

OPINION

AI, Data Feminism, & Ethics



An incunabula is a book printed during the earliest years of movable type. These texts mark the beginning of a structured literacy revolution. Being alive during this time was no guarantee you'd notice, though.

The GenAI Incunabula

The cradle of prediction models

----- JESSICA ARREDONDO

What are the specific features of this incunabula moment in Generative AI? Well, for starters, the speed at which AI has spread. It's interesting when you put it into perspective alongside other technological advances in history, such as the spread of printing in Europe. This took decades, and to be clear, that was *fast*. I remember when ChatGPT dropped to the public, my roommate at the time worked for the government and told me I "had to try this new thing," he couldn't even explain to me what *it* was.

My idea of AI up until that point was *Terminator*, it was the T-1000, it was *Ex Machina*, *Total Recall*; basically, the entire concept was very Sci-fi. The early days of my AI prompts included things like *what are some good nicknames for Abraham Lincoln* and *tell me a great joke about dogs*. The fact that these prompts sound so pitiful in retrospect, just a few years later, speaks volumes to the rapid nature of ChatGPT alone, both in use and ability. Just as in printing, GAI manifested in other ways: people found out very quickly that it could write semi-elegant prose. It was tailored, responsive, and it made people feel as if it was more than an algorithm on the other side.

Up until this point, current society didn't really have much to compare this moment in time to. The closest I can personally relate to is being a child with landlines, a teenager with a Nokia, and an adult with a computer in my pocket. This era feels similar in the way that I cannot quite fathom how GAI might transform in another 20 years; it'll be something we've never seen before.

I think people have a hard time digesting GAI for an assortment of reasons.

One reason is that it is human-like in many ways, for example it often reveals to its user that it is "thinking for a better answer," (ironically, an option you can skip if you so desire). And it does appear to be "thinking", in its own way.

This point gets more to the crux of how to answer the question: a topic covered by James Somers in their 2025 article "The Case That A.I. is Thinking." I believe AI is "thinking" in the way that it knows how, so it's comical that the closer it gets to replicating the human cognitive processes, the better it gets.

& For the Lady...*Thinking for a better answer...*

The thought of AI "thinking" might be the cause of some existential dread among tech denizens, but what keeps me up some nights is whether proponents are wrong about AI.

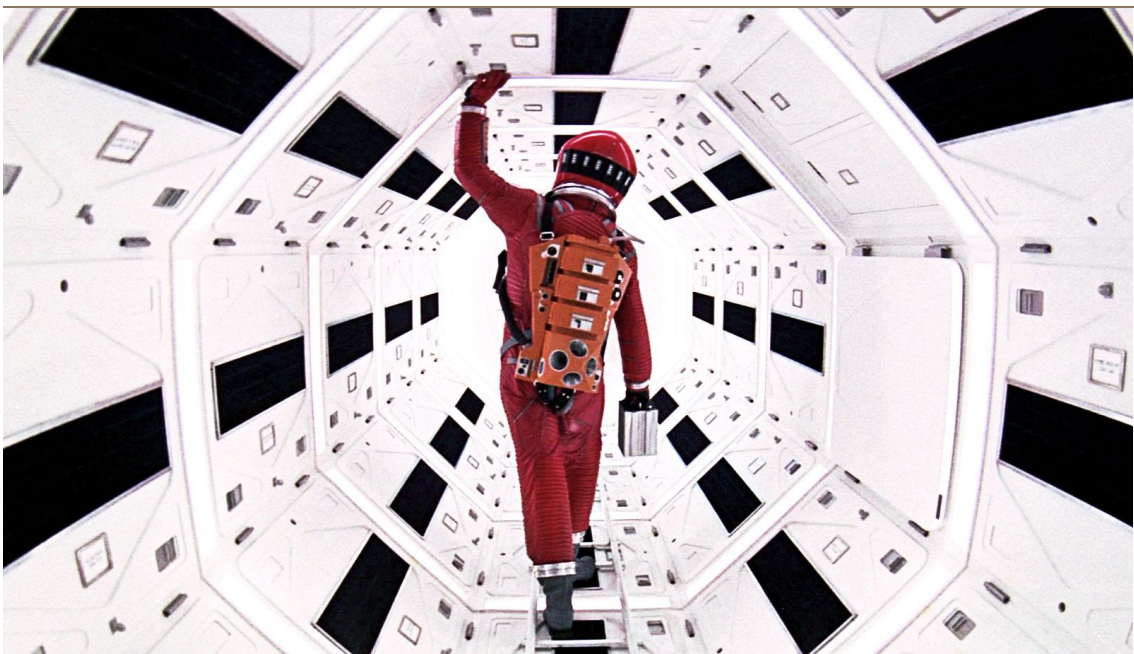
Since being out for a few years, it is now glaringly obvious about the pitfalls, and there are many. Also, there are always naysayers with every new technology, *video killed the radio star*.

The ethical issues with AI are considerable. When I was asking ChatGPT about Abraham Lincoln's nebulous nicknames, I certainly wasn't thinking about Earth's water tables.

What truly haunts me is the use of AI in political destabilization. Fake news spreads six times faster than real news. Social media had already crossed many ethical lines in that theater, not even including the data collection performed on users. Does that mean this technology should not exist? It is a question worth grappling with.



Social media and AI aren't inherently harmful; however, we can concede that the long-reaching effects of both have not been confined to their original purpose (whatever *that* was).



Despite being released in 1968, *2001: A Space Odyssey* remains visually arresting, even today. Its practical effects are refreshing in an age of compressed, far-from-lossless CGI film 'sets.'

What we are experiencing is the staggeringly glacial pace at which regulations and general bureaucratic red tape are implemented in stark contrast with the GAI which appears to move at lightspeed.

“AI seems to already be experiencing oversaturation in the market, and certainly in peoples’ hearts.”

In *Interacting with Print* (Multigraph Collective, 2018), a quote from Samuel Johnson c. 1750s encapsulates this sentiment: “advertisements are now so numerous that they are very negligently perused.”

A few years after its release, AI is being used everywhere, in various grades of success. Much of the public has AI fatigue already. As with other burgeoning technologies, there is a pendulous effect on what people desire. Whenever there is a technology that enters the stage this quickly (or even slowly), there are those that long for the antecedent.

Right now, I have seen a rise in demand for hand crafted things, services offered by humans, art that is overtly clear in its human creation. When CGI started to become more popular in film (and actually *look good* too), it was suddenly everywhere. We had entire movies that were shot against green screens. I know I personally long for the days when practical effects were back in use, *2001: A Space Odyssey* continues to hold up to this day for a reason. This is evidence that AI is a cultural and social instrument and technology (Gopnik et al., 2025).

“These are the areas I consider myself to be empowered where AI is not. AI cannot write with much wit in my opinion. It cannot present a perfectly crafted joke that’s both mildly offensive and yet very relatable. It will *try*, creating a suitable *Manchurian* candidate.”

Charles Pierce’s 3-part sign will help me articulate this next point; it is a semiotic model that helps explain how meaning is made from interpretation. GAI is very good at 2 out of 3 parts: it can identify the sign and object well. What this means is that it can recognize that the words “Sigourney” “Weaver” signals the actress Sigourney Weaver and that a photograph does the same.

What it can’t do, and it will never be able to do, is have a relationship with the interpretation. This means AI will never be able to *imagine* Sigourney Weaver as she exists in the world. Humans can do this as it is part of our mental understanding coupled with our senses.

Final Thoughts

For the UX + communication communities I’m interested in, I know that AI is being utilized, and corresponding skills are being looked for within our resumes.

I am currently trying to reconcile the difficult task of both showing I can write, humanly, and showing I have fundamental AI knowledge. The UX writing and content design industries are interested in AI chatbots, virtual assistants, prompt architecture etc. I know from tuning into friends and family, tools such as AI chatbots and virtual assistant are many years away from any kind of “beloved” status.

I think some people have a difficult enough time being “handled” by other humans, let alone *some bot*. I know that post-covid social practices have changed however, and there are many people who are grateful not to deal other humans (I find myself ambivalent).

Much of what is unnerving about AI is that it is widely unknown and highly mysterious, sort of like our ocean. *Stick with the Devil you know*, as they say.

As tempting as it might be to run from the new technology darkening our doorstep, I think I would rather wait and see what else is in store for us humans—maybe there’s candy in the white van.



The future has arrived and it is not in the form we expected. Equally terrifying: chatbots that help write emails and occasionally hallucinate legal citations.

