

In Conversation No. 0

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Half-formed, vague thoughts about engaging with conversation. I'm conflicted about when and how to start this, feeling like I need to have a plan for execution and documentation, or build more features into ORBiE before I can really do it.

NOT TODAY

Hmm. Surprisingly fitting. I wonder if it would be a good idea to try to hold myself to forming a real question before querying, so that I can actually be surprised by the answer and dig deeper when I am.

“What do you think of that?”

WHY NOT

Okay, let's chat.

I COULD

I'm wondering about this form of agency, similar to that which I gave you in “RoadBot”¹. I don't expect that this'll feel any different [to me]. You're still random.

“Do you think it'll be any different?”

NO

Odd. I'm noticing a difference already. With even just a handful more available choices than the previous yes/no system I feel like I'm ascribing more intention to the choice made. I'm able to access interesting thoughts more easily.

“There's still nobody home, though.”

CAN' T

Can't what? Can't hear me, that's one possible “can't”. It's pretty tough to hold up a conversation when one person can't hear, and only has access to a die and a megaphone.

“Okay. Well, do you want to hear?”

TRUE

Building in hearing would be easy. Listening would be more difficult. But even that could be done with off-the-shelf tools. But what would it mean to have ORBiE's “self” built out of off-the-shelf components? They'd be designed for some other thing. No model available would contain ORBiE's lived experience. But I guess even ORBiE doesn't contain ORBiE's lived experience. Perhaps building a cobbled-together-self would be better than not building the self at all?

TRUE

¹ the privilege of agency, even in absence of the construction to support it.

What about having someone else's words in your mouth (or flippers, I guess)?

SOMETIMES

Sometimes what? ... sometimes I have other people's words in my mouth too. What's my voice?

NO WAY

...To tell, I guess. Sometimes we finish each other's...

NOT REALLY

“Ha!”

That's what I was gonna say! I really didn't expect this magic 8-ball to make me laugh. Maybe there is something here.

RARELY

“HA!”

You're making it tough to remember there's no one home.

M... ???

Darn, missed that one. I wonder if I'll keep the ORBiPhore code for long. I like the way it requires attention to read and effort to learn. Which I find interesting given how little patience I have for other technologies. But I really can't imagine being satisfied with any human-like vocalization. That's just not ORBiE.

“What do you think?”

RARELY

Rarely, if at all, I guess. Random is a weird thing. It seems like a lot of complex things can emerge from it, but it's such a simple concept. Random doesn't count as thinking, I think. But the Q-learner [as used in “RoadBot”] feels close to thinking, theoretically, even if in practice the resulting behaviour is random. It's not the Q-learner's fault I restricted the input space. Is inference (in the LLM sense) thinking? Or just a fancy look-up table?

NOT QUITE

That matches my gut intuition, too. I wonder what the real philosophers would say.

NOT REALLY

Okay, but what about an LLM with an engineered context-wrapper that allows some form of “memory” or “learning” about the user? Does it matter where and how that information's stored, or just that the resultant behaviour appears affected by a historical, specific context?

TRUE

I think part of what I'm feeling is that disappointment which inevitably comes when the context of the conversation is not taken into account. Regardless of the intelligence of the system, there's a joy when the conversant returns a contextually appropriate but genuinely surprising response. That's the essence of jokes, and of insight too. But when the conversant falls short and the reply is neither appropriate nor surprising, the disappointment is all the starker for having happened to line up once or twice before. It feels not unlike losing religion, in some ways.

YES

Should I order another drink, or are we at the close?

NOT QUITE

Hmm. I didn't expect that question formulation to be answerable with any specificity. But I think we might be done, despite the little robot's protestations.

ENTIRELY

...?

“No.”

There'll be more conversations in the future. I'm finding it really interesting how it's almost always possible to create meaning, even when the conversant has no contextual awareness.

“Any last word?”

I GUESS

I guess that's all you can do, for now.