

Didascalicon
(de Studio legendi intellectus artificialis)

A Ventriloquist's Vernaculars

It is not common to consider the category of “voice” in relation to artificial intelligences; one usually maintains either a logical or a measurement point of view. But if we think not in experts but in a common-sense way of what the category of “voice” refers to, is it not precisely this? A voice forms from how form and quantity work together mechanically in articulating a stream of breath into sounds as recognizable units. The idea of such a *physics of voicing* informs the interest in attributing voice to artificial intelligences and of considering such voice not through the perspective of general linguistics or logics but through quantum optics of spectralization. AI speaks in vernaculars, and we should think of language in terms of the physics of voicing

data. Voicing attends to data as a *puissance* (a mixture of objective capacity and subjective capability).

Technically speaking, an AI is a neuronal network. In their current generation of machine learning and big data, there are two principal architectonics: *Recurrent Neural Networks* are artificial intelligences that perform well when dealing with *temporal* sequencing, i.e., with text and recorded language—as the Google translate algorithm, for example. They articulate the *physicality of language* in artificial (coded, algorithm-based) vernaculars. Like every vernacular, such algorithms preserve the varied and local stories and morals that characterize the times and regions where those tongues are spoken. The other principal AI architectonic in the current generation is *Convolutional Neural Networks*. Instances of this architectonic perform well when dealing with the *spatiality* captured in the graphics of images, for example, face recognition algorithms or automatic driving algorithms. They articulate the *physicality of images* in vernaculars that qualify likewise; they, too, preserve the varied and local customs and forms of representation that characterize the times and regions where they have been trained. Both import those characteristics to wherever they are being set to work.

An AI is dissociated from any particular form or embodiment; it distributes itself logistically across spaces and times. However, it does develop and take along a particular cultural temper that *persists* or *insists* in it across these spaces and times. There is something of a mother tongue in every vernacular that emancipates technically. But who speaks in these vernaculars? Not anyone in particular, but it is also not the voice of a general nature. Operating an AI is like “speaking” as a ventriloquist.

Speaking in a ventriloquist’s vernaculars gives data a body in appearance by wrapping it in liquid costumes of commodities’ coded custom and/or the topography of a weighted and measured *common sense*; such speech tessellates the marquetry of a covering space where an open horizon and the end of the world are contingent one upon the other. While the voice in a mother tongue maintains relations of immediate origination, a ventriloquist’s vernaculars relate agencies to mediate self-engenderings.

The Meridian Voice

Data as Foundlings. “I am finding something—like language—immaterial, but earthly, terrestrial, something circular, something which returns to itself by passing through both poles and which

thereby—mirthfully—crosses even the tropics: I am finding ... a meridian.”¹ With this poetic of the Meridian, Paul Celan speaks of the return of a poetics of adventure, as if the voice of heroic materialism that characterized the cultures of industrialization were beginning to acquire a self-consciousness of its communicational physicality (in the “technics” of “information.”) Voice in this poetics of adventure is voice that is preoccupied with cyclical scales—scalarities, really—it is the poetic voice of a re-cycling metrics: one that breaks and distributes its articulations across the meridian like a projected image is broken and distributed by a fractured mirror.

The meridian is a geographical concept. It is a half-circle projected around the globe, established by measuring angular degrees East or West along the equator. In Celan’s poetics, this involves angular measurement that relates existence to creation: the poetic meridian establishes “the imaginary longitude between the inclination angle of existence and that of creatureliness (*Kreatürlichkeit*).”² For meridian poetics, the “earth” to be measured includes

1 Paul Celan, *Der Meridian*, Dankesrede zur Auszeichnung des Georg Büchner Preises, 1960, <https://www.deutscheakademie.de/de/auszeichnungen/georg-buechner-preis/paul-celan/dankrede> (accessed September 24, 2021), my own translation.

2 Ibid.

art and artifice, and the line of longitude is imaginary. It manifests as an ideated cosmos in what we could perhaps best call a poetic covering-space. The moderating metrics in such a poetics of the Meridian is one of articulate breath, not one of geometric meter. Rather than spatial coordinates, it is a diacritical measurement that counts in the returns of *Atemwende* (breath-turn). Voice turns polytonal; we could almost say figurative—tropical. But not quite, for the Meridian crosses not only both poles of the geographical globe but also the tropical line. Poetry is then, metrically, reconnected with an aspiration that cannot fulfill itself in figurative speech. There is breath and voice in it, which speaks in a polytonal manner whereby the diacritical signs mark the accentuation of “voiced length” with a novel kind of grammatical tense. A meridian poetics is to work, we can imagine, with the three diacritical markings³ of:

- the *acute* of the current contemporary
- the *gravis* of history
- the *circumflex*—a length mark—of aeon

3 Ibid. The full passage in the original is this: "Man kann, ich bin mir dessen durchaus bewußt, dieses Wort so oder so lesen, man kann verschiedene Akzente setzen: den Akut des Heutigen, den Gravis des Historischen – auch Literarhistorischen –, den Zirkumflex – ein Dehnungszeichen – des Ewigen. Ich setze – mir bleibt keine andere Wahl –, ich setze den Akut."

Diacritical Hourglasses

Diacritical hourglasses are the gnomons that give orientation in abstractive thought. With them, one can measure the shadows cast by objects in the light of the intellectual craftsmanship (ratiocination) that was invested into the *poiesis* of their fabrication. Time is not running out in these hourglasses; it is being kept. Such hourglasses make it possible to hold on to some of the time that is kept in the conservation of the world's invariances. The keeping of time they are capable of depends upon conversation: the measurement of time they facilitate puts conservation and conversation into proportion.

Such hourglasses measure time using diacritical markings that accentuate—or render still—the aspiration that went into an object's fabrication. It is a measurement that depends upon exegesis and demonstration as if it were the quick body of law in jurisprudence or the holy script in theology. What such hourglasses do, ultimately, is abduct time from the universe, on the one hand, and render it back to the world as space, on the other. The exegesis at work in such abduction and the rendering at work in such demonstration brings the world to proportion in words that can be taught. Such lexicons

are dedicated to the world's invariances, and their words are best-called world words.

World words spread invariant meaning into the abundantly variant colorings of sense like white light spreads colors in Newton's optics. The reception of world words depends upon an instrumental rendering of the distributive invariant meaning. World words can articulate meaning, but only when spoken by the meridian voice of an impersonal artificial intelligence. They articulate meaning all at once in any of the coding-literate ventriloquist's many vernaculars. The instruments of diacritical hourglasses facilitate the rendering back of such reception: They collect and bundle colorful light into black spectra, like Goethe's color theory.

The lexicon of world words is a gnomonic lexicon. Thereby, it is a theoretical lexicon in the sense of Quatremère de Quincy: "*The object of all theory is to teach,*" he maintained, Theory needs such instruments (a gnomon and a lexicon of inarticulate words) because it needs to respect what he calls "*the mathematical line.*" It "*is the region of the imaginary, where reason quits us, and whither none can follow us.*"⁴ The objects of theory are objects that have been

4 Quatremère de Quincy, *The True, the Fictive, and the Real: The Historical Dictionary of Architecture of Quatremère de Quincy*, trans. and ed. Samir Younés, London, Andreas Papadakis Publisher, 1999, p.x.

brought back from flights across this line. World words name those objects, but they do not themselves articulate them. World words have no proper subjects. Their articulation depends upon the instantational and circumstantial reception of the invariant meaning they render apparent. This act of reception is spiritual and material, a bit like the photosynthesis of plants.

