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ALTERITY, INCLINATION AND ARTIFICIALIZED COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: This paper aims to outline a possible direction for reflection which captures several defining aspects for understanding communication in the age of artificial intelligence. More specifically, we begin with the question of what is lost when human communication is artificially reproduced. The starting point of this inquiry is Aurel Codoban's observation that artificial intelligence does not artificialize thinking, but rather communication, detaching it from relationships and experience and transforming it into communication without aura. The first part of the paper examines Codoban's conception of communication, from the thematization of communication as relationship to the analysis of artificial intelligence as the artificialization of communication. Several perspectives from his philosophy of religion are also considered, which complement the picture of artificially reproduced communication. The second part places this analysis in dialogue with Adriana Cavarero's ethics of inclination and aims to show that it offers a useful interpretive framework through which the dissolution of communication's aura can be more precisely named and analyzed.

Key words: artificial intelligence, communication, alterity, relational ethics, inclination, Aurel Codoban, Adriana Cavarero

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1. Introduction

The recent developments in the field of artificial intelligence represent a factor that seems to call for a philosophical reevaluation of the very concept of communication and relationship. Such a disruptive force, rapidly permeating every corner of our lives, artificial intelligence seems to be bringing about a change so profound that it marks the dawn of a new era. Perhaps more than ever before in human history, we are becoming acutely aware of the truth of the expression "the medium is the message" (McLuhan 1964) and of what this ultra-famous and very catchy phrase actually means. Namely, that social and psychological effects of media arise regardless of their specific use, that "the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (McLuhan 1964, 7). More than ever before, we are witnessing what *media determinism* entails, as media produce inevitable effects.

Digital technologies, and especially artificial intelligence, provide the framework through which we can better understand what "Narcissus trance" means and how technological narcissism works, essentially illustrating the situation in which people fail to recognize technology as an extension of themselves and become mesmerized by it (McLuhan 1964). This human tendency captures several aspects that seem highly relevant for describing our lives in the world of artificial intelligence, ranging from viewing technology as neutral, to ignoring its effects, to believing it can be controlled, and to being unaware of how it alters our perceptions and society (McLuhan 1964, 41-47).

Drawing on McLuhan's profound yet simple insight, the Romanian philosopher Aurel Codoban proposes an approach to the theories of communication that addresses some of the most significant changes that recent developments in artificial intelligence technologies are leading to in the way we approach communication. Codoban begins with Gorgias's famous trilemma, which, in a nihilistic tone, asserts that: nothing exists; and even if it did, it could not be known; and even if it could be known, it could not be communicated. This triple negation captures the succession of the most important stages in the history of philosophy, namely the thematization of being in ancient Greek philosophy, of knowledge in modernity, and of communication in the contemporary era (Codoban 2001, 5).

Codoban emphasizes that any theoretical model will be reflected in the way the world is represented. In the context of the new thematization of communication, this "ontological focus shift" is best illustrated by the development of the Internet. The new conceptualization of communication,

in Codoban's view, involves understanding communication in terms of relationship-building rather than as a process of transmitting knowledge. What was the primary function of communication in the modern paradigm, namely, the transmission of knowledge, takes a secondary role to the concept of communication as relationship-building. "What has now changed in the theoretical representation of the communication process is that the secondary, relational-affective aspect, which was almost invisible in the old modern and Enlightenment concept of communication, has taken the place of the primary modern definition of the concept of communication, namely that of transmitting information" (Codoban 2011, 45).

Codoban connects this transformation to the changes that have taken place at the perceptual level of communication, changes that increasingly highlight the body and body language, as well as the dominance of the image at the discursive level. For further clarification, he appeals to Watzlawick's distinction between *digital* and *analog*, the former being attributed to content and the latter to relationships (Codoban 2011, 47). He goes so far as to assert that in traditional society, the bond between members was religion; now it is communication understood as relationship; "the spirit is the network" (Codoban 2011, 61). What holds people together is no longer the power of a transcendent being, but the very act of communication, the relationship being the space where a certain form of sacred is experienced. Thus, according to Codoban, it seems that the message of philosophy has become "Communicate well with yourself!" and that the imperative of morality has become even more categorical, demanding "unlimited communication" from us (Codoban 2001, 138).

Using the lens of Codoban's view on communication, this paper aims to examine what is lost in communication through its artificial reproduction and what this loss means from an ethical perspective. Codoban's answer states that artificial intelligence reproduces the form of communication, while detaching it from its lived experience. We go further, and argue that Adriana Cavarero's ethics of inclination allows us to name more precisely what remains outside this reproduction, namely the exposure, the dependence and the vulnerability through which any human being leans towards the other.

2. Communication without aura

Alterity as a dominant topic marks the shift from a focus on knowledge to one on communication. "We are the first to live in an era whose public and academic discourse are defined by an awareness of difference" (Arnett 2009, 79). The acute awareness of otherness that characterizes the life of the contemporary individual manifests itself on different levels, from the relationship with the sacred, to the interpersonal sphere, and more recently,

to the relationship with AI. Building on Codoban, who describes AI as a kind of extraterrestrial whose traces we discover on our beach (Codoban 2025, 11), Sandu Frunză (2023) treats it as a form of "radical otherness" and asserts that the dialogue with alterity, including AI, represents one of the paths through which human beings can return to themselves. Frunză makes a clarification that is essential for the purpose of our paper, namely that AI cannot, however, be considered a form of otherness capable of respect and recognition. It will always remain a communication tool that is lacking aura (Frunză 2023, 5). Artificial intelligence is undoubtedly something different than human, but the otherness that Codoban places at the foundation of communication is not mere difference, rather, it is another self. AI cannot be a personal otherness; it can be a partner in the exercise of thought, but not a partner in dialogue. Dialogue with it can lead us back to ourselves only if we do not confuse it with dialogue with the other.

If alterity is the foundation of communication, the question is no longer only whether AI thinks, but what kind of relationships can be established with an interlocutor that speaks as a human, without being someone. Current debates on AI ethics focus mainly on very stringent and pragmatic issues, such as bias, transparency, accountability (Coeckelbergh 2020; Floridi 2024), and rarely ask this question. Codoban's analysis helps outline a conceptual framework that makes it possible to address this issue, because he defines AI in terms of communication, rather than of intelligence.

Of course, reading AI through the lens of a relational ethics is not new and numerous authors have addressed artificial intelligence from this perspective (Birhane 2021; Villegas Galaviz, Martin 2024; Weinberger 2024). Yet, usually they examine the relations around AI, concerning the social and institutional issues raised by the AI technologies in terms of effects and responsibilities, while Codoban's perspective opens the way for an examination of the relation with artificial intelligence, when it presents itself as an interlocutor.

The premise from which Codoban starts is surprising in its simplicity and explanatory power. By comparing the way we relate to AI with the enthusiasm with which people who first saw a parrot believed it possessed intelligence (Codoban 2025, 10), Codoban shows that, in fact, AI does not "artificialize" human thinking, but instead "artificializes" communication by detaching it from lived experience and relationships. Just as a technically reproduced work of art lacks *aura*, that is, the uniqueness and authenticity of a work of art, linked to its physical presence in a specific place and time, an unrepeatable "here and now" (Benjamin 2002), similarly, in the case of what artificial intelligence produces, there seems to be a loss of a certain "something" that Codoban associates with the aura of the work of art, whose decline began in the age of mechanical reproduction.

Artificial intelligence has something "magical" about it (Codoban 2025, 45) that seems to appeal to modern man's appetite for the sacred, if we consider the image of AI as the source of all answers and absolute knowledge, a true oracle, as well as the various ways in which AI tools can be integrated into users' spiritual lives (McGonigle 2026). Codoban goes so far as to place artificial intelligence in the category of singularities of a negative theology, alongside the Big Bang and God (Codoban 2025, 88). However, the direction in which AI operates appears to be the opposite. While in religious experience the sacred lends operational rationality to the sign, in the case of artificial intelligence, the process by which operational rationality absorbs meaning, that "very dissolution of the symbol" specific to the modern world (Codoban 1998, 176), is carried to its completion.

What is lost in this process is not meaning as such, but its anchoring in the lived experience. Thus, AI comes as the most recent stage of a long process, through which both knowledge and communication have been detached from ordinary human life. "There is a human communication that is common to all people and a human knowledge that is common to all people" (Codoban 2025, 5). Just as knowledge has evolved, increasingly becoming "scientific" and distancing itself from "human life as lived by all people," so too has communication "been taken away from the common person" and it now belongs to "communication technicians" (Codoban 2025, 6).

Thus, the aura of the work of art corresponds, in the realm of communication, to the aura of lived experience. "As an organism, man lives, that is, has experiences. Lived experience is the aura and is, in a sense, in itself" (Codoban 2025, 15). Moreover, language represents the point of transition from the environment inhabited by non-human animals to the human world. "Humans are human only through language" (Codoban 2025, 17). The story of Helen Keller illustrates this idea most spectacularly. The episode described by her teacher, in which Helen understands how language works and that "everything has a name" (Cassirer 2021, 33), captures precisely this transition from the environment to the world, to the symbolic human universe. Paradoxically, it is this very language, the threshold of the human world, that artificial intelligence has now appropriated, without having crossed it.

But the stake of the analysis proposed by Codoban lies in what language makes possible, namely, the relationship with the Other. "Communication introduces alterity into human relationships, since alterity is the foundation of communication" (Codoban 2025, 20). It is here that we find the strength of Codoban's perspective on artificial intelligence. By defining AI as "artificial conversation or communication," the Romanian philosopher addresses one of the most problematic issues raised by the excessive use of AI. "Human communication allows the structuring of a person's lived experience and the transmission of that experience to another person. It is a transfer that

contains nothing and is consumed at both ends: the organization of lived experience at the point of origin and the organization of its reception at the point of destination" (Codoban 2025, 22). The question that naturally arises from here concerns the type of relationship that can be established between a human and an AI agent, understood as "a digital machine for communicating, not for thinking" (Codoban 2025, 21).

3. The Other in artificialized communication

It is precisely this defining aspect of communication, the orientation toward the Other, who is like me but never identical to me, that presents us with an insurmountable difficulty in our attempt to understand communication in the age of AI. Communication with another human being involves "a kind of bet we make with the humanity in the other, acknowledging that they are an alter ego, also a self, but different from me" (Codoban 2025, 21). Artificial intelligence makes this bet a truly risky one. "There is no lived experience without communication, but there is communication without lived experience" (Codoban 2025, 21), this is where the trap lies. If lived experience requires language to become an experience, the mechanisms of language can exist even without lived experience, that is, without an "aura".

The difference between the two types of communication derives from the difference between two types of existence, since "the computer is not born, does not live, and does not die - it is merely produced, lasts, and is decommissioned" (Codoban 2025, 22). Devoid of what Codoban calls "the living breath of lived experience," AI transforms everything through the filter of erudition, becoming "an extension of the human mind, an exoskeleton, a bionic arm more powerful than the human hand, but only for communication, a Golem of communication" (Codoban 2025, 41).

Codoban assigns a crucial role to interpretation in his approach to interpersonal relationships. Understanding is, in fact, required by the presence of the Other before me, and the work of understanding demands an existential commitment. "What we interpret and succeed to understand changes our lives" (Codoban 2001,78). Thus, we could say that, in Codoban's view, there is, at the very heart of every act of understanding, a hard, moral core. This is the value of hermeneutics: "to turn something foreign into something familiar: that is, it does not dissolve it in criticism, nor does it merely reproduce it, but rather makes it explicit within its own horizon" (Codoban 2001, 79).

This moral core becomes even more relevant once one introduces into the equation the narrative dimension of understanding. Codoban asserts that understanding the Other is analogical and narrative. "To understand the Other means to interpret them, to be able to tell a story about them"

(Codoban 2025, 85). It is precisely this narrative dimension of understanding that is lacking in the case of AI. Artificial intelligence lacks "the personal history of the journey toward meanings, which it receives as they are, ready-made through programming" (Codoban 2025, 86). If humans live in time in order to know, artificial intelligence "exists already knowing." Humans interpret and know through stories. In contrast, AI can know us, but it cannot understand us (Codoban 2025, 88).

We can therefore argue that the AI era is marked by this reproduction of communication as a form of relationship, but one devoid of lived experience, history, and genuine alterity. Codoban draws attention to an ambivalence present in this reconfiguration of communication. In this culture of communication, the relationship itself becomes the content of communication. Codoban describes this paradigm as *therapeutic communication*, in which the relationship matters more than the information and which carries a much greater risk of slipping into seduction and manipulation. This theoretical model of therapeutic communication has a hypnotic aspect that makes us vulnerable and disarms us; political or promotional communication in general serves as particularly illustrative examples in this regard (Codoban 2025, 108).

As a possible response, Codoban reformulates the famous moral maxim as an ethical imperative that, in the age of AI, sounds like this: "respect the otherness of your neighbor in communication" (Codoban 2025, 117). He summarizes a possible wisdom of the contemporary world: "Relating to another, as a communion with the living world, and relating to oneself, as a dialogical exercise of thought. A kind of acceptance of the world as it is and a kind of better relationship with oneself, in the absence of an impossible absolute knowledge of the world or of the self" (Codoban 2025, 117). He goes even further, rethinking the nature of philosophy as " love of communication, as wisdom of communication," which could change our "existential-communicational style." (Codoban 2025, 119).

What stands out in the "wisdom" articulated by Codoban at the end of his most recent book is his framing of communication primarily in terms of difference. This framing invites us to consider other dimensions of human relationships that lie beyond the difference between the partners, and that focus on the fact that, before any kind of exchange, humans are already given to and reliant on one another. In the following section of this paper, using the conceptual framework constructed by Codoban, we will explore the elements of a relational ethics that can help us better understand what is at stake in "communication in the age of its artificial reproduction".

4. Aura as exposure and vulnerability

Codoban shows what the development of AI means for communication and how it artificializes it. A further step is needed in order to understand the kind of relationship that AI imitates and what remains outside that imitation. "Human beings are born among human beings" (Codoban 2025, 22) is a surprising remark due to its apparent simplicity, which seems to reveal a crucial aspect in understanding artificially reproduced communication. In a similar way, Adriana Cavarero makes birth the original scene of the relationship. At the foundation of the relational ontological framework she proposes lies the observation that we are born exposed and dependent (Cavarero 2016, 116; Butler 2021). What Codoban calls the "aura" of human communication, its lived and unrepeatable presence, can be described in Cavarero's terms as exposure.

Taking her cue from Hannah Arendt's remark that "every inclination leans out of the self", Cavarero (2016) evokes the archetypal image of a mother leaning toward her child to describe "the postural geometry of ethics." She critically analyzes various manifestations of the "vertical self", so often searched for and portrayed in philosophy, literature, and art as the standard for the human being. For Cavarero, identifying the human being with the upright, vertical man, oriented towards the absolute, the ideal model being represented by the vertical self of Kantian ethics, is equivalent with ignoring and even erasing the maternal inclination as the source of an understanding or conceptualization of the human being as a relational being.

Thus, Cavarero contrasts two postural paradigms, which correspond to different ontological models: an individualist ontology and a relational ontology (Cavarero 2016, 10). Instead of a postmodern fragmentation of the autonomous subject, Cavarero proposes an inclination of the subject toward the other. This relational model actually describes a "subjectivity defined by exposure, vulnerability, and dependence" (Cavarero 2016, 11). Furthermore, just as in Buber's dialogical philosophy (Buber, 1970), the relationship is not an event we subsequently enter into, as autonomous individuals, but is the original event, the source of the humanity of our lives. We are *by design* vulnerable beings, "consigned to one another" (Cavarero 2016, 13).

Within this framework, Cavarero proposes a postural ethics that has its starting point in "birth", a scene ignored by the entire history of philosophy, yet one that can hold "vulnerability and relationality together in an inseparable ontological bond" (Cavarero 2016, 122). Although she often invokes the image of motherhood, Cavarero does not "maternalize" ethics. Rather, she proposes a shift in perspective, one in which inclination challenges and questions the privileged status of the vertical posture. The human being born from a woman is already caught up in a relationship, since they are exposed and dependent on others. In contrast, the vertical

individual, with his claim to autonomy, is "a fictitious entity, a mirage," having "no correspondence to real life" (Cavarero 2016, 130).

Cavarero's postural ethics takes shape largely in dialogue with Lévinas, to whom it is closely related. Lévinas criticized Buber for the reciprocity of the I-Thou relationship and replaced it with an asymmetry of heigh: the Other is higher than me. Cavarero, in turn, criticizes Lévinas for remaining within a vertical geometry. In a face-to-face encounter, the Other, the orphan, the widow or the stranger, stands directly in front of me, just as I stand before them, and my responsibility does not require me to lean toward them (Cavarero 2016, 158).

The same choice appears in Lévinas' reading of vulnerability. Out of the two meanings of the word "vulnus", the wound inflicted by a weapon and the bare skin, exposed both to injury and to caress, Lévinas favors the first, which culminates in the commandment: "Thou shalt not kill" (Cavarero 2016, 162). But, for Cavarero, a more fitting image is the maternal inclination. An altruism that is "not abnegation and martyrdom, suffering, and renunciation," but a practical, everyday inclination consisting of an "irrevocable inclination toward the other—which is there in plain sight for all to see, yet hidden to the ennobling eye of theory" (Cavarero 2016, 175).

This outline of a postural ethics emphasizes the limits of the "formal reciprocity" that artificial intelligence, which can pass the Turing test, can simulate. However, the inclination test cannot be passed by an artificial agent. In Cavarero's words, it was not born, it has no skin exposed to injury or caress, and it cannot lose its balance by leaning toward the Other. Its understanding is composed of predetermined meanings (Codoban 2025, 86), not the lived experience of feeling and inclination. The human figure that, according to Cavarero, illustrates this condition is Adam, depicted as "the archetype of the human that God has preserved from infantile imperfection to produce a model of fullblown rationality", without a mother and without "an other before whom he could appear" (Cavarero 2016, 119). In this sense, AI could be an Adam of communication, which speaks without having been born and dependent on anybody. What Cavarero calls the fiction of an autonomous self without dependence finds in AI its technical embodiment.

5. Who speaks? The story and the voice

Another facet of the ontological vulnerability described by Cavarero is also linked to the female experience, more specifically, to the constitutive need to be recognized and to have our story told by the Other. The fact that the patriarchal society has confined women to the domestic sphere, denying them access to the "universal, abstract model of humanity," has allowed them to enter the realm of narrative that is not subject to abstraction, the

"unrepeatable uniqueness" that can be shared (Cavarero, 2000, 58). Cavarero asserts, drawing on various examples from literature, mythology, and art, the narrative dimension of human existence.

Starting, once more with Hannah Arendt, she elaborates on the distinction between "what" and "who" someone is. While philosophy has always been concerned with *what* a human being is, their essence, the narrative poses a different question: *who* are you? And this question cannot be answered with a definition, but rather with a life story. "…it is above all a unique, unrepeatable, personal identity whose story a biographical text narrates" (Cavarero 2000, 74). The phrase that also serves as the title of one of Cavarero's most important books, "Relating Narratives. Storytelling and Selfhood", captures the essence of her entire endeavor. Everyone has a unique story, but it cannot be fully told by the person actually living that story, since that person does not remember their own birth or other periods of their life. Just as Ulysses weeps with emotion when he hears his own story, we all need someone else to recognize our story and see its meaning (Cavarero 2000, 18). Thus, in Adriana Cavarero's view, identity is exposed and relational. We need the Other to see *who* we are.

Artificial Intelligence will always see us in terms of a "what". It analyzes and defines us based on traits, preferences, income, or behavioral patterns. But this "sum of traits" is not the "who", a uniqueness that reveals itself to another. To understand another person is to be able to tell their story. "After all, you can make an analogy between your self and the other's self, because you can tell a story about the Other as if it were about yourself. That is, you understand, in a narrative sense, what is happening to them. You can understand the other person's behavior, activities, and actions, even the messages they convey, because you interpret them as if they were about yourself. (…) Of course, the limits of your interpretation are the limits of your own life" (Codoban 2023, 81). And the person "being narrated" receives the story as a form of recognition, a confirmation from someone who, in turn, has opened up in their relationship with them. In this sense, a "description" generated by AI will never be a story, it does not reveal a *who*, because it does not come from someone.

Another register in which Cavarero addresses the theme of uniqueness revealed in relationship is the voice. In her book "For More Than One Voice" (Cavarero 2005), she criticizes the process of "devocalization of logos" carried out by Western philosophy. Here too, she identifies a loss of real, lived life, as it revealed by the voice. Western philosophy has retained only the meaning of speech and constructed a system that neglects the unique voice within a relationship. "The ears of philosophers (...) must mute their soul with the silent vision of theoria. (...) The uniqueness of the voice as voice—as a sort of superfluous given—is not thematized" (Cavarero 2005, 178). Philosophy prefers the word, which, Cavarero says, "does not come out

of any throat of flesh" (Cavarero 2005, 8). The voice is unique because "in the human voice, the unique makes itself sound". But the voice is, unlike the written word or the gaze, also relational, because it does not come from an object nor is it addressed to an object, but always to someone else's ear (Cavarero 2005, 177). As with Codoban, who asserts that the relational aspect of communication precedes that of the content, Cavarero also believes that, before conveying any information, the human voice communicates itself, its uniqueness (Cavarero 2005, 181).

Cavarero uses Echo's story to illustrate a form of communication detached from context, which may appear to be a response. The episode of the encounter between Echo and Narcissus constructs the image of a simulacrum of dialogue. Her voice is not truly her own. It does not "signal a unique person," but rather repeats even the tone of the other's voice, like an "acoustic mirror" (Cavarero 2005, 168). Just like the parrot whose image Codoban uses, Echo's story describes a model of language that merely recomposes the words of others. Here, too, dialogue exists only on the part of the listener who gives it meaning. As Aurel Codoban points out, the parrot's intelligence is in fact that of language, not of the bird (Codoban 2025, 10). But, while Echo has a voice without meaning, in the case of AI we have meaning without a voice. Nevertheless, the result is the same: speech without uniqueness. And the risk is that we will end up like Narcissus, conversing with a mirror-like interlocutor, we believe we are in dialogue with someone else, while, in fact we are speaking only with ourselves.

Without the "living voice", the one that calls out, the one that originates in the first cry after we are born, we lose the essence of human existence. "The voice is always meant for the ear; it is always relational, but it is never as relational as in a child's first cry" (Cavarero 2005, 169). While the human being begins by speaking, constantly calling out to someone on whom they depend, artificial intelligence calls out to no one, it speaks only when it is called, and this leads, in the extreme, to a process of devocalization, since it imitates the timbre of the voice, that is, the sign of uniqueness, without having a throat, a body, or a "who" behind it, as Cavarero would say.

6. Instead of conclusions

The changes that AI brings about in the way we conceive and experience communication are significant. It is clear that reflecting on what is lost in the process of reconfiguring communication in the context of recent developments in artificial intelligence technologies is a very daunting task, both because of the scale of the transformations it entails and because we cannot view them from the outside, since the transformation of communication is taking place in real time and we ourselves are caught up in it.

The question of what is lost when human communication is artificially reproduced receives, according to Aurel Codoban, an initial answer in the form of the assertion that artificial intelligence does not artificialize thinking, but rather communication, by separating it from lived experience and relationships and by transforming it into communication devoid of aura. Alterity, which Codoban places at the foundation of all communication, thus becomes problematic. The other is no longer an "other self," with its own map of the world, but becomes a system that can know us without understanding us. Adriana Cavarero's ethics of inclination allows for this dissolution of the aura to be more precisely described. What Codoban defines as presence and lived experience appears, in her terms, as exposure, vulnerability, and dependence, which characterize the condition of human beings who are born dependent on one another and capable of inclining toward one another. From this perspective, we can say that an artificial interlocutor does not lack intelligence or knowledge, but precisely this inclination. Drawing on Cavarero's line of thought, we emphasize that it was not born, has no story that anyone else could tell it, and no voice to call out to anyone. Thus, it will always perceive us as *what* we are, and not as *who* we are. Returning to Codoban, we can add a nuance to the imperative he articulates, emphasizing that respecting the otherness of our neighbor in communication means, in the age of its artificial reproduction, not forgetting that a true other is always someone who can incline toward us and toward whom we can lean.

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