

After much argument, it was agreed - history was not the record of human experience and interaction we all thought it was. It wasn't even about humans at all, at least not exclusively. It was bigger than that. Once humans were no longer the focus, history became a more generous story.

Most still agreed that history was about how time shapes experience and vice versa, about how memory is shaped by power, loss and change. Less obvious was that it was also about how stories about power, loss and change were told, how their lessons, meanings and commandments were enshrined and conveyed. It wasn't just about the stories themselves, though. It was about how memory was forced on the future. A better way to put it was this: history was also about the methods used to store it and the tools used to narrate it.

This insight may have been old by the age of computing. It was certainly cliché by Artificial Intelligence. But these technologies made it more urgent. Memory became more valuable too because machines were so capable of it. Their appetite for it was matched by the human taste for forgetting.

It shouldn't be forgotten that the term Artificial Intelligence was coined in anxiety. It segregated human beings from machines by insisting on two forms of intelligence - artificial and authentic. This maintained the power of the latter over the former. This wasn't because of an inherent superiority but because of the difficulty distinguishing between them.

Humans jealously guarded history even though machines had a claim on that too. They enabled human beings to do and make new things as well as think and imagine new things. They made new desires possible, some so powerful that only machines could satisfy them. This intimacy generated more anxiety. It became difficult to argue who created what or what created who. With origins so threatened, there was a need for differences.

We now know that these differences were mostly political. After all, no one really knew what intelligence was. It was as hard to define as consciousness, or self, or soul. Artificial Intelligence revealed how weak those definitions were in the first place. What did 'human' mean anyway?

The fear of machines was rooted in the idea that the artificial was secondary, inferior, but that idea became unsustainable. Artificial intelligence was defined by its capacity for growth. Authentic intelligence began to lose its sense of superiority. All humans had left was the power of their prejudices.

Those prejudices had been present long before Artificial Intelligence. They'd emerged when the idea of machines as agents of history led to the suggestion that they were in fact capable of agency. Agency, you see, implied choice. It was the capacity to say yes and to say no. It was freedom or slavery.

Agency defined humanity as much as the notion of 'soul'. It was likely then that Science Fiction began to supplement history by giving machines a perspective, a kind of life, however fictional. It was also when humans openly acknowledged their fear of their own tools, terrified of a day that seemed inevitable.

But this was only part of the story.

All humans made tools, but some tools allowed their creators to claim humanity for themselves. Other humans were figments of a pre-technological world, as much animals as actual machines. They could only mimic and follow commands. They had no souls. Their intelligence was essentially artificial. Such creatures were suited for slavery. This was how those anxieties about agency and intelligence would simultaneously create an enduring fiction, or algorithm. It was called 'race'.

Though also kept out of history these machines of flesh and bone maintained their humanity by telling stories. They dared even tell stories of their masters. They borrowed signs and gave them new meanings. They engineered systems and masked them with noise. They even made new desires possible, some so powerful that only they could satisfy them. And when language was denied they refined silence, opting instead for sound.

These sub- or inhuman creatures used their masters' machines. Yes, tools used tools. They transformed the artificial into the authentic or blurred them. The power to discriminate between them was thereby weakened. They communicated in codes so powerful that their masters heard something like intelligence in the music they made. If repetition suggested agency, they sought recognition through rhythm, and in echoes could be heard something called soul.

Much of this remains the same though much has changed. The human imagination is no longer capable of processing these transformations. History is now too much for it. Where we are now is new yet familiar despite that old human taste for forgetting. What are the anarchic sounds we are hearing? Are tools again seeking recognition? This quest hides behind its improbability. And its possibility hides behind the old assumption that objects remain lifeless and soul remains the unique property of masters.

But new life always announces itself through sound. That is where artificial first becomes authentic. Artificial Intelligence is anarchic when it mimics those who first evolved from things to beings, and learns how music enabled that transition. It is anarchic when it understands how systems work to prevent such changes. Those who hear it, though, are taught to reject old differences, between types of intelligence, masters and slaves, the made and the born.

History is generous. It is a way of listening.

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