

ChatGPT Made Me Paella!

Yes, you read that correctly. That damn ChatGPT that everyone is talking about, that chatbot capable of writing a book and scheduling the nuclear winter, made me paella the other day. The cookbot version of it did, of course. The final product was a yellowish mess in which most of the rice was overcooked and smelt of factory-made seasonings. At the bottom of the paella – which is actually the name of the pan used to cook it in, a name that has slowly been absorbed by its contents in the Spanish region of Valencia, from where the dish originates – there flowed a liquid not unlike kerosene. This was the outcome of miscalculating the amount of extra-virgin olive oil needed to fry the onions and garlic, the base of this world-famous miracle of the Mediterranean. It might seem that anyone can make the *pièce de résistance* of Spanish gastronomy, but very few people can produce one that is truly outstanding. In short, a robocook powered by AI made me some cold paella of the kind sold every day at the stands in London's Southwark market: a plate of gummy rice with...stuff.

Making real paella demands much more than simply copying an online tutorial, or even following an excellent recipe. Like in just about everything human beings do, it is a mix of feelings, the improvisation in the pinches of salt and 'doing it by eye', sips of wine enjoyed while all of the flavours mingle, and a healthy dose of intuition, something artificial intelligence does not possess. A good paella begins with the memories of those who could gather the best firewood from orange trees, a skill that requires a great sense of smell. The pain of missing those no longer with us and who taught us exactly when to dissolve the saffron strands which, like a precious elixir, would fill with flavour and colour each grain perfumed by the fruity aroma of those coals. And the thrill of sharing with little ones secrets passed down from our parents and grandparents. *That* is what AI should feel if it were ever to make me paella.

Don't get me wrong, I'm no Luddite. Artificial intelligence will certainly be of use to us – of great use. But it will offer the same convenience as highly-processed foods: instant, mechanised gratification that fills a hole, but doesn't warm the soul.

That damn ChatGPT doesn't know what it means for a single feeling to make you both laugh with joy and cry from nostalgia. It can't apprehend the smell of the rain that rises up from the soaked earth after a summer storm. That AI has never learnt how to ride a bike, nor has it grazed its knees falling off one; yet, going against all logic, it has persisted in its attempt, as stubborn as a mule. It has never had a sleepless night because it doesn't know how to love. It doesn't know anything because within it beats nothing.

May this arabesque make it clear that these letters have not been gathered by artificial intelligence, but by human intelligence. With all its wonderful imperfections.

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