

“Weaving tales of resilience”: cyborg composing with AI

Cyborg
composing
with AI

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to offer an approach to cyborg composing with artificial intelligence (AI). The author posits that the hybridity of the cyborg, which amalgamates human and artificial elements, invites a cascade of creative and emancipatory possibilities. The author critically examines the biases embedded in AI systems while gesturing toward the generative potential of AI–human entanglements. Drawing on Bakhtinian theories of dialogism, the author contends that crafting found poetry with AI could inspire writers to problematize the ideologies embedded into the corpus while teasing apart its elisions or contradictions, sparking new forms of expression at the interface of the organic and the artificial.

Design/methodology/approach – To illustrate this approach to human–AI composing, the author shares a found poem that she wrote using ChatGPT alongside her reflection on the poem. The author reflects on her positionality as well as the positionality of her artificial interlocutor, interrogating the notion of subjectivity in relation to Bakhtinian dialogism and multivocality.

Findings – Weaving tales of resilience in harmony or tension with AI could unravel threads of possibility as human writers enrich, deepen or complicate AI-generated texts. By composing with AI, writers can resist closure, infiltrate illusions of objectivity and “speak back” to AI and the dominant voices replicated in its systems.

Originality/value – By encouraging students to critically engage with, question and complicate AI-generated texts, one can open avenues for alternative ways of thinking and writing, inspiring students to imagine and compose speculative futures. Ultimately, in animating assemblages of the organic and the artificial, one can invite transformative possibilities of being and becoming.

Keywords Found poetry, Cyborg composing, Collaborative writing, Generative AI

Paper type Viewpoint

Weaving tales of resilience, we tell stories,
amplifying marginalized voices.

To tell stories is to *ignite joys and sorrows*
shining a light. . .yet exposing the darkness.

What lies in the *silences* between the seams,
in the gaps between these woven stories?

Whose lives are left untouched,
whose stories left unheard,>

whose names unspoken?

Received 3 August 2023
Revised 1 December 2023
20 January 2024
Accepted 23 January 2024



ETPC

What is a *voice*? Does it speak into the *silence*,
a chord resounding with echoes?
Does it whisper, cry, laugh, sing?
Can AI have a *voice*?
Can we *envision a just future* with AI
weaving new *tales* beyond what has been written,
amplifying voices yet unheard?
or does AI merely carry vestiges of the past,
bearing the echoes of faded words?
Peering into ChatGPT's empty text box, at the blinking cursor,
can we bring stories into being,
breathing life into the loom of language?
Amid its infinite stream of words,
can we expose a *tangible*
thread of thought?
In the terrains
where thought unfurls,
where language itself unravels
we see a *light shining* through the spaces between the words
on the screen.
It is here that we can *inspire hope, ignite change, weave tales*
that create new worlds of being and becoming.

Reflection on writing and teaching found poetry with artificial intelligence

Above, I share a found poem that I wrote using ChatGPT. A found poem is assembled from other texts (Academy of American Poets) and could be conceived as a collage-like assemblage of interspersed, intertextual fragments. To create this found poem, I prompted ChatGPT to

write an essay on the power of storytelling and its ability to inspire change (the full text appears in the [Appendix](#)). I highlighted words and phrases from the ChatGPT-produced essay that stood out to me, then reassembled the words and phrases into a poem. The fragments that follow the italicized words can be read as echoes that speak into the silences between the words, inviting wonder in the space of a pause. The process of crafting a found poem casts language as strands of meaning interwoven into a layered, textured tapestry of ideas.

My experiment with composing found poetry with artificial intelligence (AI) coincides with [Wu's \(2023\)](#) found art activity "Dada, Machine Writing, and the Found." Wu invites students to identify "areas of slippage or strangeness in the generation," to interrogate "its limits, and where [...] it create[s] the unexpected." Echoing this disposition toward probing the limits of language, I posit that composing found poetry with AI invites a fragmentary poetics, a way of unsettling the sense of certainty and closure embedded in its systems as new ideas and questions emerge from the spaces in between the human–corpus relationship, exposing to light unheard stories, unspoken voices.

Recognizing and navigating the tensions that arise from entanglements with AI technologies, I respond to [Byrd's \(2023\)](#) call to "uncover conflicts or tensions over power and ideology" (p. 135). As scholars have noted, large language models such as ChatGPT perpetuate dominant ideologies which, as Byrd writes, "have oppressed, mitigated, and erased marginalized communities that LLMs have encoded" (p. 136). [Perrotta et al. \(2022\)](#) examine the affective labor of writing with AI chatbots, especially in relation to the particular biases in the ways AI systems (mis)represent race, gender and class identities. As one illustration, a user's experiment with composing a story using AI exposed the ways the system generated positive outputs for a presumably middle-class character named Elizabeth yet produced critical stances toward an ostensibly working-class character named Dee. As [Perrotta et al.](#) illustrate, the system's predictive biases could preclude potential pathways of possibility in composing texts, "deliberately obscuring some avenues and highlighting others that confirm specific biases" (p. 17). [Perrotta et al.](#) conclude that "the real value of the AI-mediated communicative situation was created through laborious human sensemaking" (p. 13). Yet despite critiquing the "extractive," "exploitative" nature of AI language models, [Perrotta et al.](#) speculate that the interactions between human users and AI language models could engender "creative and emancipatory potential" by inviting resistance to AI's biases (p. 23). [Robinson \(2022\)](#) similarly argues for a "resistive digital writing pedagogy wherein literacy scholars, educators, and students can resist the dominating potentials of technologies ostensibly designed to assist them" (p. 117).

Extending the scholarship that exposes the tensions of composing with AI, I posit that crafting found poetry and stories in collaboration with AI could invite one possible approach to "resist[ing] the dominating potentials" of generative AI technologies. I conceptualize collaborative writing with AI as a form of cyborg composing – a process unfolding at the interface of the organic and the artificial ([Haraway, 1991](#)). I posit that the hybridity of the cyborg – "a hybrid of machine and organism" (p. 5) invites a cascade of creative and emancipatory possibilities. In an AI and human-written hybrid found poem, the dialogue between the AI and human language can be read as melody and countermelody, a layered unfolding of syncopated rhythms. Echoing Bakhtinian theories of *heteroglossia*, or multivocality, AI and human-written hybrid compositions could be conceived as a dialectic – an ongoing dialogue that invites a diversity of voices and perspectives as ideas are cast into "contrapuntal" tension ([Nahachewsky and Ward, 2007](#)).

By crafting hybrid human-AI found texts, writers can speak back to AI, exposing gaps or questioning ideas in AI-generated texts while inviting perspectives that may be elided by an AI text. While I acknowledge the affective and material labor of composing with AI,

speaking back to AI could create avenues toward unsettling the predictive pathways that produce biased outputs (Perrotta *et al.*), inviting alternative possibilities of storytelling. By interrogating “the presence of power and ideology in the corpus texts” and engaging in “critical inquiry on our relationships with these corpus texts” (Byrd), writers can problematize the ideologies embedded into the corpus while teasing apart its elisions or contradictions.

Collaborative writing with AI could spark critical inquiry into AI-produced writing: as Annette Vee (2023) posits, the manner in which ChatGPT provides immediate answers rather than wrestling with uncertainty belies a writer’s capacity “to be uncertain, to inquire, to examine [one’s] own experiences” (p. 177). In counteracting ChatGPT’s propensity toward certainty, composing with AI could offer one approach to supporting students to “process the accumulated knowledge of generations of scholars before them, probing and challenging it in order to build on this knowledge” (Vee, p. 179). Weaving tales of resilience in harmony or tension with AI could unravel threads of possibility as human writers enrich, deepen or complicate AI-generated texts in a cascade of intertextual collisions.

I conceptualize *voice* as an utterance in the Bakhtinian sense: as responding to a previous utterance. To utter is “to give voice or expression to” (OED), yet an AI language model instead emits the echoes of existing, dominant voices. As Owusu-Ansah (2023) articulates, such “languages and noises drown out the language of missing people who do not have the global capital to increase the volume of their utterances” (p. 146). By amplifying dominant voices while diminishing marginalized voices, languages and ways of writing, AI language models collapse Bakhtinian *heteroglossia* or multivocality into a single utterance while collapsing the very notion of *utterance* as “giving voice or expression to.” Echoing voices diffuse rather than distinctive, eliding missing and marginalized voices, AI texts could thus become emptied of the richness of being and meaning in its infinite variety.

In my teaching and writing, I seek to encourage an epistemology of multivocality: to invite multiple ways of thinking, knowing, writing, being and relating. I strive to nurture students to recognize divergent perspectives, to complicate dominant narratives and normative ways of knowing. As a form of remix or remediation (Palmeri, 2012), crafting found poetry with AI can stimulate language play and creative experimentation while inviting innovative forms of expression that extend beyond the “predetermined” outputs and “uncritical normative reproduction of standardized English usage” that may be perpetuated by AI language models (MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force on Writing and AI, pp. 6–7). By leveraging AI tools as “instruments for creative wordplay” (MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force), this approach echoes and extends the work of Kangasharju *et al.* (2022), who found that co-writing poetry with an AI-based digital tool facilitated students’ exploration and experimentation with poetic features and revision processes.

By encouraging students to critically engage with, question and complicate AI-generated texts, we can inspire students to imagine and compose speculative futures, including futures for social activism and community building (Wargo and Alvarado, 2020), alternative universe fanfiction writing and the counter-storytelling of women’s narratives and slave narratives (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, 2016), to mention a few examples. As one illustration, students might prompt ChatGPT to generate Harry Potter fan fiction in the form of a poem, then draw from the ChatGPT-produced poem as an initial point of inspiration for crafting alternative realities that center students’ own identities and life worlds. The advent of generative AI thus invites the potential for the playful remixing of texts as students “write themselves into stories” (Thomas and Stornaiuolo, p. 317) while raising “new and important questions about their worlds and their own words” (Vee, p. 178). In sparking more just futures through an intricate tapestry of interwoven language, we can reimagine the futures

of composing as dynamic, participatory and liberatory, creating new worlds of being and becoming.

Reflections on positionality

Invoking Bakhtinian dialogism and multivocality, I reflect on my own voice and the voice(s) of my artificial interlocutor. In doing so, I strive to map the *locus* of my perception, to dig into the roots that have formed my thinking while teasing apart its outward branches. My interdisciplinary interests inhabit the interstices of literary studies, writing studies, English education, applied linguistics and creative writing. My background in literary and writing studies has shaped my attunement to the way strands of language coalesce into meanings in discourse.

As writing becomes inextricably intertwined with digital technologies, I have become interested in investigating the shifting nature of writing in the era of artificial intelligence, particularly in storytelling in collaboration with generative AI. I am especially fascinated by the idea of *resonance* – in the way words evoke layered resonances, reverberating into rhizomatic dimensions; in the ways stories resonate with readers across time and space, across human and artificial realms. In inviting an interplay of melody and countermelody, I am also drawn to the notion of *dissonance* – to moments of discord in student discussion in which conflicts are resolved through a deeper resolution, to dissonances between substance and style in AI-human collaborative storytelling, to instances of “contrapuntal” tension (Nahachewsky and Ward, 2007) arising from the interstices of initiation and response, sound and echo in cyborg compositions.

Inquiring into the sonic dimension of language and discourse, I seek to probe into the nature of a dialectic in its oscillations between harmony and dissonance, in the shaping and unshaping of meaning across intertwining strands of textuality. In navigating between the print and digital, the human and artificial, the literary and rhetorical, the critical and creative, I find myself poised at a precipice, traversing shifting terrains of thought. To interrogate one’s own positionality is to continually unsettle and reimagine oneself in relation to the evolving fields one traverses. I thus envision my positionality as one of continual expansion, as a perpetual process of “ideological becoming” (Bakhtin): in experimenting with human-AI cyborg composing, I seek to extend the edges of inquiry, to push the boundaries of thought woven together by a Bakhtinian thread.

To interrogate the positionality of my artificially intelligent collaborator, I reflect on my encounters with ChatGPT. Upon first glance, the interface appears empty, formless: a blank screen upon which words emerge from nonexistence. To generate instantaneous inscriptions from a disembodied state is to erase the visceral, tactile, perceptual dimensions of experience. As words materialize on the screen within seconds, ChatGPT-produced texts elide the latent, inchoate facets of thought and feeling, evading the interstitial spaces between thought and expression – the processes by which conception transmutes into articulation, vision into instantiation. An AI language model perhaps carries traces of residual emotion – the residue of conscious thought and subjective perception invoked by the texts in its corpus. Yet it remains open to question whether intelligence can be cultivated without subjective consciousness, perception, awareness. To speak into being through language presupposes mediation through a body/mind – a passage through a channel, a transmission through a vocal chord or *chora* (Kristeva), as spirit transmutes into matter, as thought is rendered material through expression, as an idea unfurls from the roots before branching outward.

Projecting an empty space, a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*, ChatGPT appears to have erased, subsumed, suppressed or perhaps transcended the myriad of social identities that give

subjectivity to our languaging – race, gender, political orientation, class and other intertwined dimensions of identity. Engaging dialogically with AI thus seems to present a paradox: a tension between subject and object, being and nonbeing poised in counterpoint as though two planes that may never meet, extending into infinite dimensions. Such an absence of subjectivity elides the situatedness of being; as Stanton writes, “Bodies and minds contain multitudes, and a purely mechanical conception excludes the many ways that individuals are shaped—defined, utilized, discarded, or revered—by the surrounding culture” (p. 183). In this view, to engage in dialogue with AI would be to erode the complex contours of subjectivity that shape and inflect lived experiences, to erase the multifaceted nature of being, to suppress the “multitudes” teeming within and among body/minds situated within diverse cultures and environments.

To summon creation from a nonbeing is to exhume echoes emanating from a corpus whose voices float away from their sources, to escape the sensuousness of being and becoming. As languages, voices, and beings become effaced, we must, as Johnson posits, “ask how our literacies, biases, ideologies, and languaging practices are being rendered (in) visible through these technologies” and to engender “more generative thinking” about the discourses in which we are inextricably entangled (p. 170, p. 173). To generate with generative AI, to be in dialogue with an entity that appears to elide subjectivity raises questions: Can we speak through AI? Can AI speak through us?

I begin by considering the second question: in examining whether AI can speak through us, I am reminded that artificial intelligence is a human creation, brought into being by its designers. In this sense, ChatGPT speaks through us – through the accumulated corpus of data embedded into its systems. The work of Benjamin exposes the ways technologies inherit the biases of their human creators and counterparts. While a bot may seem to be objective or neutral, Benjamin shatters the “allure of objectivity” (p. 35); as Benjamin argues, the data that bots are trained on “reflect deeply ingrained cultural prejudices and structural hierarchies” including discrimination based on race, gender, and class (p. 39). Even as the echoes of existing voices reverberate across ChatGPT’s corpus, the artificial echoes the real, perpetuating “complex forms of coded inequity” (Benjamin, 2019, p. 43). For instance, Benjamin describes the way crime prediction algorithms used in police surveillance encode racial discrimination and exposes the way Google search engine results reflect the biases embedded within the algorithms. As Benjamin illustrates, rather than mitigating bias, the algorithms that fuel large language models could reinscribe the inequities ingrained into the social fabric. In this sense, ChatGPT is not a blank slate but rather a canvas teeming with the subjective biases of its designers. As in a resounding chamber of infinite mirrors, an AI language model could echo, even amplify structural inequities.

Coda: toward a cyborg poetics

In facing the effacement of diverse voices in physical and digital spaces, we might ask: Can we speak through AI? Can we, as the ChatGPT essay expresses, amplify marginalized voices through individual and collective storytelling? Even as AI escapes embodiment, its interfaces could offer a medium or conduit through which to speak, to voice our stories. The concept of the cyborg, which intertwines the human and the artificial, offers an innovative approach to conceptualizing how we might speak through AI. To compose with AI is to blur the boundaries between humanity and artifice, to fuse imagined worlds with material realities even while envisioning more liberatory futures (Haraway, 1991). In conceptualizing collaborative human–AI cyborg composing, I am inspired by Lizárraga (2023) notion of “cyborgness—an augmenting of [one’s] body with technology” (p. 2). As the artificial augments the human, the

human could augment the artificial: our craft as composers could enrich the ethereal with embodiment, enlivening encoded systems with generative possibilities.

As Haraway suggests, the concept of the cyborg summons “an imagined organic body to organize our resistance,” to transgress the “dualisms of mind and body” (p. 15). Haraway writes:

[. . .] a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point (p. 15).

Cyborg theory offers a speculative lens through which to conceptualize and navigate the tensions immanent in composing with AI: in navigating “partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (Haraway, p. 15), we could problematize the inequities reinscribed by AI systems while creating apertures for emancipatory potential, wrestling with the tensions of engaging in dialogue with an entity that at once eludes subjectivity and perpetuates subjective biases. Interrogating the tensions imbricated in composing with AI casts into relief the nature of a dialectic as an “inquiry into metaphysical contradictions” (Oxford Languages) – contradictions between being and nonbeing, subject and object, voice and echo, existent and emergent stories.

To engage in a dialectic with AI is to “see from both perspectives at once” (Haraway, p. 15): rather than merging these dualisms or resolving their conflicts, we can navigate the dualisms in a perpetual tension, in a continual dialectic between the human and the machine. Refracted through an oblique prism, cyborg composing unfolds into multidimensional potentialities, stimulating multivocality: melody and counter melody poised in productive counterpoint, oscillating between harmony and dissonance, reverberating into rhizomatic reconfigurations.

Echoing Lizárraga’s call to “leverage these stories to craft new possible ideational and material worlds” (p. 2), cyborg composers could leverage ChatGPT’s capacity for (re) generation to (co)create new life worlds at the interface of the human and the nonhuman. To compose with/as cyborgs is to tread “transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities” (Haraway, p. 14): to embrace the simultaneity of the human and the artificial, traversing presences and futurities, interweaving stories real and imagined. Even as cyborg theory strives to transgress essentialism, to remix or reassemble texts from ChatGPT’s corpus is to seek to unsettle stabilized forms of language and meaning, to resist existing modes of domination and oppression.

In shattering the solidity of language, in dematerializing its materiality, we seek toward dismantling social stratification, planting seeds for more equitable futures. From the collapse of the subject/object distinction emerges the capacity for cyborg collaboration, for the possibility of new forms of signification. As body/minds morph and mutate, nascent forms of expression materialize from hybrid fusions, animating altered ways of languaging and creating. In reassembling existing texts, we awaken assemblages, manifesting material reconfigurations at the interface of the organic and the artificial. As thinking, writing and being intertwine; as selfhoods and stories coalesce, we can come to a further understanding of our positionalities: as cyborgs whose humanities augment, disrupt, complicate and are complicated by artificial intelligence. To transgress into the alterity of artifice is to inhabit the interstices of being, to permeate porous boundaries between fluid, partial, emerging identities. To compose as cyborgs is to conjure the emergence of altered, artificial subjectivities, to encounter the malleability of being as being transmutes into becoming.

To craft poems and stories from the rubble is to cultivate seeds of possibility arising from the gaps and elisions of ChatGPT’s corpus. The unraveling of language can expose gleams

of insight, opening apertures through which to materialize futurities; to create permanence in the wake of instantaneous, fleeting textual productions; to engender meaning from artificial intelligence. In this sense, we can envision creation itself as artifice—as art. To compose is to traverse the threshold of becoming: to spark syntheses and craft new worlds.

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Appendix. The power of storytelling: igniting change through narrative (essay written by ChatGPT)

Introduction

Storytelling has been an intrinsic part of human culture since time immemorial. It is through stories that we make sense of the world, preserve our history and inspire one another. But storytelling goes beyond mere entertainment; it possesses a remarkable power to ignite change. In this essay, we will explore how storytelling, in its various forms, can captivate hearts, challenge perspectives and motivate action, ultimately shaping societies and driving positive transformations.

Engaging hearts and empathy

At the core of storytelling lies the ability to engage hearts and evoke empathy. Stories have a unique way of transporting us into the lives of others, allowing us to experience their joys, sorrows and struggles firsthand. By immersing ourselves in the narratives of different individuals and communities, we develop a deeper understanding of their perspectives and empathize with their circumstances. This empathy becomes a catalyst for change, as it compels us to address societal issues and work towards solutions.

Challenging perspectives and fostering dialogue

Stories have the power to challenge the status quo and broaden our horizons. They introduce us to alternative viewpoints and experiences that may differ from our own, prompting us to question our assumptions and biases. By presenting diverse characters and complex narratives, storytelling fosters dialogue and encourages critical thinking. It opens up avenues for discussions on social, political and cultural issues, nurturing a more inclusive and empathetic society.

Inspiring action and social movements

Some of the most significant changes in history have been driven by the power of storytelling. From ancient myths to contemporary novels, stories have inspired revolutions, civil rights movements, and social activism. By weaving tales of resilience, injustice and triumph, storytellers galvanize individuals to take action. Stories provide hope, ignite passion and unite people around a common cause, empowering them to create tangible change in their communities and the world.

Preserving and amplifying marginalized voices

Throughout history, certain voices and experiences have been marginalized or silenced. Storytelling acts as a powerful tool to reclaim and amplify those voices. It gives a platform to the unheard, allowing their stories to be shared and recognized. By shining a light on the struggles and triumphs of marginalized communities, storytelling challenges societal norms, promotes inclusivity and works toward dismantling systems of oppression.

Education and cultural transmission

Storytelling is an integral part of education and cultural transmission. It preserves history, traditions and values, passing them down from generation to generation. By sharing stories of the past, we learn valuable lessons and gain insights into the human experience. Moreover, stories enable us to envision a better future. They inspire creativity, innovation and problem-solving, nurturing individuals who are equipped to tackle the challenges of an ever-changing world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, storytelling holds a profound ability to inspire change. Through its capacity to engage hearts, challenge perspectives, inspire action and amplify marginalized voices, storytelling becomes a potent force for societal transformation. As storytellers, listeners and readers, we have a responsibility to embrace the power of storytelling and use it to shape a more compassionate, just and inclusive world. Let us recognize the immense potential within narratives and harness their power to ignite change, one story at a time.

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