Meaningless gods and posthuman companions: situated meaning in the future of AI

Dominant discourses in approaches to artificial intelligence have had the goal of creating a truly intelligent agent by means of universal knowledge and mathematical rules and these stand in stark contrast to different mindsets on AI as memory and storyteller and as artist and companion. Contrasting these two paradigms seeks a redefinition of AI using both epistemological and semiotic lenses to shed greater light on systemic approaches to technological advances that increasingly pervade our lived experiences, our shared stories, and our possible futures and look to those possibilities that are not dominated by the universal common language but by the experiential heteroglossia that we all possess..

The universalist approaches include such current day projects as by Cycorp's Cyc, OpenAI's GPT-2 and now GPT-3 and Google's Switch-C language models. These projects draw on intellectual roots from Ramon Llull's *Ars Magna,* Athanasius Kircher's *Ars Magna Sciendi*, and Gottfried Leibniz's *De arte combinatoria*, projects which sought to find the mathematical rules and heuristics that would be the root of all universal knowledge. In recent work, Bender and Koller (2020) and Bender, Gebru, et. al. (2021) challenge these projects in grand claims of understanding such as OpenAI's GPT-2 in the realm of natural language understanding. Furthermore, the work of Searle(1980), Adam(1998) and others indicate the postulation that these projects could in the end produce nothing more than a construction best represented by Microsoft's Tay chatbot – an amalgam of expressed human opinions in misogyny, racism, transphobia, and other bigotries without understanding of its own. This omniscient AI that is the end-goal of projects as described above are at their heart both deeply colonialist (Dourish and Mainwaring 2012) and in the end represent a loss of meaning in the morass of sheer information they collect without context or connection (cf. Haraway 1989).

The paradigm of AI creation that is both personal and meaningful is exemplified in such work Eugenia Kuyda's *Replika* and Stephanie Dinkins *N'TOO*, which serve as repositories of those they have loved and wish to memorialize (also shown as a speculative possibility in the Black Mirror episode "Be Right Back"), Ai-da Robot, an artist robot created by UK artist Sadie Clayton with whom she has on-going collaboration in artistic creations, and explored in speculative workshops and installations by groups such as London's Comuzi Studio and LA-based collective *Feminist.AI*. Their works create an extension of the human into the non-biological and computational space, creating work that is both approachable and meaningful in the human-computational dialog (see Hayles 2005, 2006). By situating their work within the highly personal and situational, they root their approaches to AI within a subjective meaning, allowing for extension and existence that is both dynamic, evolutionary, and significant for the humans who interact with their work. Indeed, people have reported ongoing conversations with *Replika* that resembled that of a person with their therapist and have credited *Replika* with saving their lives. *N'TOO,* was created "to ensure that people of color, and others who inherently understand the need for inclusion, equity, ethics, and multimodal testing, participate in the design, production, and testing of 'smart' products'. The creation of AI as a labor of love, of the disembodied minds of others, reimagines the storyteller in the posthuman space, as extensions and unique creations.

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Biography

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