Someone; from Somewhere

by

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What is your theme/topic/goal/issue to be tackled - why is it important to you?

Fixing miscommunications and connecting differing schools of ideas is something I tend to do reflexively. These situations appear like abstract puzzles just begging to be solved and the larger the space between the opposing parties, the more interesting the solution becomes. Creative writers tend to be *VERY SET* in their ways of doing things and have a distrust of technology that has only been worsened by natural language models. They feel these systems will replace them and homogenize their field. And while it's true that systems such as ChatGPT can create the illusion of creativity, perhaps there is a way to parse the data that can lead to better *human* creativity.

I've watched faculty from writing heavy departments struggle with how to approach natural language models like ChatGPT. This conflict is in part due to a misunderstanding of how these platforms can be used. What I am hoping to create is a tool that limits data given to the user from natural language models in an exercise to strengthen their own creative development. By limiting how much data the natural language model gives back while also limiting user input, we force the user to fill in the gaps of data with their own interpretations. I believe this is the optimal way to engage with AI-driven, natural language models; not as a replacement for creativity, but as a tool to help exceed one's own limits.

What form will your project evolve into - who is your audience?

The audience for this tool are people who need help imagining characters for their own fictional narratives. It is also for people who come from more analog forms of creative work who may have hesitancy in using natural language models. Folks from these fields view AI (or in this case, natural language models) as something that will replace them. While it's true that lots of work can be offloaded to models such as ChatGPT, this technology should be viewed as a means to elevate fields instead of replacing them.

By limiting both the data input and output of a language model, this project looks to strip out the noise of AI-generated language down to its creative suggestions. Users are presented with a randomly generated character based on the parameters they input for their world generation. The traits of this character would be presented as five random facts rather than a more rigid demographic break down. Users would be able to accept or disregard information for their own creative works from this tool and fill in the blanks with their own creativity.

This project is also being made as a personal tool I hope to use in future projects related to game design. I've taken on tool creative director rolls since the start of my education and found that narrative content to fill out the world takes a lot of time. What I don't want is a tool that does all the work for me, but rather a tool that generates suggestions my imagination can play off of. Need a non-narrative dependent NPC who still has some unique qualities tailored for your world? By engaging with this website, you can start to have suggestions made to you that won't replace your own agency.

Discuss how each of the two readings listed above have inspired/motivated your current choices with regards to the project.

Hito Steyerl and their analysis of data patterns through the lens of apophenia[1] correlated a lot with personal views on creativity. The essay by Mimi Onuoha also influenced my work with an awareness for the possible bias found in the data I use[2]. What makes Steyerl's work more relevant to this project is because of the human element required to finalize data interpretation. Apophenia can lead to people seeing patterns in clouds or Jesus in a piece of burnt toast. It's my belief that creativity can be exercised through apophenia brought about by limited data sets. The goal is to never get the full picture from either the user or the language models. Final interpretation of what is being displayed is left to the user's imagination.

Onuoha's remarks on the biases we see in data is something I'm hoping I can break down in this project. I understand there is very little I can do outside of carefully considering the data sets I use, but perhaps there is a way to remix the data into something abstract again. Two unconnected data sets who fail to interact with one another but being presented as a unified answer could shed some of the interpretation bias found in whichever model I use.

What medium(s) do you intend to use and why?

A standard website accessible only through desktop will be the front end of this project. This will likely be the most barebones project I've done visually and that is by choice. The idea is to create a very basic format free of unnecessary clutter so the user can engage with the meta-task of creativity. However, there is one design decisions will be enacted in the name of accessibility. The font used for the website will be OpenDyslexic[3] so that those with dyslexia will better be served. It's not the prettiest font with its haunting similarities to Comic Sans but making the text accessible is a priority.

The back end of the project is where I will be putting most of my efforts. Parsing user data and remixing it before sending it off to a language model like OpenAI[4] will take some time to get right. The difficulty will hit a climax when I attempt to have the natural language model imagine itself first as the world outlined by the user before generating a person from it. I'd be lying right now if I said I had any bloody clue how I was going to pull this off, but I thought I might as well go for broke.

[1] 'A Sea of Data: Apophenia and Pattern (Mis-)Recognition - Journal #72' <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/72/60480/a-sea-of-data-apophenia-and-pattern-mis-recognition/> [accessed 2 October 2023].
[2] Mimi Onuoha, 'The Point of Collection', *Data & Society: Points*, 2016 <https://medium.com/datasociety-points/the-point-of-collection-8ee44ad7c2fa> [accessed 2 October 2023].
[3] 'Home | OpenDyslexic' <https://opendyslexic.org/> [accessed 2 October 2023].
[4] 'OpenAI Platform' <https://platform.openai.com> [accessed 2 October 2023].

What is your data: where will you get it, will it be collected - how and why?

Common Crawl[5] will likely be the data set I use for my project as it is what OpenAI was trained on. It is important to note that this project is still in its early stages and the API I will end up using may differ from this. Quantity of data over quality of data is my current development path which is why I'm using Common Crawl with its 390TB dataset. Built using data scraped from the web, Common Crawl creates a moral conundrum that may require I use an alternative. Being a 501(c)(3) means that this company operates without a profit motive which is point in their favour. However, the data collected was done so without permission from those who created it.

The solution of using Common Crawl is one bore from utility that I hope to supplant with a better one should time allow. Data input created by users of my project will be used to feed the machine in what I hope will be a symbiotic relationship. By limiting the data both given and received, it's possible creative types could use the benefit of working out ideas without giving their work away.

One final note is about a dataset I found for the image generation rather than using AI image generation. To cut down on work and data supplied to Common Crawl, I found a library of images on GitHub[6]. These images are portraits created using AI from around 4 years ago and will be helpful as a visual aid for users. The randomness of the images along with the data created from the natural language model will create something new from two, unattached datasets.

At a very high level: what are the algorithm(s) that will be used and implemented to achieve your intentions?

It's important to admit this project is less about the algorithms used and more the exercise that comes from willful user engagement. Node.js is going to form the base of my project from a technical standpoint with the previously mentioned use of OpenAI (GPT-3) and a git repo of faces. For the purposes of this project, I need only something that can take a few basic parameters with the goal being curated nonsense. The user's creativity is exercised as they are presented with a random person who exists in a world they dreamt up. Limiting data input coupled with curated questions prevents the user from misusing the natural language model as a crutch while also providing an exercise in creativity.

The algorithm I'm trying to create is found in the relationship between natural language models and the individual engaging. Datasets of any type could be used for this project if they hold some type of cohesive labelling. Information from these sets is repurposed into a text-based ink blot that requires the user's imagination to contextualize. This project doesn't return

[5] 'Common Crawl - Open Repository of Web Crawl Data' <https://commoncrawl.org/> [accessed 2 October 2023].
[6] Ozgur Ozer, '100,000 Faces', 2023 <https://github.com/ozgrozer/100k-faces> [accessed 1 October 2023].

demographic data, but rather five random facts about this fictitious person who lives in the world outlined by the user and interpreted by an AI.

Reference Project 1 – Akinator[7]

Akinator has been around since the early days of the internet and was an early example of databases being used to fake conversation. The website would figure out the cartoon character a user was thinking about by asking questions. These days the site looks and operates like any cheaply made Facebook game, but to a very young Madeline it felt like a conversation with a living being. An illusion was created that somehow this *thing* was trying to understand me and it made me want to be more honest in return.

The heart of this parlor trick of a web app is using process of elimination along with an extensive database of characters. Akinators success comes from understanding the importance of what we ask instead of what we answer. Limiting the types of answers one can give to already limited questions ensures the experience is always moving in the direction of an answer. This design limitation is what I intend to play off in my own project by limiting the amount of data the user can input into the fields. The goal is to provide only a small bit of aid to the user as they generate characters for their fictional worlds.

Reference Project 2 – AI Dungeon[8]

Created in 2019, AI Dungeon is a web app that allows players to experience the world of TTRPGs but with a computer guiding you. Users can choose between premade adventures or create one of their own from scratch. Its initial build design was based on early GPT-2 datasets which were eventually upgraded to GPT-3 as time went on.

AI Dungeon creates a never-ending story built from large datasets and curated by user interests. The issues that arises from this, and the thing I'm looking to fix in my web app, is the amount of data AI Dungeon produces. This project requires the AI to imagine a complete world (which is great) and then uses its understanding of creativity to create things to inhabit this world (which is the problem). Unnecessary amount of filler text is created to simulate creativity rather than having original information.

Still, there is something interesting in the idea of being able to create a test environment for one's imagination. Creativity is a muscle that needs to be exercised and having something you can bounce ideas off of can clear mental blocks. A user could make a custom experience inside AI dungeon and then play as character from creative writing project to see what they might do next. That change in perspective could be just what someone needs to build something new without being too dependent on AI.

[7] 'Akinator, the Mind Reading Genie' <https://en.akinator.com/> [accessed 1 October 2023].
[8] 'AI Dungeon' <https://aidungeon.com/> [accessed 1 October 2023].

Reference Project 3 – Boil the Frog[9]

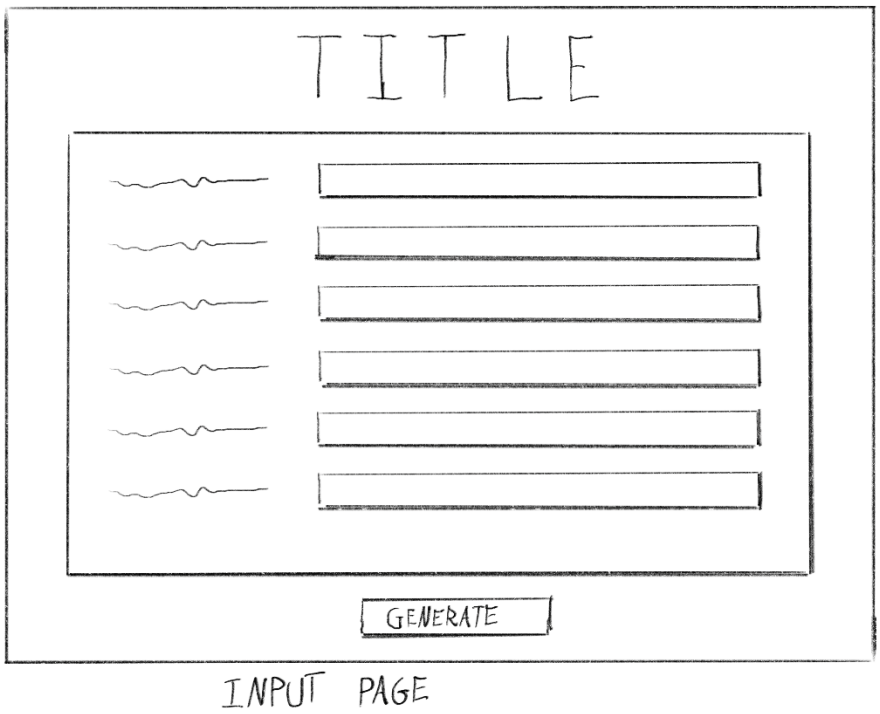
Boil the Frog is a website that uses the Spotify API to recommend musicians based on two suggestions from the user. It uses datasets created by Spotify (along with its sorting algorithm) to transition the use from their first artist suggestion into their second. Tamer results can be found between similar artists, but where the website shines is when you start mixing unrelated musicians. A playlist is created that is meant to transition the listener between the defined musicians in a way that sounds seamless.

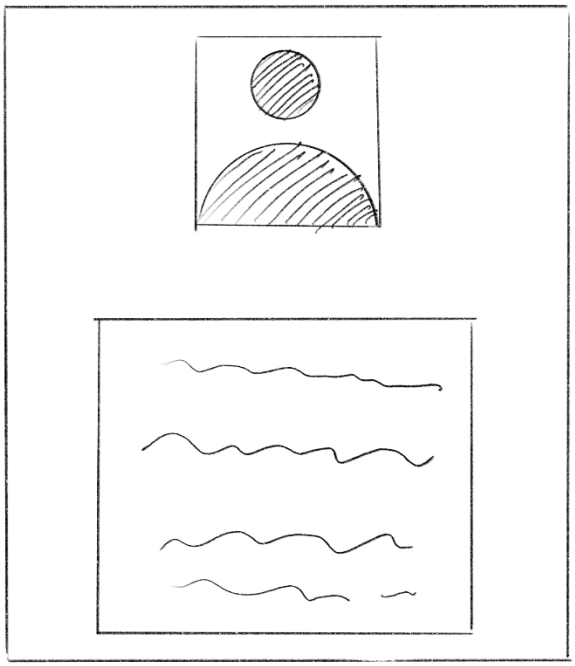
What I like about this project is its subjective nature in whether one would consider the result successful. Results are entirely built on Spotify's categorization of its music library (to be fair to Spotify, this labelling system is based off sound music theory and is quite extensive). Musical tastes are often a deeply personal thing whose validity as "correct" can't really be quantified. This loose definition of success creates a result the AI will likely never know is correct or not. One could run the same request multiple times and different results would appear for the user's consumption.

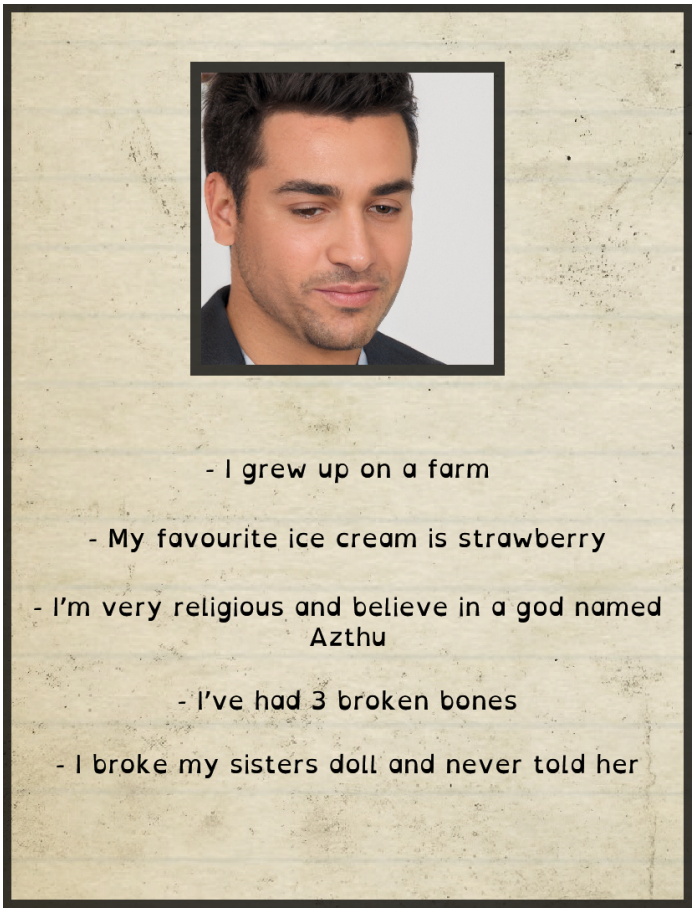
I had the pleasure of using Boil the Frog for a long time before the website broke. Its front end is still there, but something on the back end prevents the results from working. Boil the Frog still offers use in my project with its simplistic and limiting approach to user input. I hope to emulate its effect of creating an artifact that seems (correctly or not) to be unique to the user.

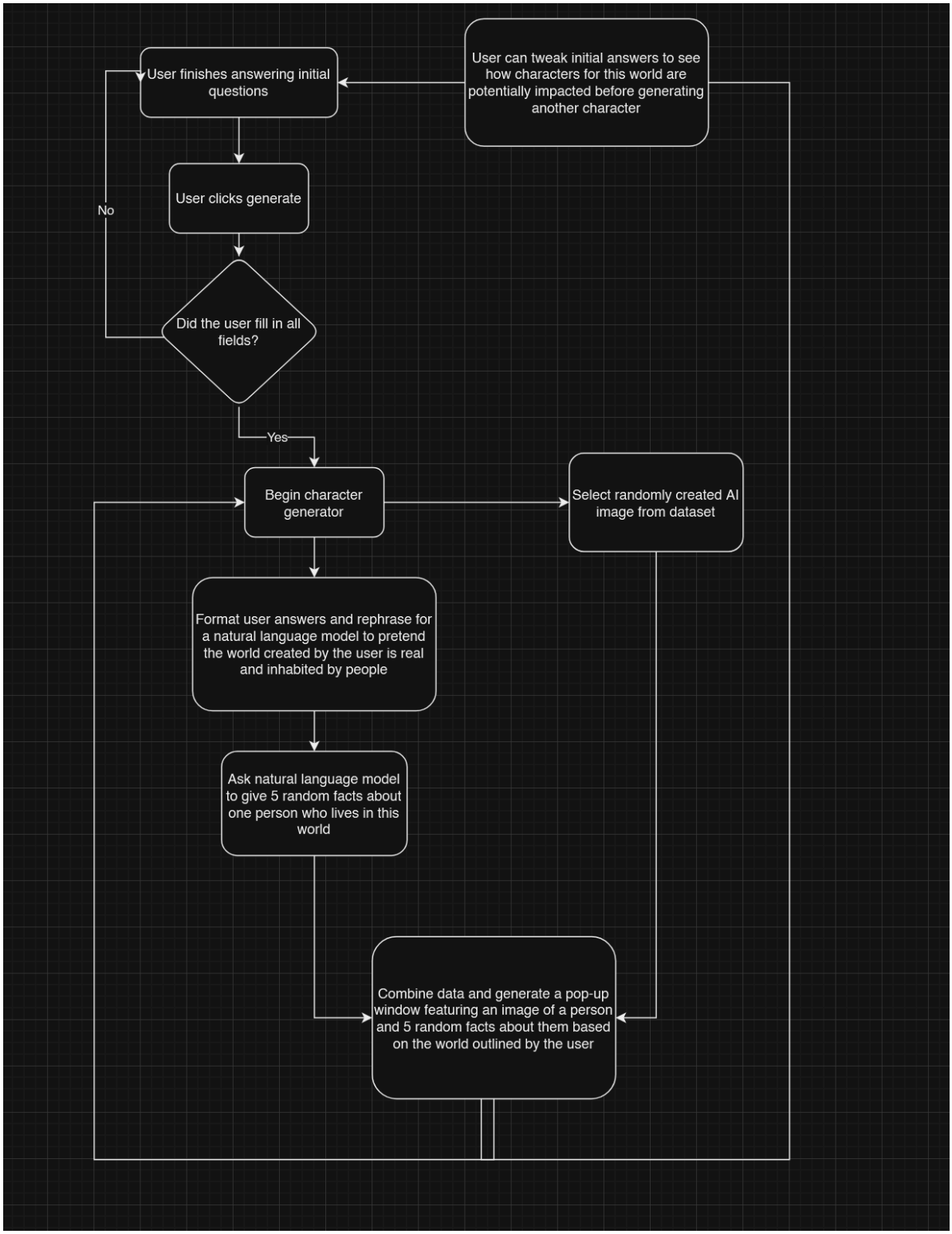
[9] 'Boil the Frog' <http://boilthefrog.playlistmachinery.com/> [accessed 2 October 2023].

Visual Storyboard




POP-UP WINDOW


- I grew up on a farm
- My favourite ice cream is strawberry
- I'm very religious and believe in a god named Azthu
- I've had 3 broken bones
- I broke my sisters doll and never told her


User finishes answering initial questions
User can tweak initial answers to see how characters for this world are potentially impacted before generating another character
User clicks generate
No
Did the user fill in all fields?
Yes
Begin character generator
Select randomly created AI image from dataset
Format user answers and rephrase for a natural language model to pretend the world created by the user is real and inhabited by people
Ask natural language model to give 5 random facts about one person who lives in this world
Combine data and generate a pop-up window featuring an image of a person and 5 random facts about them based on the world outlined by the user

Bibliography

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