ChatGPT Is a Bullshit Generator Waging Class War

By Dan McQuillan, *VICE*, February 9th, 2023

ChatGPT isn't really new but simply an iteration of the class war that's been waged since the start of the industrial revolution.

Large language models (LLMs) like the GPT family learn the statistical structure of language by optimising their ability to predict missing words in sentences (as in 'The cat sat on the [BLANK]').

5 Despite the impressive technical ju-jitsu of transformer models[…], it's still a computational guessing game. ChatGPT is, in technical terms, a 'bullshit generator'. […]The language model has no idea what it's talking about because it has no idea about anything at all. It's more of a bullshitter than the most egregious egoist you'll ever meet, producing baseless assertions with unfailing confidence because that's what it's designed to do. […]

10 [T]here are many in the AI community who insist on imputing emergent properties of reasoning and insight to ChatGPT. Its parent company, OpenAI, was set up "to ensure that artificial general intelligence benefits all of humanity", where 'artificial general intelligence' (AGI) is the insider term used for human-like intelligence that goes beyond narrow AI like facial recognition or self-driving cars. However, […]the concept of AGI is inseparable from the kind of hierarchy of intelligence that

15 has underpinned ideas of innate supremacy since the days of empire and colonialism. […]

OpenAI is acquiring billions of dollars of investment on the back of the ChatGPT hype. The point here is […] the reasons why institutions and governments are prepared to invest so much in these technologies. For these players, the seductive vision isn't real AI (whatever that is) but technologies that are good enough to replace human workers or, more importantly, to precaritise them and

20 undermine them. ChatGPT isn't really new but simply an iteration of the class war that's been waged since the start of the industrial revolution.

That allegedly well-informed commentators can infer that ChatGPT will be used for "cutting staff workloads" rather than for further staff cuts illustrates a general failure to understand AI as a political project. Contemporary AI, as I argue in my book, is an assemblage for automatising

25 administrative violence and amplifying austerity. ChatGPT is a part of a reality distortion field that obscures the underlying extractivism and diverts us into asking the wrong questions and worrying about the wrong things. Instead of expressing wonder, we should be asking whether it's justifiable to burn energy at "eye watering" rates to power the world's largest bullshit machine.[…]

Instead of reactionary solutionism, let us ask where the technologies are that people really need.

30 Let us reclaim the idea of socially useful production, of technological developments that start from community needs. […]

Transformer models and diffusion models are not creative but carceral - they and other forms of AI imprison our ability to imagine real alternatives. It's not so long ago that we all woke up to the identity of truly essential workers; the people carrying out the precaritised roles of nursing, teaching,

35 caring, delivering and cleaning[...].

Instead of being complicit with expensive toys running in carbon emitting data centres, we can focus instead on centring activities of care. [A] refusal of algorithmic immiseration goes along with a positive search for alternatives[…]. It's not time to chat with AI, but to resist it.