theodor.barth@khio.no   [do something else]   **02.11.2022**

An anecdote. During an exchange with Andreas Ervik—on his book *Becoming human amid diversions* (2022)—we discussed the implications of his matching of a book written by *him*, with a mirror-version generated with an *AI algorithm*. The algorithm had "learned" from the prose of a hive-mind from a large number of recognised authors. How could we meet this with VR?

Not VR in the sense of goggles, gloves and suit but *performatively* when crossing the boundary from *plain* reading, to match and enrich our reading as a *live experience*. The result of the discussion eventually led to the conclusion that the difference that makes a difference (Bateson) is whether the AI mirror copy of the book is *fed forward* to the reader, or *fed back* to the author.

If fed forward to the reader, the hive-mind prompts the idea of a readership: it makes sense, because the hive mind—like the readership—typically is *anonymous*. If fed back to the author, the hive-mind typically has a knack of becoming *personified*. Like the match we know from the Turing-test that will fool us. But who cares if we can be fooled (least of all the algorithm)?

The two alternatives, first and foremost, features two different models of *time* or the *appropriation* of time. The former performative, the latter predatorial. It makes a difference. In the case of the book, offering the mirror-book alongside the published volume, provides an invitation to the reader to locate their own reading: *here* is the original, *there* is the mirror, what is *my* bid reading?

The predatorial logic is different: when fed back to the author, and the mirror version is as "good" as the author's, perhaps we can use AI to generate high quality content (thereby substituting and erasing the need for creators)? Notwithstanding the perversity of this idea, it might conceal intellectually mediocrity: a signature parody of where our culture is going. A semiotic "snigger".

With the performative appropriation of time, the problem is not "solved" and the enigma continues. Because, it could serve to feed contemporary narcissism. Not as a psychological condition but as a cultural form with a *time-local* hit, and a *provincialising* impact. A mind-set allowing to live with the benefits of digital civilisation without taking notice of the social/environmental cost.

Indeed, how do we relate to the paradox between **1)** the pockets full of earth —much *older* than us—that ends up in this mobile phone [*construction*] and **2)** the cute, stupid, silly or playful ways of scaling this artefact into our—comparatively *short*—life-span [*dwelling*]. Well, we could ask the question: how do I locate this artefact in the *proximal* zone in which I live and work?

That is, the zone within hands reach, a few steps away and within the social zone of the *electrosphere* that I share with other people: *between* the intimate space of my body [biology] *and* the remote recesses of terrestrial resources [geology]. This is a contact zone where I can *locate* my work—for instance, my reading of Andreas Ervik's book—but also putting my work into *question*.

What is the value of this work compared to that of the workers who extract rare earths and metal—in South America or Africa—to make digitech components, or the South-East Asian workers doing the assemblage of our smartware? These is the point raised by designer Isak Wisløff when he barters the price of $5 for his commissioned emoticon-paintings down to a mere $1,8.

The predatorial AI-doctrine will appropriate human exertion as a kind of *free work* that is up for grabs. While a performative doctrine of AI will raise the question of work on new grounds. Maybe [Stephen Wright] has a point when claiming that users should be *salaried*. Because they are putting a lot of work without hire. But if this is not worth a salary then why are they not fired?