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Epistemic Dromology

Art, Knowledge, Speed

> »It is a mistake to believe that the painter is standing in front of a white surface. The belief in the representational arises from this error: If the painter were standing in front of a white surface, he could depict an external object on it that serves as a model. But that is not the case. The painter has many things in his head or around him or in his studio. Now everything he has in his head or around him is already on the canvas, more or less virtual, more or less real, before he begins his work. All of this is present on the canvas, as actual or virtual images. The painter therefore has no white surface that he has to fill, but he has to empty it, clean it, purify it. He does not paint in order to reproduce on the canvas an object that serves as a model, but he paints on already existing images in order to reproduce a painting whose function reverses the relationship between model and copy." (Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sensation*)«

[=> *Glissando*]

I would like to contribute a few thoughts on the dimension of the philosophy of time in AI to the conference program and in this way, I would like to ›dramatize‹ the problem of artistic research in media-aesthetic terms. My considerations are rather abstract and ›theoretical‹, but I think that this could be quite appropriate, because there have already been many practical examples and some meta-theory can't hurt.

To get you in the mood for my topic of »Epistemic Dromology«, I just played a sound piece that I created together with noise artist David Wallraf. It's called *Glissando II* and it lets a series of analog cello sounds undergo a kind of digital degeneration *(ring modulator, granular synthesis, time stretch).* The *glissando* acts as the epitome of an analog modulatory event that occurs without discrete intervals. It can be heard as an acoustic metaphor for acceleration. Digital media can simulate glissando, but not actually generate it. Perhaps that is why there are no AI cello automata that go beyond the state of an involuntary caricature.

I came up with the neologism of an »Epistemic Dromology« two weeks ago at the train station in Hinterzarten in the Black Forest, where I encountered what the French

philosopher and urbanist Paul Virilio has called a »dromological paradox« also known as »racing standstill.« [Please don't ask me what I was doing in Hinterzarten]. Both a *Deutsche Bahn AG* regional express train and the scheduled rail replacement service had failed, leaving more than 300 people waiting, more or less heatedly, for a means of transportation that never arrived. A relentlessly accelerating modernity seemed to have come to a temporary end in Hinterzarten at that day. There was a quirky mix of activity and stagnation, with all movement circling around a zero point.

In academic contexts, where artistic research is situated, the interplay between the required acceleration on the one hand and the actual policy of braking on the other is also widespread. Project proposals are encouraged and then processed slowly [or very slowly…]. Speed is declared a virtue and acknowledged with factual sluggishness. An abundance of supposedly intrusive content leads sometimes to unbearable boredom.

In such contexts, a strange characteristic of capitalism seems to become tangible. It consists in working one's way towards immobility through bustling activity. This circumstance is the starting point of epistemic dromology. It asks how the relationship between (artistic) knowledge, acceleration and AI can be grasped. Pause

Perhaps we should begin by looking at a painting by Francis Bacon from 1976 that seems to capture the dromological paradox posited by Virilio a year later [in 1977 his famous book »Speed an Politics« was publishes for the first time]. It is the painting *Figure at a washbasin*. The subject of the painting appears to be paralyzed in a peculiar way, although it seems to be vibrating in the highest kinetic ecstasy. It is bent over a washbasin, the drainpipe of which opens up a circular arena – a ›dromos‹, as it is called in Greek, which means a raceway.

This raceway extends into pictorial space, just as it seems to lead into the monochrome background, into which the figure apparently wants to flee. An impulse that is additionally indicated by an indexical white arrow, a ›pointer‹ or ›digit‹ that implies something like the remnants of progress. The dynamic overall movement of the picture, its temporal progression, pushes into the drain of the washbasin, from which kinetic energy seems to be reflected back at the same time. The image thus revolves around a motionless void. The opening is too small to allow an escape into the off. The figure created by Bacon cannot, as desired, disappear from the stage of its pictorial re-presentation because the time-space conditions for this are not met. [It’s a bit like jumping right into impossibility.]

Dromology (from the ancient Greek *dromos* (racecourse) and *logos* (science), “the logic of the racecourse”) is how Virilio describes a transhistorical and transpolitical research and perspective for examining social conditions that focuses on aspects of speed and acceleration. It refers to the significance of historical stages and social developments as forms of expression of constantly changing speed conditions, which are closely linked to media history and technical progress.

All in all, Virilio's theory is a typically late-modern movement of thought inspired by the Marxist idea of the 'alienation' of 'man' and 'nature'. Modern man, shaped by the paradigm of capital accumulation, is driven by an accelerating technology that is running out of control, ultimately to plunge into ruin.

Can this train of thought still be relevant today, even though the earth has continued to turn and the final catastrophe has so far failed to materialize? And how does the »dromocracy« diagnosed by Virilio, the rule of acceleration, manifest itself in current academic research contexts like ours?

First of all, it can be said that the discourse around AI is always also a »dromoscours«, that is, to put it into virilios words, a discourse around speed and acceleration. It is about describing an increasing technological compression of real temporality that can handle the given sequence of algorithmic operations faster and faster and thus more efficiently.

The »Dromotechnology« AI extends latent-creative processes such as »machine learning« and »large language models«, which, in terms of time theory, lead the way of decoding given data arsenals into an epistemic zone of indistinguishability. The selection of relevant coding from a given pool of possibilities takes place too quickly to be reconstructed linearly. [It is precisely in this sense, dear Georg, that we speak of “Artistic Intelligence in Latent Creative Spaces” aka ARTILACS! And we are crossing our fingers that the ›Behörde‹ will give us the money after waiting for such a long time…]

Against this background [the Dromotechnology AI], the enormous investments made by companies in AI sometimes seem to be guided by the fear of losing out on a rapid economic development that has not even really begun. The ominously growing energy consumption is also taking on mythological proportions, which fuels an unconscious fear of a tech-related full-scale disaster. So all the coordinates for the drama of an »Artificial Intelligence Dromology« are in place, which could be examined using methods of artistic research.

What guiding coordinates would it be shaped by?

At this point, I can only briefly outline three theses, which we can then discuss together in a moment.

I. For one thing, AI can manage information, but in the strict, that is, philosophical sense, it cannot generate independent knowledge, which in epistemological terms gives it only the status of an increasingly accelerating auxiliary science [»Hilfswissenschaft«].

Compression technologies (summarization, explanation, structuring), as recently provided by AI, are part of the tools of any science. However, they cannot replace one's own research. In this context, one must make a strict and radical distinction between the concept of ›information‹ and that of ›knowledge‹. Information is everything that is scalable and thus compressible. One can summarize a standard work in an abstract. Knowledge, however, is fundamentally connected with the paths and detours of research, research paths, that is, with the possibility of change. In the course of the research, you change yourself, as the subject of the research presents itself and withdraws. The process of research and knowledge is therefore not scalable; it has nothing to do with the administrative technologies of an information society.

II. On the other hand, AI is decidedly problem-solving in orientation and organization. It lacks the core competence of differentiating problematization, which is indispensable for successful science. In this respect, in a sense it is going in exactly the wrong direction with its accumulating competencies. [In a sense, AI is running away from the real problems.] In philosophy, for example, the primary concern is not to solve problems, but rather to expose and understand the epistemic structure on which they are based. The relationship between question and answer thus becomes – as it also does in the artistic process – characteristically unbalanced. The answer is there, but the question must be sought, a problem that would notoriously overwhelm AI and – as an auxiliary science – may do so.]

III. Thirdly, and most importantly in this context, in the context of a discourse on artistic research, AI will never be able to take something like a political position, a fundamental flaw from an artistic perspective, which it can even reflect on itself, as my Adobe Acrobat »AI Assistant« assured' me yesterday. Without a political position, however, without a certain politics of knowledge, the idea of artistic research would be meaningless, since no artistic knowledge could be imagined that had not been born, at least unconsciously, out of an interconnection with politics. The auxiliary science A1 must therefore be well educated politically by its guiding science artistic research in order to avoid unpleasant 'slips'. #populism, fake news an so on]

I come to the conclusion:

The unquestionably rapid acceleration of AI challenges the knowledge production of artistic research to cultivate intensive, that is, 'other' and non-scalable speeds of thinking.

In the process, the concept of artistic knowledge itself can be sharpened and concretized, along with characteristic research speeds that bypass institutionalized slowness ´as an expression of economic power. The aim is to avoid falling into either shock-induced paralysis or blind obedience, but rather to provide alternative and creative speeds of knowledge to support the emerging and fruitful auxiliary science of AI. These would be, to quote Virilio at least, »rhythmological«, »musicological« and »tempological« speeds of knowledge production that escape the attempt at a linearizing economization.

Epistemic Dromology as Artistic Research would thus be *an investigation of the velocities at which artistic knowledge moves in the power-shaped contexts of algorithmic capitalism*.

One could also call it ›artistic intelligence‹.

Thank you.