

The Ghost in the Machine

Gilad Kenan

Ari Teperberg invites us to read his mind. He sits facing us, a laptop in front of him. He is silent and hardly moves. He types and the letters appear behind him, projected on a screen. "I am here" - the text points to itself - "and also here" - it gestures back to the typing body. He is simultaneously in two but not entirely distinct places. Where is he *really*? Is Ari the body or rather the written, projected thoughts? Are the latter more internal in some sense, exactly because they are totally external to the former?

Ari plays us a recording of Alexander Graham Bell's voice. He tells us that Bell experimented with engraving vocal air movements in wax. After remaining still and silent for more than a century a cutting-edge development made it possible to decipher these marks. Through YouTube his voice materializes once again in the room, resurrects long after the body which produced this voice has withered, crumbled and disappeared. State-of-the-art technology functions as a séance and shivers run down our spine in the presence of this ghost, who asks or perhaps begs us "hear my voice!" - words that we cannot but obey. Bell is there, in 19th century Boston, and here, in the engraved marks, in the movement of air, traversing distance and time.

Untitled Document reminds us that writing and inscription are always a form of séance and telepathy, and so are technologies of communication in general. They allow us to reach the other's mind within or without the body, across time and space, to preserve life beyond the limits of death, by transposing and exchanging one body for another. Paradoxically, it thereby produces the opposite effect as well: it arrests the animated voice in dead marks, the spontaneous movement crystallizes into a mechanical reiteration, and we are presented with the absence of the speaker, with their being out of reach or long gone. The piece foregrounds the fact that communication is bound by this paradox, always brings closer while drawing away, as if pointing to what must remain out of sight, it always exceeds itself and spills over.

The piece is woven by this structure, haunted by ghosts, memories whose imprints enable one to summon them, reanimate them, only to mourn their inaccessibility. Ari tells us, for example, how his grandmother in her last years with Alzheimer's gradually taking over kept on playing and singing the same old songs. Life and consciousness vaguely flickered through the automatic repetitive movement, as if the body is an organic recording machine or a technology conjuring her lost voice. We are listening to Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle* together with Ari's late aunt, who had correctly insisted there was a special and rare version, before it was finally found. Its online availability enables us to revive her memory and her memories, and here is Rossini with us in the room as well, laying on his deathbed, expecting us.

Ari's work makes a wise use of appropriation of technology, exploiting the fact that its functioning is never entirely fixed. Joybubbles, the blind child, devises a way to hack the phone network by mimicking the tones, while the search bar surprisingly serves Ari as an almost secret

place for communication of messages. It is precisely in the heart of the technical mechanism that the spark of spontaneity, of life and humanity, is discovered. Ari is almost more present and alive in the dancing characters on screen than in his typing body, just as Joybubbles finds comfort and escape from the violence surrounding him in the monotonous dial-tone.

Communication and mediation, their very possibility and limits, are recurring themes in Ari's works. In his previous work ***And My Heart Almost Stood Still*** he examined the possibility of translating sound to other senses, inspired by Hellen Keller's description of her experience of Beethoven's Ninth through touch. In the present work sound is transformed into writing, into engravings, into electrical signs, into pixels. Life, experience, memory, relationships, all depend on the possibility of transformation from one medium to another, on the fidelity of translation, which is never that simple and transparent. Ari's works are a testimony for the way the medium always has its own materiality, its own logic, to the way translation always leaves its mark, and to the fact that the pure origin is always already lost.

But this is not at all a tragic testimony. This translation is a great comfort, it's all we have. The human condition is this possibility to reach our hand and touch, to find the spark in the machine, in the dead matter, in the declining body, in the fading memory. The work delicately and brilliantly exposes how communication opens up doors in the walls surrounding us. The doors remain locked by marks and writing, while life, memory and presence are the object of our desperate hope that something lies on the other side. In that sense, Ari never abandoned his childhood's fantasy to invent a machine that would generate a key to open all doors. He translated this machine to a different medium.

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