

ChatGPT made me a *paella*!

Yes, you read that right. The same ChatGPT everyone's talking about, the AI bot capable of writing a book or programming a nuclear holocaust, made me a *paella* the other day. The "cookbot" version, of course. The result was a yellowish mush reeking of synthetic food additives, with most of the rice overdone. At the bottom of the *paella* pan – a redundant term, really, as the word "*paella*" actually refers to the receptacle, the meaning having gradually been absorbed into its contents over a low cookfire in the Valencian motherland – floated a sort of kerosene-like liquid, caused by the bot having miscalculated the exact quantity of extra virgin olive oil needed for the *sofrito*, the seasoning base for this magical Mediterranean meal. You might think that anybody could make *paella*, the star of Spanish gastronomy, but very few have the skills to pull it off. Truthfully, the cookbot made me a cold *paella* of the kind one might find on any given day in the food stalls of the Southwark markets of London: chewy rice with *things* in it.

That's because making *paella* actually requires much more than a tutorial downloaded from the Internet or even a master recipe. As with any human activity, it boils down to a *feeling*, guesstimating fistfuls of salt, "eyeballing" ingredients and sneaking sips of wine while all the flavours blend together, and no small dose of intuition – the latter being entirely unknown to any form of AI whatsoever. A good *paella* starts with memories of those who knew how to pick the best orangewood logs – which requires an excellent sense of smell. The yearning for those who are no longer with us but who passed on their knowledge of *just the right moment* to sprinkle in the saffron strands that, like a highly prized elixir, imbue with colour and flavour every grain of rice perfumed by the fruit-scented embers. The emotion involved in transmitting to our children secrets inherited from our fathers and grandfathers. That's what an AI needs to feel if it ever wants to make me a *paella*.

Don't get me wrong, I'm no Luddite. I know very well how useful AI will be, but in much the same way as ultra-processed food: instant and mechanical gratification that satiates the stomach but not the soul.

And the reason is that ChatGPT doesn't know what it means to laugh and cry all at once from a commingling sense of both joy and nostalgia. It doesn't understand the smell of parched earth soaking up rain after a summer storm. AI has never learned to ride a bike or scraped its knees falling off, and yet, stubborn as a mule and contrary to all logic, it insists on trying. It's never experienced anguish because it doesn't know what it means to love. It doesn't know anything because it doesn't care about anything.

I hope this little diversion has made it very clear that these words were not cobbled together by some bot but by an actual human being. In all his marvellous imperfections.

By Humberto Montero, *El Colombiano*, 16 February 2023