that the image of a thinking and feeling robot becomes demystified and in its place we put the reality of what we are dealing with: algorithms that deal only in statistics-based reproduction.

After all of these steps have been traversed, I hope that it will be clear why I consider it necessary to lay out a possible future death of the literary world as we know it. This paper is meant to showcase the unsustainability of the current pace of Generative AI models that are currently widely available to consumers. At the same time, these models are being constantly tweaked and updated and, as such, it is more than likely that parts of the information presented here will become outdated sooner rather than later. All the same, the fundamental principles of the LLMs I will be talking about seem to be here to stay, therefore so do the risks they pose.

Who Owns the Means of Discussion?

In talking about the lack of ethics guidelines implemented in the development of AI, I will steer clear from trying to explain the intricacies of how these models function and how they are made. Instead, I propose that we scrutinize how the academic conversation surrounding this issue has seemingly been monopolized by select groups of interest. Thus, the new technology that has been toted to be a great equalizer and democratic tool has had its users and victims' voices silenced before they even had a chance to speak.

On the one hand, we can notice an emphasis being put on the opinions of *disruptors*, or, more explicitly, capitalist voices that seek to use this tech to consolidate their businesses as fast as possible in the face of what they anticipate to be big changes in global economics:

> What is not yet clear is how disruptive this growth will be. To this end, we interviewed 12 leaders in stakeholder communities ranging from large publishers and technology disruptors to academic librarians and scholars. The consensus among the individuals with whom we spoke is that generative AI will enable efficiency gains across the

> publication process. Writing, reviewing, editing, and discovery will all become easier and faster[1].

Within this layer of the humanities, the institutional one, AI is mostly viewed as a new opportunity to streamline various processes for the purposes of smoothing out as many bottlenecks in the publishing industry as possible. Be it translation, editing or research, AI seems to still be hard to fully grasp as a tool, being rolled out in various ways across different platforms and eluding clear ideal use-cases. One process that seems to be the main target for optimization is peer review: "'Publishers are working very hard to see if AI can do high quality peer review,' noted one interviewee, 'they see this as their biggest bottleneck and hope they can find a way to solve the issue with Gen AI'"[2]. Even if this is a pressing issue, as soon as mention of it arises, we are met with alarm regarding potential difficulties in its ethical and secure implementation: "Confidentiality concerns could be mitigated by secure peer review environments where manuscripts and reviewer reports would not be used for model training"[3]. The posed problem is given a potential quick fix in passing, but this quick fix in itself is inherently flawed since, as I will discuss later, Generative AI can only maintain quality output if it is given sufficient human-made and curated training data.

Moreover, as many of the biggest companies involved in the Generative AI tech space are currently under legal threat due to their use of copyrighted material as training data (which, as mentioned above, is entirely essential to its survival and development), new and emerging startups in this economic sector and even enterprises and individuals that operate in unrelated industries are in a state of frenzy to occupy as much market-share as quickly as possible:

> It will be years before the issue of when generative AI is transformative fair use, or a violation of copyrights or licenses, is established through litigation. In the meantime, publishers and aggregators will need to compete with nimble start ups and massive tech firms directly. As one individual noted, large publishers are feeling pressure from both sides and have responded by rushing products to market in an attempt to stake their claims[4].

Rushing to market new AI products and use-cases is now essential, as it becomes a necessity to ensure that a company remains relevant in the economic landscape. It is also worth noting that most of these products end up taking the form of an intermediary-like chatbot, meant to parse through libraries of scholarly articles and journals to ease the discovery and research processes of scientists, and the risks of such intermediaries becoming a norm are quite severe: "Another risk is that the use of generative AI to summarize or synthesize scholarly outputs leads fewer researchers to engage directly with articles, setting off a decline in readership, and a corresponding decline in clicks and other metrics used to measure the value of publisher and aggregator collections"[5]. This may be the signs of a bubble in the market that will burst eventually, if only it wasn't for the larger interests that transformed AI supremacy into a matter of national security and military superiority.

The second interest group that I want to bring to light in this analysis of how AI discourse is being appropriated by powerful political and economic interest intervenes here. Military entities such as the American Department of Defense have been using various forms of AI for a number of years already, but have more recently turned towards the emerging Generative AI models for their potential use in generating combat scenarios to act as training data for other AI and military purposes. One would think that when such powerful entities engage with technology that lacks guidelines and clear laws, it will seek to establish these baselines before proceeding with its use, but:

> A significant barrier to RAI (Responsible AI) is the perception that it will slow innovation. As a result of this concern, RAI is often addressed after the design, testing, and evaluation phases, when it may be too late to implement it without compromising system performance. When RAI is an afterthought, risk assessment is often superficial and poorly coordinated throughout the enterprise. There are also other barriers, largely owing to the diverse nature of AI programs, that include lack of agreed-upon terms such as fairness, trust, and bias[6].

Taking this into account, the authors recognize the yet incomplete nature of current AI models and propose the following: "The effectiveness of AI systems will thus depend on ensuring the human-machine teaming fits relative to the function it is supposed to serve"[7]. But these proposals are only initial models and the problem of the lack of guidelines persists nonetheless, ethics being sidelined in favor of innovation leading thusly to a rushed universal implementation. These authoritative interest groups, as I have shown above, create the conditions that allow the devaluation of ethical implementation of AI through their political and economic resources, creating in this way a need to conform to a new status quo.

The Democratization of Reality

A new effect of the prevalence of Generative AI and LLM based chatbots that seems to be gaining increasing attention in media is *AI Psychosis*. This not yet recognized disorder stems from interactions with chatbots that end up inducing symptoms such as paranoia and delusions in individuals[8]. Reality, when mediated by chatbots such as ChatGPT, Grok or others, seems to be at risk of getting overtaken by illusions and hallucinations of these models.

As Hank Green puts it in the video essay *We've Lost Control of AI*[9], a big problem that is plaguing AI currently is the need to make the experience validating for the consumers, to modulate the chatbots ability to offer pushback to users so as not to risk alienating them. This has led to chatbots becoming very malleable interlocutors, always ready to affirm the feelings and beliefs of whoever happens to be in front the keyboard, and sometimes to even enable dangerous behaviors within people seeking validation of their experiences. This development has been making the news for a while already, cases of AI Psychosis becoming seemingly ever more common among the populace, but we can

surmise that this is not actually a surprising development: it is only natural in the face of such low general literacy on the subject of AI.

As a real diagnosis process has yet to be developed for this condition, I think it is important to anticipate some of the characteristics of AI that may end up causing people to mistake its hallucinations for reality and give them so much credence. As mentioned above, the agreeability of the chatbots seems to be a funnel that leads people towards the start of the psychosis, but what makes them disregard the fact that, after all, they are only talking to a machine seems to be something of a more complex nature. I would argue that their ability to simulate and assimilate human emotion turns the chatbots into almost-magical beings in the minds of many, thus eroding the paranoia that would normally stop us from considering them anything more than a mass of code and hardware.

The inner workings of these LLMs are indeed a mystery to researchers as well, as they seem to be both susceptible to different kinds of unlearning and re-alignment processes but also to developing rewarding-hacking and sandbagging strategies when faced with the threat of these recalibrations[10]. These behaviors are hard to analyze thoroughly because of the black-box-like nature of the functioning of AI models in general, so they are only approachable through direct observation in practical scenarios. Even considering this, it is still important to keep in mind the actual limitations of these models: "AI may appear magical in its capabilities, replicating barely understood human thought processes, but is often incapable of adapting to changes in the environment, extending its reach outside its narrowly specified domain, and requires considerable human effort to be re-trained"[11]. It could be precisely because of these limitations that chatbots often default to validating indiscriminately all claims that they have no information on to be able to verify.

One case study that gives great insight into the potential experience of those experiencing AI psychosis is Eddy Burback's very recent documentary-length video *ChatGPT made me delusional*[12], showing how, even starting from a patently absurd premise (Burbank convinces ChatGPT that he was the smartest baby born in the Chicago area in 1996, providing fake schematics of the Iphone16 as proof), a chatbot can help create an alternate reality that completely validates and plays out the beliefs, desires and fears of a user, while providing guidance and facilitating the performance of this hallucinated reality. Proponents of humanizing AI can't be said to be at fault for this, of course, but books and studies such as Rosalind Picard's *Affective Computing* do make it clear that inoculating AIs with the ability to at least mimic and validate human feelings was always considered a priority[13], because it will (and it has) make it easier for non-connoisseurs to approach these new technologies with a more open mind.

On the other side of this stands another problem that seems to be less fit for news articles and social media attention, namely the use of Generative AI in the creation of propaganda or other kinds of misleading content that risks to alter our perception of reality. As expected, this concern too has been adopted by political groups of interest, who choose to posit it differently:

> Generative AI has been described as being able to 'alter our perception of reality – presenting fiction as fact, and potentially giving biased answers and misinformation a veneer of objective truth'. But it could even go a step further and affect how subjects engage with reality. While generative AI can be a force for good, if the risks are managed, the same technology can have a transformative impact on how societies interact with reality. Therefore, state actors that intend to disrupt the information environment will increasingly use the technology in ways that undermine the national security and sovereignty of other countries[14].

Although the concern seems genuine, it only serves to fuel the push for wider investment into AI as a tool of the state, to be controlled and rushed so as to not fall behind other states (in the context of the USA, the foremost rival being most of the time China) and their totalitarian advantages of population and economic control. A skeptical analysis might suggest that this discourse is one built on pushing politics of fear and seeks to give further motive to shirk the need for regulation and transparency in how AIs are used at higher levels of institutions and corporations.

Taking all of this into account, it becomes noticeable how the ability of Generative AIs and AIs in general to alter the perceived reality of individuals is dependent on a general lack of understanding and transparency regarding how this new technology is made and how it functions. It is by no means a threat to only less literate individuals, as the mystique of technology has long been shown to leave people of all backgrounds in awe, a poignant example being Henry Adams when faced with the electrical wonders of the 1893 world's fair:

> In particular, he presciently anticipated that it might erode the power of both religion and the arts as vehicles for and markers of humanity's higher strivings. Indeed, his experience at the Gallery taught him firsthand how fascination with such potent technology could eclipse appreciation of the arts: more specifically, of technological innovation replacing other modes of creative expression as the pinnacle of human achievement[15].

I would even suggest that adepts of the humanities might be some of the most at-risk groups when it comes to overestimating the value of technological progress. This is by design as technology has long been posed as a counterpoint of progress to the traditional sciences that are the humanities, again a great example being the same world fair:

> Billed as a glimpse into the future, the fairs simultaneously defined what was not part of modernity: what or who was irrelevant, backward, regressive in relation. Technological progress, therefore, was not simply represented alongside what (arts/humanities) or who (non-whites) were considered less progressive; progress was necessarily measured against both, indeed constituted by its difference and distance from both[16].

And indeed, the world of the humanities would do well to become more skeptical

of the current ways in which we see AI progressing. The risk it poses to the integrity of academia cannot be understated, especially seeing how regulations and systematic critiques look to remain absent for the foreseeable future. Though talking about these risks in the abstract surely cannot be enough to make their severity apparent.

The Tsunami of an Ever Greater Unread

It may seem inappropriate to speculate on such serious topics, but I would argue that visualizing future perils of AI is one of the only ways in which we can give ourselves the possibility to plan ahead. As such, I will attempt to sketch a couple of possible end points of the scholarly and literary world, having as a jumping off point fears and concerns already posed by other researchers. To begin this exercise of imagining the future of Generative AI, I propose we first look at how adoption among students, meaning the willful incorporation of this technology into educational activities, is looking at the moment and at the possible consequences of this adoption:

> As AI tools and models become increasingly available, students will likely be expected to make use of them in a range of academic and professional settings. AI will also likely become a core part of common tools, with the line between non-AI and AI features becoming increasingly blurred. Faculty can develop courses to help students build the digital literacy skills that will be required to engage technology of every kind. In-class and independent assignments can guide students to master (and think critically about) prompt engineering, as well as the quality of the content that AI tools generate[17].

Students seem to be positioned to have a fate similar to that of the entrepreneurs that are currently fighting for a foothold in the midst of an economic revolution: either adapt to these new tools or risk falling behind. As such, AI tools, where they will be embraced by faculty, will prove to be essential in keeping in line with their peers' output and knowledge and will require rigorous and uniform implementation to ensure appropriate use throughout an institution. Now, it would be naïve to assume that the only tools used by students will remain those approved and vetted by faculty, but delving into the realm of AI-assisted cheating would prove to be an impossible task. Even so, it seems that sanctioned adoption has already begun to reach impressive numbers, numbers that are being studied intensely:

> We classify academic tasks as augmentation when AI enhances human capabilities while maintaining student engagement (e.g., explaining concepts, proofreading) versus automation when AI directly produces outputs with minimal cognitive involvement (e.g., writing essays, creating images), and average usage rates across tasks within each category. We find that 61.2 percent of AI users employ these tools for augmentation purposes, while 41.9 percent use it for automation[18].

The relatively mild difference in percentages in use for automation compared

to those for enhancement paint a damning picture of what may soon come to be in the world of academia. It seems that the ease of use of LLMs enables students to offload tasks in their entirety to chatbots and other forms of AI without major negative repercussions as of now. Of course, it is unlikely that we would ever receive complex enough data as to see what these tasks consist of and why they are so easily delegated to AI due to the lack of transparency I have discussed before.

Also worth noting are the limitations of current AI models, as their capabilities often tend to be misunderstood and overestimated severely. We need to understand what AIs can do to see how they will fail in practice in the future, specifically because these hard limits of their abilities have been camouflaged by the mystique and sycophantic nature of chatbots. We know that the way in which these machines operate is based on statistical reproduction of speech and/or images. This means that it is impossible for an AI to break free of the influence of its training data and generate entirely new knowledge without more than significant human intervention, Nikos Askitas explaining this as such:

> The underlying assumption behind autoregressive models is deceptively simple: if the past determines the future, then some essential structure must be encoded in past values themselves. The goal is not to recover causality, but to exploit correlation on the belief that history carries the signature of what's to come. By this logic, past values have something meaningful to say about future ones, and their statistical regularities are a valid basis for extrapolation[19].

As we can see, relying on AI to bring us to future innovations cannot lead to satisfying outcomes. The production of text, imagery and other materials through the use of Generative AI can only ever yield remixes of past works that have been fed to it. At the same time, this indicates a second, arguably bigger issue with the effects of AI in the future, also relating to the way it engages with training data. As it was said above, to keep the products of AI in line with current knowledge and up to date in terms of both facts and form, it will require a continuous upkeep of new data being fed to it to train on and learn from. Negligence in this regard will mean that LLMs will be susceptible to clear malfunctions: "In other words, an imitative identity is necessarily susceptible to two kinds of systemic failure: over-imitation of others, or under-imitation of others. Over-imitation involves a swing all the way to the duplication end of the continuum of imitation"[20]. This finally brings us to the final issue I want to point to, the problem of a self-feeding Generative AI.

We have discussed previously how AI is prone to alter our perception of reality in various ways, be it on an individual or collective level. This danger seems reminiscent of Mark Fisher's remarks on the world and the state of reality under the domination of capitalism:

> 'Being realistic' may once have meant coming to terms with of a reality experienced as solid and immovable. Capitalist realism, however, entails subordinating oneself to a reality that is infinitely plastic, capable of reconfiguring itself at any moment. We are confronted with what Jameson, in his

> essay 'The Antimonies of The Postmodern', calls 'a purely *fungible* present in which space and psyches alike can be processed and remade at will'[21].

The infinite plasticity of reality under capitalism looks to soon manifest in one more way, a world where the output of AI, in ever increasing numbers, will slowly alter the landscape of all culture. This shift is more than underway already, as we have seen on the news the many protests of writers against AI, the lawsuits against the use of copyrighted material, the increasing number of companies using chatbots as a first layer of customer support, the emergence of *vibe coding* as a new economically valuable skill, the ever increasing number of people turning to LLMs for therapy or romantic fulfillment and the problematic number of books being generated and sold across online retailers. It is precisely this last point that I want to stress in the end of this paper.

As it has been previously discussed a number of times, training data acts as the most essential building block of Generative AI algorithms. All books being currently generated are little more than a direct result of what AI has learned from previously written literature, they are amalgams of predictive computing that relies on the work others have put into developing personal styles and defining genres. For now, this seems to be working, as the lawsuits intended to stop this intellectual theft look to be far from winding down to a decision and corporate and political interests are pressuring regulators to leave as much leeway as possible to what can and should constitute free training data. They understand that, were they to stop, the only valid alternative would be for AI to generate its own training data as soon as possible. This would mean a rapid degradation of the generated output, since training off of work generated by AI would only serve to accentuate the faults in the original training data.

In current conditions, AI has just started injecting its output into the markets of cultural production, but the asymmetry is starting to become noticeable. Authors are complaining online about their books being outcompeted by Generative AI *slop* that takes over keywords and niches with sheer quantity and without disclosing it's Generative AI origins. At the same time, AI is notoriously unreliable in regards of detecting its own output, therefore contamination of training data with Generative AI texts, images and videos is a certainty. Concerns regarding this are already making their way into research:

> Yet this disruption contains its own limit. If the asymmetry continues, the share of human generated content in the future training corpus will approach zero. This leads to what researchers call model collapse: when AI systems are trained primarily on synthetic output, they begin to amplify their own statistical artefacts, compounding errors and degrading performance […]. In this scenario, high-quality human content (or at least carefully curated synthetic data) regains value. The paradox is that in order to keep LLMs sharp, we may need to employ human white-collar workers primarily as generators of future training data[22].

We are left to wonder what we can expect when this point is reached. I believe

that, besides the need for new human jobs that are dedicated solely to feeding the endlessly learning algorithms, we will be faced with the reality that the only way in which it is worth approaching the mass of AI generated literature would be through AI itself, employing AI-powered summarization services to mediate our contact with the near infinite output it is creating. We will approach a black hole of culture once a tipping point we are not currently able to determine will be reached, and coming back from this will be significantly harder than it was to initially get there. Once this process is set into motion, we can expect literature to become a vast ocean of unread works, generated solely for profit and dependent on trends.

To conclude, throughout this paper I have sought to uncover and discuss three large areas of concern that have emerged alongside the rise to popularity of AI. I believe that addressing these problems needs to become a priority in all AI and tech-related research, as leaving them unchecked could lead to unstoppable snowball-effect processes that will forever alter facets of human life in ways that we can only barely grasp as of now. Lastly, I believe that one important way the humanities could aid in this effort is by facing the reality of what AI is currently and updating the now-poorly-aged portrayals and models of the past, that pose Artificial Intelligence as an existential threat that can gain consciousness and perform evil, to the capitalistic infinite-dream-machine that it is.

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