AI's Impact on the Labor of the Sentence and Verbal Gestalts

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As a new wound to human narcissism, the new situation with generative AI gives rise to the circulation of old and new affirmations of irreducibility, some more helpful than others. Engaging with the technological developments of his time, Heidegger famously declared how "cybernetics transforms language into an exchange of news···.renders language operational and thus holds mastery over the essence of man". With generative AI, cybernetics may well have "scored"against language as a domain of irreducible human singularity, the essence of man be "damned".

The pharmakon has made a spectacular return and everyday a large portion of human beings hand over their linguistic decisions to the smart and pretty mirror of the machinic outcomes of language processing.

This talk proposes to tackle this situation not so much as an ontological issue of the essence of the human, as one of the practice of writing. The sudden uptake of the "prompt and response"genre, may, despite a beneficial symbiotic possibility, spell an impoverishment for creative or thoughtful struggles with language, favoring products over processes in all kinds of writing (or "scripting").

Instead of just leaving us with a sense of how right the German thinker was, this should drive us to make an effort to be more specific: It is easy to outline the huge gain in time and efficiency made possible by generative AI in writing. But if there is an impoverishment of linguistic skill and practice, where exactly might it lie? Historically informed by Naomi Baron's narrative of a gradual drive toward efficiency in approaches to language in AI, this talk will take up two specific headings, where struggle is needed and possible: the shaping of a sentence including the space between sentences (Verlyn Klinkenborg) and the experience of meaning (Jan Zwicky).

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