

El Turco

El Turco presents a large scale (8x3m) triptych video installation. We see two digital hand-drawn animated avatars projected at the two sides of the screen. Their spoken dialog appears as continuously evolving text at the center screen. One of the avatars, called Socrates, is operated directly by a human with regards to gestures, facial movements of the avatar and speech generation, hiding inside the system, as a kind of "ghost whisperer".

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 second avatar, called von Kempelen, is creating speech through a natural language processing AI system. We use customized statistic based probabilistic language models called Large Language Models such as GPT-2, -3 or ChatGPT are.

Von Kempelen seems to evoke allusions to what French philosopher Jean Baudrillard describes as simulacrum: a system that generates a world of symbols and signs without any original reference. Despite the machine displaying impressive and surprising capabilities in mimicking knowledge and understanding, the effortless "talking machine" reveals itself to be an advanced computational "magician's trick" with effectively no understanding of language nor the world being present.

This inescapable lack of intelligence cannot change within the framework of statistical based deep neural nets, no matter how much the models might get more advanced in resolution, prompting and other techniques in the future model GPT#n.

New tools are required to address AI to make it a reasonable concept in the first place.

Regardless, we might over time be compelled to rethink our definitions of intelligence.

The artwork can also be presented interactive, allowing the audience to talk with the machine live by operating the green avatar.

Also, a live theater performance with a professional actor hidden in the system playing Socrates is possible.

The work has been first presented at the Aichi Triennale 2022 in Japan.

Diemut Strebe, 2022