Construing *with* the machine

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Writing about 'artificial life', Marilyn Strathern once observed that such phrases "depend on a balance between the synthesis that produces a novel entity and the analytical differentiation of elements without which the combination would not be visible" (1992: 2). Much the same could be said of 'artificial intelligence', which without the sense of a balancing act does little more than name a technical enterprise whose achievements quickly become part of the furniture. Roger Shank and Lawrence Birnbaum have noted that deep questions of intelligence implied by its name "are rarely part of the intellectual debate about the possibilities for AI… [and] are often not part of the debate about human capabilities either" (2009/1994: 79). As Donna Haraway writes (with reference to Strathern), "It matters what thoughts think thoughts… what knowledges know knowledges… what relations relate relations… what worlds world worlds" (2016: 35). What thoughts, then, what knowledges, relations and worlds follow from the yoking together (Samuel Johnson would have said, a violent one) of 'artificial' and 'intelligence'? How do we stay aware of and develop its semantic balancing act? How do we avoid "Single vision & Newtons sleep" (Blake 1802)?

The beginning I take is to imagine as thoroughly and concretely as possible, with as much attention to the engineering and mathematics as someone severely undereducated in those subjects can give it, what a fully realised AI would be like. I see two ways to go from there. The first follows the well-trodden lead of Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014), Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* (2011--) and a host of others into Masahiro Mori's "uncanny valley" (Mori 2012/1970; Kageki 2012). There we find opportunities to ask rich historical and philosophical questions. The other, less trodden path is to treat our imagined creature anthropologically, as an other faced by the other that is us, as a digital native, and then set about *with* it (or with *whom*) to investigate David Gooding's *construals*, his "flexible, quasi-linguistic messengers between the perceptual and the conceptual" (1986: 208). This is the tack I take here. Avoiding all manner of prognostication, I do not speculate on where this tack might take us, whether to a destination we aim for, or to some other. Rather I consider the grand challenges and hard questions it raises, and ask for help with them.

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