



Friction in the machine

Description

I prompted Google's NotebookLM with a request to draft a blog post on "romancing the artificial," with content derived from my own writing uploaded to the platform, See previous post. It suggested that the sources offer a "nuanced perspective" on the topic, particularly as it relates to information technology. This phenomenon, characterized by a fascination with machines and their potential to surpass human capabilities, has historical roots that extend beyond the current fascination with AI.

Cyberspace

One prominent example discussed in the sources is the romanticism surrounding cyberspace in the early days of the internet. Proponents envisioned cyberspace as a realm of liberation and utopian possibility, promising enhanced communication, community, and access to knowledge.

However, critics countered that this techno-utopian vision often overlooked the social, economic, and political realities shaping technology's development. The sources argue that this uncritical embrace of technology can lead to inflated expectations, a diminished focus on practical concerns, and the perpetuation of existing power structures.

Romanticism

This tendency to romanticize technology is not limited to cyberspace. The sources explore how this romantic impulse manifests in various ways throughout history, drawing on examples from architecture, design, and cultural movements. For instance, the sources explore how the romantic movement, which emerged as a counterforce to the scientific Enlightenment, championed the importance of subjectivity, imagination, and emotion, often finding expression in a fascination with machines and their potential to transform the world.

The sources suggest that this romanticism can lead to an exaggerated belief in technology's capabilities, particularly when machines are viewed in isolation from their social and technical contexts.

For example, the steam locomotive, the electric light bulb, and the microchip have all been lauded for their transformative power, inspiring awe and a belief in technology's capacity to solve societal problems. However, the sources argue that this perspective often overlooks the complex interplay of social values, economic forces, and human practices that shape technology's impact.

Against conciliation

This account from NotebookLM so far seems consistent with my views. However, it drifts towards a conciliatory position drawn more from the LLMs general training and fine tuning than my own views.

The sources advocate for a more balanced perspective, one that acknowledges both the allure of technology and the need for critical awareness of its limitations. They emphasize the importance of understanding technology's embeddedness in social and cultural contexts, recognizing that its development and use are shaped by human choices and values.

The sources ultimately encourage us to approach technology with a discerning eye, celebrating its potential while remaining vigilant about its potential downsides. By understanding the historical and cultural forces shaping our relationship with technology, we can engage with it in a more informed and responsible manner.

As far as I am aware, I try and avoid such narratives seeking to reconcile diametrical positions, or award merit to both sides of an argument and seek a "middle ground." I drew the platform's attention to some of my reflections about productive antagonisms between rival positions. Here's a response. It seems about right to me.

Agonistics

The sources consistently reveal a preference for exploring the tensions and differences between opposing viewpoints, rather than attempting to reconcile them. There's a clear emphasis on **incommensurability and difference**, recognizing that disagreements and contradictions are inherent in various domains, such as digital narratives, design, and philosophical positions. This approach is not about finding a comfortable middle ground; rather, it involves a **critique of reconciliation and synthesis**, suggesting that seeking a compromise can actually obscure the core issues. Instead, the focus is on **productive disruption and deconstruction**, actively challenging established norms to expose underlying tensions and generate new understandings. This involves a "rhetoric of restlessness" that undermines foundations rather than establishing them.

This perspective also informs the approach to interpretation, where **hermeneutics** is seen as a process of "distanciation" that maintains a productive gap between the interpreter and the interpreted. This allows for critical reflection without trying to merge different perspectives. Furthermore, there's a rejection of **totalizing views** that seek to impose a single, unified perspective, and instead an embrace of **multiple viewpoints**, even when they conflict. The sources encourage **dialogue and conversation** as means of engaging with difference, not necessarily to reach agreement, but to foster productive interaction. The use of **metaphors** is seen as a way to set up oppositions and tensions, highlighting the

value of friction between viewpoints. This preference for dynamic engagement with uncertainty, as opposed to static harmony, is underscored by a readiness to embrace paradox and contradiction, exploring the instability of structures rather than seeking symmetry and balance.

Note

- Featured image is by WordPress.

Category

1. Artificial Intelligence

Tags

1. agon
2. Romanticism
3. technoromanticism

Date Created

January 4, 2025

Author

rcoyne99

default watermark