El Turco

El Turco presents a large-scale (8x3m) interactive video installation in real time. We see two digital AI avatars in animated hand-drawing aesthetics projected at the two sides of a screen. Their spoken dialogue appears as continuously evolving text at the center screen.

One of the avatars, called Socrates, (to the right) is operated directly and live by a human hidden in the system. The setup is similar to the "Mechanical Turk", an automated chess player that surprised the 18th century aristocrat courts, but later appeared to hide a human player. The left avatar is operated by a GPT4 machine, which is chained to a pipeline of different AI tools. It presents an identity that is constituted as a mix of different fictional and historical personalities. In essence the construct can be seen as a format, a shell, since in principle it could be holding any desired profile and narrative. It seems to evoke allusions to what French philosopher Jean Baudrillard describes as a simulacrum: a system that generates a world of symbols and signs without any original or "grounded" relationship to the world. Despite the machine displaying impressive and surprising capabilities in mimicking knowledge and understanding, the effortless "talking machine" seems to reveal itself, according to some critical observers, as just quite an advanced computational "magician's trick", while the discussion about the machine's true degree of intelligence remains the subject of controversy. (Since we have no understanding of how our own intelligence really works it could well be that Wittgenstein's quote that "Nothing is hidden." and "All is open to see", is true, and that there will be no ghost in the machine to be ever found.)

Other than a "text-only module" the presented interactive live-conversations provide a 360-degree view on the avatar giving much more insight in how the machine and its modules work. Any flaw suspends the illusion of intelligence, every success nourishes it. But if working perfectly, what does it allow for to really state about the machine's true intelligence and what to say about our own? In any case we seem to be compelled to rethink our definitions and perspectives on human and machine intelligence.

Next to the video series of live-recorded dialogues called *El Turco / Conversations with an AI* (using a customized chat version of GPT-3) *El Turco / Living Theater* enables the audience to explore any latest version in Large Language Model technology in a live theater performance played by an actor. The figure of Socrates can be chosen in different gender and race formats. In the theater format an audio gender switch tool can be used. The exchangeability of *any* racial, gender and personal identity addresses a dramatic problem that AI technology throws at us by disabling the discrimination of true and false in the creation of digital counterfeits and other applications.

Due to the artwork's interactive live interface, the audience can also be invited to talk with the AI machine directly by operating the right avatar.

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