

Chatbot rodeo: exploring context windows and Rogerian psychoanalysis through a comparative interface of GPT models

Renée Ridgway^a

^a *London South Bank University, UK*

Instead of us(ers) drawing on tacit knowledge, memory or libraries in an effort to find information (Noble, 2018), the past 25 years ‘ubiquitous googling’ (Ridgway, 2021; 2023) with keywords has become a daily habit of new media (Chun, 2016), shaping public understanding of the world (Mulligan & Griffin, 2018). As users enter queries in search of information, Google operates as an ‘increasingly invisible information infrastructure’ (Haider & Sundin, 2019) and it is sometimes difficult to discern paid advertising from ‘organic’ search results (Introna, 2016; Lewandowski, 2017). With a search engine market share worldwide of 91% (statcounter.com), its technological outputs (search results) are an authoritative mechanism trusted by the public (Noble, 2018). Yet the actors and dynamics of search are changing with the uptake of generative artificial intelligence, with chatbots providing one answer to all queries. Obscuring the difference between ‘finding information and synthetically generating it’ (Cetin et al., 2025), generative AI marks an ontological rupture, altering the measures of ‘fact, integrity, fidelity, provenance and interpretability’ (Shah, 2024). Besides generating search results, chatbots are conversational agents carrying out query/response exchanges that draw people into a conversation about themselves (Bunz, 2019, p. 152).

However, chatbots are not novel.

In 1966 Josef Weizenbaum conceived of the ELIZA chatbot to show the ‘superficiality of communication between man and machine’ and decided to program it as if it were a psychiatrist responding to a ‘human correspondent’. Weizenbaum stated that he ‘originally conceived of ELIZA as a barman, but later decided psychiatrists were more interesting’ (1966). The rule-based ‘script’ called DOCTOR references a ‘theatre metaphor’ (Natale, 2019, p. 719), applying Turing’s imitation game as it attempted to simulate Rogerian psychoanalysis. Primarily thought of as a conversational therapy or reflective listening, Carl Rogers applied the metaphor of a mirror in his clinical theorizing and therapists sometimes caricatured his work as a mechanical parroting back of the client’s words. Via a typewriter and by applying ‘pattern matching’ and word substitution, ELIZA recognised keywords—‘cues in its interlocutor’s words’ (Bunz, 2019, p. 152) and would respond by echoing them in the form of a question. This Rogerian method – a type of non-directive therapy was crucial to ELIZA’s success as it ‘allowed the programme to sustain a conversation while adding little, if anything, to it’ (Weizenbaum, 1966). Weizenbaum chose this mode of conversation because the psychiatric interview is a type of ‘categorized dyadic natural language communication’ where one of the pair (the chatbot) ‘assumed the pose of knowing almost nothing of the real world’ (1966, p. 42).

SEASON 2026, September 15–17, 2026, Hamburg, Germany

EMAIL: rridgway@cc.au.dk (A. 1)

ORCID: 0000-0002-1483-9996 (A. 1)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48441/4427.3730>



© 2026 Copyright for this paper by its authors.

Use permitted under Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

Instead of scripted chatbots (symbolic AI), this small study applies Weizenbaum's choice to find out what kinds of responses contemporary generative pre-trained transformers (GPTs), a type of LLM (large language model), produce when prompted about context windows, Rogerian psychoanalysis and their antecedents. It uses a bespoke 'chatbot rodeo' (Gemini, ChatGPT, Mistral, Apertus, Perplexity), which juxtapositions proprietary, open weight and full open-source models as a comparative interface within the re-search.site.

Some of the prompts posed to the chatbots include *'What is a context window and how is it beneficial in answering queries'?* Through their own context windows of varying lengths, the chatbots themselves explain what a context window is and how it is beneficial to their queries. For example, Perplexity AI has more quantifiable answers, augmented with citations and explains that 'a context window is the maximum amount of text (measured in tokens).' Or, with the prompt, *'How would you compare Rogerian psychoanalysis with a context window?'* the flagship European model Le Chat (now Vibe) responded that 'the therapist, like the context window, holds and processes the client's data (thoughts and emotions) without imposing their own agenda.' If asked whether *'the chatbot ELIZA performed Rogerian psychoanalysis?'* all chatbots put forth synonyms (illusion, mimicked, could appear, simulate, etc.) to describe how ELIZA feigned this type of therapy. With the 'enable chat history' checked (context window) in the re-search.site backend interface, the chatbots provide more extensive and detailed answers, which also illuminate certain insights into the companies' models. Perplexity imparts that the Swiss chatbot Apertus has humanlike and ethical answers 'due to its design as a fully open-source, transparent multilingual LLM.' Instead of the author's subjective interpretation, it is the chatbots themselves that analyse the other chatbots' responses. Although this is only one data collection iteration (due to financial restraints for token payments and potential poisoning of the context windows), this small study demonstrates that chatbots are not created equally.

Contributing to feminist STS, which holds that there are multiple realities instead of a fixed 'scientific objective', the results engender a type of 'situated knowledge' in that they only offer a 'partial perspective' (Haraway, 1988). This draws attention to the client software application and the size of the context window that keeps track of the chatbot's previous conversation when answering each new prompt. However, LLMs proffer conversational responses that are statistically produced, often deemed 'stochastic parrots' (Bender et al., 2021) as they neither comprehend meaning nor consistently provide the same answers. Therefore these 'intra-actions', which considers agency as a dynamism of forces that is both simultaneously differentiated and entangled, facilitate objects that emerge through them (Barad, 2007, p. 141). Much like Rogerian psychoanalysis, these prompt/response intra-actions then become socio-material processes that bring about 'entangled situations' (Smith & Otto, 2016, p. 27), where the LLMs know nothing of the real world yet provide 'believable' or 'convincing' responses. With this bespoke chatbot rodeo, political and ethical issues are not separate but integral to understanding how divergent models provide divergent answers, with open-source models offering more insight into their training data and design. In this way, the chatbot rodeo (meta) interface has become the 'material, technological and part of more extensive political and social contexts' (Andersen & Pold, 2018, p. 19), going beyond traditional written formats in human-AI interactions.

Acknowledgements



Thanks to artist/programmer Anders Visti, co-collaborator of the re-search.site and partial financial support from SHAPE (Shaping Digital Citizenship), department of Digital Design and Information Studies, Aarhus University, Denmark.

References

- Andersen, C., & Pold, S. (2018). *The metainterface: The art of platforms, cities, and clouds*. MIT Press.
- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bender, E.M. et al (2021). On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big? In Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency (FAccT '21). *Association for Computing Machinery*. 610–623. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3442188.3445922>.
- Bunz, M. (2019). Conversational interface. In T. Beyes, R. Holt, & C. Pias (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of media, technology and organization studies*, 149–159. Oxford University Press.
- Çetin, R. B., Stanusch, N. & Faddoul, M. (2025). From “Googling” to “Asking ChatGPT”: Governing AI Search. *AI Forensics*. <https://aiforensics.org/work/governing-ai-search>.
- Chun, W. H. K. (2016) *Habitual New Media: Updating to Remain the Same*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Haider, J. & Sundin, O. (2019). *Invisible Search and Online Search Engines: The Ubiquity of Search in Everyday Life*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599.
- Introna, L. (2016). The algorithmic choreography of the impressionable subject. In Seyfert, Robert and Roberge, Jonathan (Eds.), *Algorithmic Cultures: Essays on Meaning, Performance and New Technologies*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.
- Lewandowski, D. (2017). Users’ Understanding of Search Engine Advertisements. *Journal of Information Science Theory and Practice*, 5 (4), 6-25 (2017).
- Mulligan, D. K. & Griffin, D. (2018) Rescripting Search to Respect the Right to Truth. *Georgetown Law Review Technology Review*, 2 (2) 557-584.
- Natale, S. (2019). If software is narrative: Joseph Weizenbaum, artificial intelligence and the biographies of ELIZA. *New Media & Society*, 21(3), 712–728. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818804980>.
- Noble, S. U. (2018) *Algorithms of Oppression, How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press.
- Ridgway, R. (2021). *Research: The personalised subject vs. the anonymous user* (Publication No. 21.2021). PhD, Copenhagen Business School.
- Ridgway, R. (2023). Deleterious consequences: How Google’s original sociotechnical affordances ultimately shaped ‘trusted users’ in surveillance capitalism. *Big Data & Society*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231171058>.
- Shah, N. (2024). The unbearable oldness of generative artificial intelligence: Or the remaking of digital narratives in times of ChatGPT, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494231223572>.
- Smith, R., & Otto, T. (2016). Cultures of the future: Emergence and intervention in design anthropology. In R. Smith, K. Vangkilde, M. Kjaersgaard, T. Otto, J. Halse, & T. Binder (Eds.), *Design anthropological futures* (pp. 19–36). Bloomsbury Academic.



Weizenbaum, J. (1966). ELIZA: A computer program for the study of natural language communication between man and machine. *Communications of the ACM*, 9(1), 36–45. <https://doi.org/10.1145/365153.365168>.