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Computational Creativity: Making Machines That Make Meaning

Abstract. In the collective imagination, Twitterbots typically hang out with the viruses, hackers and other ne'er-do-wells of the digital realm. There are many reasons why these autonomous systems get a bad press, and most are hard to argue with. But Twitterbots can do much more than hack democracy and subvert elections! I aim to redress the balance in this presentation, and talk about some of the good reasons to embrace Twitterbots, or, indeed, generative bots of all kinds, and see them not as trouble makers but as conceptual provocateurs. I aim to place bots in their proper context, that of Computational Creativity (CC), which is the branch of AI dedicated to the generation of artefacts with novelty and value. In CC, the search for value is often the search for meaning too, so inventive CC systems are not so much problem-solvers as meaning-makers. Nowhere is this observation more true than in language, the preeminent domain in which we humans seek and make meanings. Many Twitterbots, like linguistic creativity more generally, seek to squeeze new or surprising meanings from the conventions of pure form, for when guided by the appropriate symbolic and/or statistical models, a seemingly superficial change in form often results in profound yet predictable changes in meaning. In this presentation I will show how bots can use these models to give algorithmic form to fun, whimsy and all the creative possibilities of language.

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