



Opinion

AI is devoid of meaning and humanity. That's why its vapid voice suits this political moment

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For ease and speed, we are degrading our ability to connect and to organise our societies. We must assert our trust in humans over machines

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Here is a nightmare scenario for you. You are [writing](#) a book about how AI reshapes reality. You start using it as a research partner, confident that you are applying the right hygiene by not letting it actually write a sentence of the book. You think you'll be careful, you will double check everything. And then your book comes out and it appears that it includes more than a half dozen misattributed or fake quotes. [Steven Rosenbaum, the unfortunate writer](#), acknowledged that sometimes the output of AI was “staggeringly wrong”, but still, errors crept in.

There are others. A Commonwealth prize-winning short story became [engulfed](#) in claims that it carried the hallmarks of AI. And every time I see a story of a journalist caught out by fake AI quotes during research, I cross myself - there but for the grace of God go I. But to make sure it is not left up to grace alone, I never touch the thing. When AI results pop up as the default in a search engine, I reject them, rebuke them, as if they contained a dark sorcery that would through mere engagement creep into my synapses and take control.

This monastic, almost paranoid approach is not only because AI is a risky and unreliable research tool. It is a voice, a tone, a frequency. AI language haunts me in a million similar tinny chants from customer care to social media posts to press releases. I worry even as I write this column that it might sound like AI. That I have somehow through relentless exposure assimilated its blandness and excess. Its short declarative sentences. Its advertorial narration. Its informal mimicry of personhood. Hi there! Hope all is well. I thought you might be interested in a column about AI, an issue that is increasingly occupying thought leaders and writers. Would you like to learn more?

What are we losing in this fire? Writing is not just about rendering thoughts through words in a certain style: analysis, literary fiction, storytelling. It is about the particular alchemy of a single individual drawing on their own unique profile to construct an idea. It is about the way their brain works, the quirks they have picked up along the way, their politics, their history, their relationships, the very way they see the world. You can produce a thousand Dickenses and Rumis through AI, but you can't create a new iconic writer. You can only draw on the chorus of styles that already exist. You can only derive, never create.

And then there is the atrophy. The loss of the ability to struggle for a word, to craft a verbal image. I could save precious minutes as a deadline approaches and ask AI to cook me up a nice line, or I could linger and conceptualise that resisting AI writing feels like trying not to inhale an airborne virus. It might not be a great simile, but it's mine goddamit. And it helps me, in writing, to consolidate what I am thinking. Whether it's a political text or an email, leaning on AI for everything from research to writing severs the connection between feeling and expression. It drains the colour from everything and suffocates one's ability to channel and meet and be surprised by what is knocking about in your head. When tech

meet and be surprised by what is knocking about in your head. When tech becomes about reducing labour in every way, it ends up becoming an inhibitor of actual consciousness. Entirely unsurprising [research](#) shows that leaning on LLMs may reduce brain engagement.

Even more depressing is how well suited this cauterisation of the self is to the political moment, one of a glut of content and bad information. AI is rampant on social media, where accounts authoritatively post long texts on everything from the wars in the Middle East to dramatic personal experiences that didn't happen in a sort of reality fan-fiction. And in politics, where the Keir Starmer-like voice dominates in a numbing drone of repetitive empty slogans and avoidant hedging responses. The result is loud extremist rightwing agitators skimming the froth of disinformation, or centrist politicians living in dread of breaking with the status quo. Whatever few ideas or policies they do have are hiding in plain sight, obscured by the eerie affect of trying not to speak with too much feeling lest you are accused of having an actual ideology.

Forgive me for sounding like a luddite, and for having a bit of a moral panic about a technology that is in other ways ostensibly democratising knowledge and reducing barriers to writing. But the calibration of it is completely off, resulting in a merging of real AI use and general AI sound. There is something of the witch-hunt now about running texts through AI detectors and accusing writers of cheating, a response to the bewildering intrusion of that sound into everything, and how ubiquitous AI use has become.

“Anyone who is a working writer today who sits in front of a computer,” [said Rosenbaum](#), “either doing longform or on deadline or at magazines, whatever the cadence of your work is, you're using AI one way or another at least in part because it is not only seductive as hell but it's really incredibly valuable.” This is a profoundly telling and revealingly cynical comment, one that refuses to countenance that there could be a world in which we have a choice, the importance of which goes beyond convenience.

What is at stake isn't just a few unfortunate errors here and there, but a commitment to strive, imperfectly, but always credibly. In that, there is an entire social contract that upholds our ability to trust each other. When one resists AI,

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