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Analysing Structures of Silence in AI-mediated Public Spheres

Abstract:

In this paper, I discuss what it will mean for democratic public spheres if more and more content is produced by generative technology based on large language models (LLMs), as represented by OpenAI in the form of Generative Pre-training Transformer (GPT). Although this type of technology can clearly help improve public discourse on a number of parameters, my reading of Deleuze leads me to contend that its heavy reliance on analyses of historical content is a shortcoming. Deleuze has argued that fruitful exchanges require an understanding of how silence helps to constitute what is said. If we cannot work flexibly with silence, what is said loses value. The paper elaborates on this point by discussing how Heidegger's Fourfold can be read as suggestions for how silence determines what we can say in communicative exchanges. Based on analyses of the technical foundations underpinning AI technology, I argue they tend to reproduce existing structures of silence and that this makes it important to realise that allowing AI to play a greater role in the production of public content still leaves us with the task of challenging existing structures. If we do not face up to that challenge, something will be lost in terms of the ability of the citizen to relate critically and reflexively to the discursive horizons of ongoing public discourse.

I. Introduction

Digital media have structured public exchanges to an increasing extent since the mid-1990s. Usenet, www, email lists, internet forums, weblogs, social media, mobile technology, and now AI-supported media have significantly enhanced the potential to make oneself heard in publicly accessible exchanges. As Luciano Floridi has shown, these technological developments have had such a profound impact on our society that it no longer makes sense to draw a sharp distinction between physical and virtual realities, as these are closely interconnected in a frictionless "infosphere" (Floridi 2014, pp. 40-56; 2024, pp. 41-48). Not that all citizens can participate exactly as they wish, and as might be democratically desirable (see Bohman 2004; Hansen 2014; Saco 2002; Zittrain 2008), but the diversity and accessibility of digital technology undoubtedly make it easier to engage in public discourse.

Reflections on how to provide a basis for democratic exchange in public spheres have traditionally (at least since the Enlightenment) revolved around ideas of freedom of expression, press and information. From the 19th century, these ideas have been coupled with ideas about a critical Fourth Estate whose duty it is, among many other things, to ensure that public discourse is not dominated solely by those in positions of power. The basic idea has been that citizens' participation in public discourse should be facilitated (Oster 2015, 29-30; Hampton 2010; Steel 2012; Barendt 2007, ch. 1). From this perspective, greater accessibility via digital media is, *ceteris paribus*, a democratic improvement compared with traditional mass media.

Debate has, however, raged about whether the rise of online media has been good or bad for democratic discourse ever since the internet became a dominant factor in life (see Kuehn and Salter 2020; Raymond 2001; Lessig 2006; Castells 2001; Feenberg 2002; Miller and Vaccari 2020). In isolation, it is, of course, a good thing to be able to express oneself in public dialogue. However, evaluation of public exchanges cannot focus solely on the *productive* or *expressive* aspects of communication. It is important to consider the *receiving* or *listening* aspects as well. Otherwise we may end in a situation where there are huge amounts of available information, but it does not become

productive knowledge, due to simplified listening patterns (Hansen 2018) and informational overload or pollution (Floridi 2014, 15; 2024, 46–48). New information technologies have enabled an increase in content production to such an extent that traditional reflections about how to counteract a potential lack of information and opinions are being replaced more and more by reflections about how to handle a lack of attention (Lanham, 2007; Rosales, 2023).

Awareness of the importance of the conditions for and practices of listening has thus gradually gained prominence in the 21st century (Dobson 2014; Wolvin 2010; Crawford 2009; Voegelin 2010; Dreher and Mondal 2018). I have argued elsewhere (Hansen 2026) that it is important not only to examine structures and practices of listening to what others actually say but also to examine how it is possible to listen to what is *not* said. In the words of Jean-Luc Nancy:

... to listen is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible. (Nancy 2007, 6)

Although it is clearly important to listen to what others are saying in dialogues and conversations, every utterance is inscribed in discursive structures that invite a particular focus on certain aspects of the reality under discussion and so it is also crucial to listen for what is *outside* the discursive horizon of the exchanges in question.

I have argued (Hansen 2021a; 2026; 2024c; 2024a) that it is helpful to analyse such “outsides” of discursive horizons by reflecting on the structures of silence that underpin the discursive agenda. Silence is a phenomenon that comes in countless forms and is therefore difficult to capture in a single, unifying concept. In the current paper, I will focus on the silence that is a prerequisite for language to have a semantic relationship to reality, i.e. the discursive silence that is a precondition for words that operate by focusing on certain aspects of reality at the expense of others. This silence plays a role as an underlying structural element in our language and in our linguistic practices. What we say takes on meaning in relation to what we simultaneously put aside, render silent. Linguistic exchanges cannot work without structural silence. However, in critical public exchanges it can be of value to become aware of how this silence operates within dominant discursive horizons (elaborated in Hansen 2021a; 2024c; 2026).

I will actualise this point in a discussion of the benefits and challenges that come with the emergence of LLM-based generative AI technology. I will (i) start with an interpretation of Deleuze that elucidates how silence (in a more concrete form than sketched above) is important for democratic discourse because it creates a space in which to become aware of what lies at the heart of, but also outside (because of structural silence), our existing communicative exchanges. I will then (ii) argue that Heidegger’s analyses of the Fourfold offers four tangible ways in which silence helps to constitute our exchanges. In section (iii) I show how, on a technological level, LLM-based forms of generative artificial intelligence, as we have seen with OpenAI’s GPTs, embody some of the problems Deleuze identifies. I discuss (iv) how this is a problem in relation to a democratic public sphere. The paper ends with (v) a reflection on whether it is possible to design artificial intelligence to address these challenges. I argue that it is unlikely and that an urgent task, as things stand, would be to reinterpret journalism’s democratic role and make it clear that good journalism is about coping flexibly with structures of silence.

II. The Importance of Silence in Public Exchanges

Deleuze’s engagement with technological aspects of society is well known. An important aspect of this is his analysis of how technologies affect the temporal flows of society. The point here is that technologies cannot be reduced to their materiality, but must be analysed closely in relation to social practices that are both enabled and imposed on citizens. An example of this mechanism is expressed

in the following quote from 1985, at a time when the democratic public sphere was still dominated by traditional mass media such as newspapers, radio and TV, Deleuze voiced this concern:

...it's not a problem of getting people to express themselves but of providing little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say. Repressive forces don't stop people expressing themselves but rather force them to express themselves. [...] What we're plagued by these days isn't any blocking of communication, but pointless statements. (Deleuze 1995, 129)

The quote is from a passage in *Negotiations*, where Deleuze discusses the book, the film, cinema, the picture, literature as machines. In the quote, Deleuze argues that the prevailing machines of the time of the writing of the text contained a constant urge upon citizens to express themselves and respond to information that is imposed on them. It is well documented that this concern is not just a matter of academic interest. The concept of 'information flooding' as a tool for those in power to divert the public's attention away from information that shows their rulers in a bad light has been studied and analysed by several writers (Floridi 2014, 15; Schulz 2015; Roberts 2018, ch.6; Voioovich 2022).

It goes without saying that a machine-analysis of the media from the mid 1980's cannot simply be transferred as a valid analysis of the public sphere of today. In recent years, G. Wellner has given an updated analysis of how Deleuze's analyses can illuminate how a technology sets the framework for people today (Wellner 2022). A special feature of newer technologies is their decentralisation, but this does not mean that technologies has less control over those who use it – on the contrary (Galloway 2004; Cobbe 2021).

Deleuze's concern is that over-engagement in public exchanges precludes thoughtfulness. The claim should not be overstated – at times, participation in public exchanges does occasion thoughtfulness, especially if we listen carefully to the challenges our opponents pose to our understanding of the situation. However, for conversations to be challenging in this way, it is important that participants are not overwhelmed by demands to participate and that they have time to think about what is said and what new input they might add.

This is where Deleuze calls for "little gaps of solitude and silence"¹ in which [we] might eventually find something to say". Without breaks, the participants are trapped within the horizons of the exchanges and end up merely repeating their positions over and over again.² According to Deleuze's analysis, mere passive repetition leads to propositions that are of no interest – but this does not mean they are without implications:

...a concept's power comes from the way it's repeated... (Deleuze 1995, 147)

In other words, the ability to control which statements are repeated in public discourse is a powerful tool.

This last point is not unique to Deleuze. It is a fundamental idea in theories of agenda-setting (Wanta and Alkazemi 2018; McCombs 2014; Buchmeier 2020), framing theories (Chong and Druckman 2007; Entman 1993; Johnson-Cartee 2004), discourse theoretical approaches (Dijk 2011; Fairclough 1992; 2013; 2015; Flowerdew and Richardson 2018; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002), etc. Deleuze argues that to break with "domesticating forces" that seek hegemonic discursive horizons, it is important to nurture "creative forces" (Deleuze 1995, 131). However, in contrast to a number of the

¹Notice, that this kind of silence is not identical with the structural kind of silence which is the main focus of this paper. In Deleuze's text, structural silence is reflected in his analyses of style – see below.

²This part of Deleuze's argument has great similarities with Heidegger's early analyses of how "Rede" (discourse) deteriorates into "Gerede" (idle talk – Heidegger 2010, §34-35; Hansen 2021; 2024a). It should be noted, however, that just as with Heidegger, though in a different way, Deleuze's notion of repetition is initially ontological. Deleuze is not as such critical of repetition, however in the context the problem is passive repetition (decoupled from the notion of difference – McMahon 2011; Colebrook 2002, 5).

more traditional models for analysing discursive hegemony, Deleuze claims that such creative breaks with the existing structures presuppose that we actively work with *silence*:

A creator who isn't grabbed around the throat by a set of impossibilities is no creator [...], because without a set of impossibilities, you won't have the line of flight [fr: ligne de fuite], the exit that is creation, the power of falsity that is truth. [...] So style requires a lot of silence and work [...]. Because you don't get a style just by putting words together, combining phrases, using ideas. You have to open up words, break things open, to free earth's vectors. (Deleuze 1995, 133-4)

Deleuze argues that there is a creative impulse in becoming aware of "a set of impossibilities". As general claims, the quote admittedly contains a number of exaggerations, since it is very well possible to be creative (in a sense) without being "grabbed around the throat by a set of impossibilities", just as "style" (in linguistic exchanges) can be about "putting words together" in particular ways. The point to be made in what follows, however, is that creativity cannot be *exhausted* simply by combining words in new ways. There is another form of creativity involved in feeling challenged by "a set of impossibilities", which is important in terms of developing an awareness of what lies beyond the existing set of possibilities.

In summary, it can be said that Deleuze brings to light how structural silence gives rise to different forms of style in communicative exchanges. These forms of style carry a great amount of power insofar as those in power succeed in dominating public discourse (the concepts are repeated), because they highlight certain aspects of society at the expense of other aspects.

This one-sidedness is not a new problem, and in relation to the evaluation of democratic discourse, it is often argued that it is important to avoid *bias* in the coverage of events (Blair 2012). The concept of bias is complex and often implies an intentional skewing of reality. For Deleuze, the point is, however, that such a skew will always exist, but that one can work towards not being trapped in specific forms of skewing/bias. When we repeat, perhaps in varying ways, existing elements in public discourse, we perpetuate the bias inherent in existing discursive horizons (inherited bias). Thereby certain structures governing what we can and cannot discuss in that discourse is maintained. By turning our attention to the 'impossibilities', we gain the opportunity to think beyond the inherited bias, to establish a stylistic perspective in new directions, thereby opening up the democratic discourse in new directions.

When holding Deleuze's claims up against the reality of LLM-based generative AI technology, the contention is not that there is no creativity or style in the products that emerge, but rather that there is *a certain kind* of creativity that will be under pressure, insofar as LLM-based generative AI technologies come to dominate in the public sphere. To make room for this kind of creativity there are certain kinds of creative work with styles that need special human attention and intervention.

III. Heidegger and a Fourfold of Silences

Given that this paper discusses the significance of technology in relation to social discourse, it could be argued that Heidegger's analyses of technology as *Ge-stell* (En-framing – Heidegger 1977, 3-35) would be the obvious focus. However, since the purpose of the following is to identify something that is blocked by the Enframing of technology, I will focus on Heidegger's analysis of the Fourfold instead, because it allows to reflect upon the complex and contradictory aspects of Being.

Deleuze does not expand upon what it means to be creatively challenged by "a set of impossibilities". However, I have argued elsewhere (Hansen 2024c; 2026) that one can use the late Heidegger's analyses of the Fourfold (*Geviert*) as a starting point to look at how silence shapes conversation in at least four different ways. In this section, I will argue that the elements of the

Fourfold offer one possible way to become aware of “a set of impossibilities” – not removing them, but becoming able to realise and think about prevailing settings.

Heidegger initially presents the Fourfold as an analysis of how things can stand out as entities in our understanding. He argues that things must be analysed in a tense relationship between (i) “the earth”, (ii) “the sky”, (iii) “divinities” and (iv) “the mortals” (e.g. in Heidegger 2012, 11; 2009, 171). However, the main point discussed in this is how the elements of the Fourfold can also be seen as organising dimensions for the relationship between language and silence.

The (i) *earth*-element in the Fourfold denotes how things stand out as being based and resting on something that *withdraws* (Mitchell 2015, 71-8). The (ii) *sky* element points to the fact that phenomena can occur with a degree of constancy despite variable forms of *illumination* (Heidegger 2009, 218-224). The (iii) *divinities* designate how phenomena point beyond themselves; they do not merely represent themselves but are related to or signify something *extra*; they are random in nature but *called* out (Heidegger 1971, 196; 2009, 196). The element of the (iv) *mortals* denotes the fact that phenomena are understood in *finite* ways but a finitude about which we can think and, in doing so, we can move beyond it (Heidegger 2009, 176).

An example will help illustrate the relationship between the Fourfold and silence. We can only understand a *presidential election* by ignoring a number of factors. Otherwise, the event would be overcomplicated and ultimately we would not be able to understand it. Examples of what we ignore could be the candidates’ blood types, the position of the planets and who originally figured out how to tame fire. All of this illustrates how Heidegger considers the importance of the earth for a phenomenon to emerge: Certain issues are silenced in order to allow something else to enter into language.

Similarly, as an example of the second element, the sky – the fact that something can remain the same even though it varies: The notion of “elections” presupposes the ability to understand that an event can be characterised as an election even though, for example, new candidates have emerged since the last time. We can talk about ‘elections’ in different countries, even if the geography, time and rules differ. The phenomenon is the same, even if it looks different. This is what Heidegger has in mind with the sky element. Phenomena only make sense if we silence variation and understand that the phenomenon itself remains the same in spite of any variations.

In relation to the *divinities* of the electoral process, the obvious thing to point to is the *democratic* embeddedness: When an electoral process appears to be important and urgent, it is because it is part of the democracy within which it normally takes place. In the vast majority of cases, democracy will be a *silent* horizon for electoral action. We may be a little elated because we sense the solemn backdrop of the action, but in the actual electoral action (making the choice), I choose the candidate based on how well I think they match my *political* preferences. The democratic background is silently present. Admittedly, in some cases, when democracy is actually at stake (e.g. because some of the options might lead society in an undemocratic direction), it can be argued that this divine background is present in a noisy form in the election process. In such cases, other factors will constitute the divine background, for example, considerations about the good life or good society, reflections about what it means to be an autonomous individual, religious considerations, etc.

In terms of the fourth element, *finiteness*, an election is, of course, characterised by the fact that the range of options is finite. In order to count votes, you have to reduce the number of options; not everyone can articulate exactly what they want. The act of voting only makes sense because nuances are silenced. Of course, this is a finiteness with which you can be more or less comfortable, and if it troubles you, then you can (depending on the legal and practical circumstances surrounding the election) either choose not to vote, leave the ballot paper blank or you can (in pencil-and-paper based

systems) spoil your ballot paper more or less creatively. None of these actions undo the finiteness; it is there, but mortals can relate to it creatively.

Heidegger's Fourfold accounts for the way different kinds of silence shape our approach to phenomena. Understanding and talking about phenomena presupposes silence in relation to (i) the phenomena dwelling in a withdrawal, (ii) constancy across variation, (iii) embeddedness in a higher necessity, and (iv) transcendable finitude. For Heidegger, it is also crucial that we can neither separate nor fully unite the elements:

These four, united of themselves, belong together. Obliging coming before all that presences, they are folded into a single fourfold. (Heidegger 2012, 11)

When we talk about a phenomenon, the discussion must be based upon the silence inherent in the Fourfold. This is why Heidegger ends up emphasising that silence is constitutive of language:

Language speaks as the peal of stillness. Stillness stills by the carrying out, the bearing and enduring, of world and things in their presence. (Heidegger 2009, 205 – italics in original)

Language is constituted by the forms of silence that determine how we experience and think about the things about which we talk.

Another fundamental point is that the different elements of the Fourfold are not connected in a harmonious structure. There is an obvious tension between the withdrawal of the earth and the illumination of the sky, between the transcendence of the divinities and the finiteness of the mortals. The tensions between its elements make the Fourfold dynamic, but the dynamism must be silenced if we are to think and talk about the phenomena to which the Fourfold gives rise, because otherwise our thinking and language becomes overcomplex, not allowing for focused thought and communication. If I want to say something about a specific presidential election, I basically have to avoid talking about all the silence that has enabled me to think about the phenomenon. In some cases, of course, the silence will surface. For example, we can discuss whether the specific election is actually democratic, but in that case, it is because the silence in the Fourfold no longer holds, and the discussion has to be based on a new silence in the Fourfold. So, if for example the blood type of representatives (which currently is normally silenced in discussions of democracy) becomes an urgent matter, it is possible to reshape the Fourfold, but then it would be necessary to silence other aspects, in order for this aspect to be able to stand out.

In relation to the Deleuzian idea that creative communication requires consciously working with silence in order to recognise “a set of impossibilities”, the point is that the instances when we become aware of the underlying structures of silence in the Fourfold provide a creative opportunity. There is a creative benefit in the ability to recognise the silence that lies in the Fourfold and the silence that ensures that the inner tensions of the Fourfold do not undermine the relatively stable interaction with tangible phenomena in the world. Heidegger claims we can only think about and talk about various phenomena in the world by silencing them (Heidegger 2010, 156-9; 2022, 116; 1971, 131). Silence stabilises and limits an unmanageable and hyper-complex reality. Silence creates stability by putting complexity in the background. The more tangibly and adequately we want to relate to something, the more we have to submit to a Fourfold-based silence.

Heidegger's analyses of the relationship between things, language and silence are ontological. Even though his early analyses of the decay from *Rede* to *Gerede* stress that it is largely due to a lack of awareness of the fact that the exchanges are founded upon silence (Heidegger 2010, 159), he also emphasises that this is not a normative problem as such (Heidegger 2010, 161-2 – see also §§38-39).

However, it makes sense to bring the above analysis of the relationship between the Fourfold and silence back to Deleuze's analysis outlined in the previous section. The silence of the Fourfold makes

it possible to experience patterns of repetition in a variable world. As such, there is clearly a certain constancy in how the earth withdraws, the sky brings forward, the divinities call, and we mortals are finite. This constancy has an impact on how statements in public exchanges are repeated. For example, we may disagree on which of the candidates in a presidential election we prefer – but underlying (and founding) this disagreement is an agreement on what a presidential election is – for example, that it should be understood in a democratic context, which we (usually) do not question despite our disagreements about the candidates.

Its impact on how positions in the conversations are repeated also makes clear the power inherent in being able to influence the Fourfold – either by maintaining a certain constellation or challenging it. The next section discusses how this positions the introduction of LLM-based generative AI technologies as a tool in democratic discourse.

IV. Conservative Structures in AI-assisted Public Spheres

Recent LLM-based generative AI technologies to create public content can be analysed as a Heideggerian *Gestell* (Kuchtova 2024; Bar-Gil 2025; Woods 2025). Even though Heidegger repeatedly emphasises a duality in *Gestell* in his presentation of the concept (e.g. that it is both a danger and a salvation – Heidegger 1977, 28), such analyses tend to offer a somewhat nostalgic and dystopian reading of the nature of technology (see, for example, Kuchtova 2024; Bar-Gil 2025). To avoid this, I will focus the following analysis on the ideas of Fourfold in order to identify the “sets of impossibilities” inherent therein.

The idea of developing various forms of artificial intelligence has a long and complex history, which it would be going too far to pursue in this context. Turing’s conceptual work on defining what it would mean to have non-human intelligence (the Turing-test in which a machine is defined as intelligent, if it is not possible consistently to judge which answers upon questions that stem from a machine or a human being – Turing 1950) are often considered as an important starting point. Despite these roots, it would obviously be an oversimplification to claim that the history of artificial intelligence has been uni-directional towards the realisation of Turing’s ideas. The concept of artificial intelligence has undergone major paradigmatic shifts (Čaplinkas 1998; Russell and Norvig 2021, 1-5; Zhang, Zhu, and Su 2023).

This paper will focus primarily on the societal implications of the emergence of LLM-based generative AI technologies (in the following referred to as ‘AI technologies’), which attracted intense public attention when ChatGPT, which was based upon OpenAI’s GPT-3.5 language model, was launched in November 2022. In relation to Turing’s original idea of defining computer-based intelligence by the ability of the technology to engage in a conversation in a way that is linguistically indistinguishable from human communication, OpenAI’s technology is interesting in the current paper because that is exactly the kind of communication of which it is capable.

Essentially, GPT-5 is trained via analyses of “publicly available on the internet, information that we partner with third parties to access, and information that our users or human trainers and researchers provide or generate” in order to generate responses to user input based upon the analysed data and knowledge about the statistical relationship between communicative tokens. With post-processing using Reinforcement Learning from feedback (OpenAI 2025b, 5-19).

In the development of the various GPT-models, a great deal of work has been done to prevent it from spreading negative forms of bias or knowledge that might be dangerous or compromising (OpenAI 2025a). GPT-5 is essentially based on large amounts of available information, statistical analyses of that information and communicative content based on those analyses. The subsequent post-processing corrects for certain types of bias, at least to a certain extent – which means that

certain types of views or information are silenced.³ However, it is clear that the post-processing is only concerned with quite specific forms of withdrawal,⁴ and given the generative properties of the technology, the content produced will unavoidably reproduce those axes of bias that are in the underlying material which are not actively avoided in the post-processing process.

With the Heideggerian Fourfold-analysis in mind, this should not come as a surprise. The technology is as a *Gestell* inevitably embedded within the tensions in the Fourfold between (i) earth, (ii) sky, (iii) divinities, and (iv) the mortals. The technology can (i) only bring something forward (the most probable communicative tokens) by allowing something else to recede (the less probable tokens). On the other hand, (ii) the technology is also characterised by the fact that it varies the result even when prompted the same way – in other words, there is room for variation. Likewise with the (iii) divine element: The tokens that are brought together gain significance from their pointing beyond themselves – towards the other tokens and towards the prompt to which they constitute the response. The communicative tokens are themselves meaningless, but upon reception they gain meaning that points beyond the individual parts. Finally, (iv) the products of the technology can also be used to help users transcend their own finitude by encountering information and perspectives that are new to them.

However, what these four points have in common is the conserving nature of the structure of the technology. It is a withdrawal, variation, transcendence, and finitude that, in a sense, takes place within the framework of the past. In the literature this is coined as the “inherited bias” of the technology – a bias that stems from the training data (e.g. Wolf, Miller, and Grodzinsky 2017; Hua, Jin, and Jiang 2024, 213+218-220; Stahl and Eke 2024, 8; Wu, Duan, and Ni 2024, 108-9+111) – exactly the kind of bias that Deleuze warned against. Given that the technology works on the basis of statistical analysis of huge volumes of data, it is crucial to reflect on what it means for the democratic public sphere if it is increasingly based on this technology. OpenAI is highly aware of the problem and tries to compensate for exposure bias (OpenAI et al. 2025a), albeit without solving the problem entirely (Navigli, Conia, and Ross 2023; Kotek, Dockum, and Sun 2023).

In the next section, I will approach the problem in a different way, one in line with the discussion of Deleuze and Heidegger above: In a sense, the Deleuzeian analysis demonstrates that even if you manage to process the most obvious forms of bias in the technology (in relation to gender, race, religion, etc. – Ferrara 2023, ch. 2; Hua, Jin, and Jiang 2024, 218), there will still be an inherent bias because the technology is based on existing forms of communication. Paraphrasing Heidegger and Deleuze, it might be said that the technology reproduces inherited Fourfold based structures of silence that underlie the analysed material.

V. Space for Flexible Processing of Silence in AI-mediated Public Spheres

The discussion of the significance of AI technologies for democratic societies has been ongoing for many years. When it comes to discursive and epistemic worries (which are the main concern in this paper), such reflections have often highlighted risks concerning hallucination, misinformation, epistemic bubbles, persuasive messaging, polarisation, deliberation, and bias (Rodilosso 2024; Summerfield et al. 2024; Coeckelbergh 2025).

³The causes for bias in AI-generated texts are certainly multiple. It is also well documented that it is impossible to avoid bias completely – which will also be a point in the following. It thus remains a key assignment for users of the technologies to take this into account (Wellner & Rothman 2020). However, this paper focusses upon the silencing aspect.

⁴According to a published whitepaper, the following axes of bias are considered key: “user invalidation”, “user escalation”, “personal political expression”, “asymmetric coverage”, “political refusal” (OpenAI 2025a).

AI technology can be used in many different ways (Wellner & Rothman 2020), which is why it is important to be cautious about making unequivocal claims about whether it is good or bad for democratic discourse. The technology can have instrumental value in that it is able to condense large amounts of information into a manageable form that can be useful to individual citizens. Which, taken in isolation, is useful in relation to democratic decision-making. It has, however, in this paper been argued that the condensation will, in Deleuze's terms, repeat the styles found in information upon which it was trained. In Heidegger's terms, a certain version of the Fourfold is continuously reproduced – and this is democratically problematic.

I have argued in this paper that actively working with silence can be beneficial for creativity because it confronts us with “a set of impossibilities”. However, the above reflection upon the structures of generative AI technology makes it necessary to discuss how well the technology is suited to this specific kind of creative reflection that is highlighted in Deleuze and Heidegger's work. The fundamental problem lies in the fact that the current technology works through statistical analysis of how language is used. At the outset, it mainly *reproduces* the discursive structures found in the material analysed. The technology has no room for reflection on how we do *not* use language (the underlying silences).

In relation to Deleuze and Heidegger's contributions in this paper, it can be said that the technologies do not contain a mechanism for dealing with the structures of silence that Deleuze articulates as the basis of style and that Heidegger brings out in his analysis of the Fourfold. Put differently: The technology does not contain mechanisms that can work creatively with *new* discursive horizons. The technologies can navigate between different *existing* discursive horizons, but they do not contain the possibility of reflecting on structures of silence that apply across all existing discourses.

Basically, my concern is that there are *certain kinds* of creative work with language with which these tools (in their current form) cannot help us – the kind of creative work that lies in (in Deleuze's words) being challenged by a set of impossibilities.

A comparison between Deleuze's account of “style” and the ability of new AI technologies to simulate various kinds of styles is illuminating. Deleuze points out that what he considers to be creative communication requires the ability to work flexibly with style. Using the new AI technologies, it is possible to ask them to *mimic* the style of particular individuals (or types of people), and the technology will adapt its output to that style. The imitation is based on an analysis of how the person usually communicates.

As we saw above, Deleuze's understanding of “style” is, however, quite different from this view:

... style requires a lot of silence and work [... Y]ou don't get a style just by putting words together, combining phrases, using ideas. You have to open up words, break things open, to free earth's vectors. (Deleuze 1995, 133-4)

Deleuze is exaggerating (style *can* be the result of putting words together in new ways), but the point is still important: certain kinds of stylistic work are about daring to embrace the idea that there is something we are *not* talking about – and consider whether we can do this in new ways.

The section on Heidegger's Fourfold above has shown that silence-free conversations are not possible. Silence is a productive necessity to get us to start thinking and talking about the world. However, different Fourfold based structures embody power in different ways. So, in the example with the democratic elections: If the underlying understanding of the citizens who vote is based on a Fourfold setting that brings out how citizens are less knowledgeable, with a tendency to short sighted egocentric focus on their own interests, having no visions towards the future, etc. then democratic procedures and possibilities will be set up that differ compared with if the citizens are conceived of in more visionary, competent ways (see Strömbäck 2005).

One way⁵ to learn how silence shapes current thinking and dialogue is to start with Heidegger's Fourfold: How (i) is the current understanding of issues based on withdrawal? What (ii) forms of variability are considered defining and insignificant, respectively? What (iii) is the transcendent framework and necessity that makes the issues significant? How (iv) is human finitude conceived as framing our understanding of the issues, and how can we deal with this finitude?

These questions are also difficult for human forms of intelligence. The silences sought in these questions essentially form the background to our ongoing discussions with each other, and it thus takes a severe effort to become aware of them. In ordinary discussions, they come to the fore when the resulting language proves to be out of sync with reality. In relation to the example of the presidential election, the democratic background only becomes part of the explicit conversation if it becomes urgent to consider whether the election in question is actually democratic in nature.

In previous writings, I have suggested that an extended version of *discourse analytical* tools could be a way to facilitate reflection on the structures of silence that underpin dominant discourses: a discourse analysis that focuses on the structures of silence rather than the actual utterances (Hansen 2021a; 2024c).

It is one thing that the technology itself does not have the tools to facilitate reflection on these structures of silence, but Deleuze is also concerned that too much communication actually *gets in the way* of the reflection needed to contribute fruitfully to public discourse. The possibility of streamlining communicative production in terms of time (e.g. through help during the research phase and with the actual articulation) clearly enhances the potential of making yourself heard in democratic debates. The question is, however, what does this do to our ability to listen thoughtfully and take a critical stance on what is being said?

Obviously, we should be careful not to be too assertive, as the technology (as mentioned above) can be used as an aid when trying to process large amounts of information (AI technologies can summarise huge volumes of information to make it more manageable). Generally, we should be cautious not to interpret the role of technology deterministically. In the remainder of this section, however, I will suggest whether there are *negative* affordances (or outcomes of affordances – Evans et al. 2017; Hutchby 2001) in the fact that more and more public content is being produced this way.

The first step in this reflection is to recognise that citizens choose to what extent they want to engage with this increased production of content – as such, there is nothing deterministic in the reflections that follow. However, as knowledge production increases, it carries an *invitation* to engage even more with the content produced – especially if the content attracts users' interests.

The deliberative understanding of democracy stresses that the communicative process of engaging with others is important because it invites participants to consider critically the validity claims made (the following is a brief summary of Habermas' basic argument – especially in Habermas 2007; 1996). In the process of coming to a mutual understanding (*sich verständigen*), participants engaged in communication are accorded the opportunity to consider whether they want to accept the validity claims made. In order to do this, the parties must communicate in ways that are accessible to all participants, and they must explain to each other why the claims made have not only subjective validity but are valid more generally, too.

This process of coming to an understanding is undoubtedly an important democratic mechanism – in democracies, it is valuable that citizens are able to see beyond purely subjective views and are willing to find a common starting point for how society should be organised. However, in relation to critical reflections, letting this communicative process take over also poses a challenge because

⁵It is important to emphasise that silence can constitute significance in many other forms than what we see when analysing the Fourfold (Freedman 2022; Hansen 2026; Picard 1988). The following is, therefore, just one example among many other possible approaches.

coming to a common understanding calls for people to articulate themselves in ways that are similar. This is the reason why proponents of a more agonistically conceived account of democracy (Guerrero 2024; Mouffe 2000; Rancière 2006) emphasize that the deliberative urge towards coming to understanding must be supplemented with an awareness of underlying urgent differences.

As shown above, the framing, agenda, and discursive horizons of the conversation are deeply embedded in powerstructures. In Deleuze's words: "...a concept's power comes from the way it is repeated..." (Deleuze 1995, 147). The ability to break out of the discursive horizons is already a task that requires special efforts (Rancière 2006), and the fact that AI technologies rely so heavily upon existing discourses makes this task difficult. When participants in public exchanges consider whether validity claims are acceptable or not, this will, at the outset, be done within a common understanding of what is at stake in the current situation. The reflexive process of trying to bring out the structures of silence that constitute this common understanding takes time, partly to become aware of them but also because the structures of silence help determine what we perceive as significant and relevant (Voegelin 2010). Initially, a reconfiguration of these structures will, therefore, reveal something that is not (immediately) considered relevant. It takes some time to consider how these newly discovered issues *could* be relevant.

It is in the light of this mechanism that Deleuze's concern quoted above can be understood:

...it's not a problem of getting people to express themselves but of providing little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say. (Deleuze 1995, 129)

In the quote, Deleuze calls for a space where we can reflect on the structures of silence – in silence. Actual silence sets us free from the urges inherent in reaching mutual understanding and frees us from the structural silence that sets the horizons for this understanding in communicative exchanges. In silence, it is possible to think about what is seemingly irrelevant (within the prevailing discursive horizons) without having to account for this in a discussion with others. Such reflections make it possible to consider whether the seemingly irrelevant is actually so.

VI. We (still) need Silencing with a Human Face

The above should not be interpreted as an overall rejection of the value that the AI technologies can bring to the production of public content in the future. First and foremost, it identifies a task that it is important we do not forget and that we should consider how to do in other ways. Just as with the advent of the printing press, after which it became important to have professionals (journalists, editors, typographers, etc.) who could cope with the strengths and weaknesses of this technology (Bardoel 1999; Bro 2009; Donsbach 2010; Møller et al. 2024), it is crucial to be aware of what does not happen by itself when we deploy new technology today.

Before embarking on such a reflection, it may, however, be useful to consider whether the problem about mechanisms for handling discursive silences identified in this paper is a necessary one: (a) Is the technology in its current forms already capable of addressing the challenge? Or (b) could it be designed to do so?

Regarding (a), this paper is primarily based on an analysis of a *structural* feature of the technology: that it largely produces content based on a statistical analysis of the language of existing content. Countering this, it could be argued that if the technology continuously relates to new human-made content, then the human ability to initiate new structures of silence will also gradually be incorporated into what is produced by the new technology. This is true – at least in principle. The argument presented is mainly relevant if AI-generated content in the form outlined above becomes dominant, i.e. a situation in which human-made content is gradually *replaced* by AI-produced content.

It can also be argued that the statistical analyses in the current technology are already supplemented with reinforcement learning (OpenAI 2025b), which prevents the technology from being *solely* a product of statistical analyses of historical texts. In its current form, however, this customisation is primarily about mitigating specific forms of bias, avoiding the spread of misinformation, disinformation, illegal or inappropriate content, etc., considerations that all fit into discursive horizons we already know and are not based on a search for perspectives and styles that *transcend* known contrasts.

This brings us to (b) the consideration of whether new technology could be designed to address these challenges in the future. It is important to be cautious when trying to predict future technological developments, but I would be sceptical as the task is fundamentally about identifying what is not dealt with in the historical texts. The statistical analyses of the language need to be supplemented with some kind of knowledge about how the issues in question *could* have been articulated differently.

To some extent, it is possible to transcend existing discourses by allowing for degrees of randomness in the production of content. Something that various AI technologies allow for in various ways. I will not deny that this technique can result in discursive horizons that challenge existing constellations of the Fourfold. However, as a critical-reflexive tool, it might be useful if the deviation from the statistical analyses was not merely random. In this paper, I have attempted to show that a flexible handling of underlying structures of silence, based on reflection on the reasonableness of these structures, would democratically speaking be an important element to incorporate into the creative variation. The question is, however, whether it is realistic to imagine such an approach being incorporated in these technologies. It would require that the technology be capable of evaluating the relationship between the given historical articulations and that which these articulations address, a kind of semantic link that is difficult to imagine in the given technology.

In summary, based on the analyses in this article, I would argue that we should still be wary of letting AI generated content dominate democratic public discourse. If we want democratic public spheres in which citizens are not only *informed* about what is happening but also invited to *think creatively* and *critically* about the discursive horizons, it is important that we continuously create space for such reflections. This will not happen by itself.

New technologies obviously offer a range of tools that can be of democratic value, and they will also change the work of traditional professionals in the public sphere – such as journalists. A democracy in which the public sphere is dominated by content created by AI technologies entails a shift in what should be considered a normative task. Whereas it has traditionally been considered a normative task to ensure a public sphere that gives citizens a voice, I suggest that we turn this on its head and consider whether it should increasingly be a normative task to consider how to create space for silent thoughtfulness. If, to paraphrase Deleuze, repressive forces want citizens to continuously engage in public exchanges, and AI-technologies structurally facilitate conservation of discursive structures, journalism as the profession of the Fourth Estate should be reinterpreted to become a profession that provides little gaps of silence, or at least *alternative* structures of silence in prevailing exchanges. If democratic exchanges are to be of value, the expressive element must be counterbalanced by thoughtful listening, a listening that not only focusses upon what is actually brought forward by different stake holders in the debates, but a listening that focusses upon the underlying Fourfold of the exchanges. This kind of listening focusses upon the silence or stilling that has made prevailing structures of discourse possible, hereby regaining an awareness of the “set of impossibilities” (the tensions in the Fourfold between withdrawal, variation within constancy, calling and finitude) that are still at play underneath the discursive horizons. This kind of listening creates an

awareness about the contingency of prevailing structures, which will make it possible to reflect upon that which is currently outside discursive horizons.

I have previously (Hansen 2018; 2024a; 2024b) suggested reinterpreting the journalistic profession in precisely this way. Journalism has always been an aporetic profession in the sense that journalists have had to work selectively, which means they have spread information through a process of emphasising some pieces of information at the expense of others. The journalistic ability to make a story stand out has always required the silencing of “irrelevant” information, of deciding what angle to take on the content. In a situation where it was technologically challenging to provide relevant information to citizens, it was the distributive side of this work that demanded particular attention and appreciation. With the increase in distributive technologies it becomes pertinent to focus more reflectively upon the silence that creates information.

The emergence of content produced with a diminished intervention of human professionals accentuates this point. As a scarcity of information is being replaced by a scarcity of silence, or perhaps more precisely, a scarcity of flexible coping with silence, it is time to shift the narrative of the journalistic profession’s value from spreading information to a professional who works creatively with structures of silence – work that is a precondition for citizens ability to engage flexibly and thoughtfully in public exchanges.

More specifically, journalists should work consciously with structures of silence by applying silence-focused discourse analysis to existing discourses, thereby gaining an insight into underlying “sets of impossibilities” (Anonymised 2024b). This allows us to recognise how certain understandings of the Fourfold dominate the public discourses, how our understanding of concrete phenomena is a product of certain forms of (i) withdrawal, which result in certain dimensions appearing as (ii) essential or variable; how we specifically conceive of (iii) that which is greater than ourselves, and how we (iv) conceive of ourselves as finite beings. By gaining an insight into such matters, journalists will be able to challenge horizons that appear self-evident, but which are only so because certain matters have been silenced. Journalists will be able to challenge the public because this silence-focused approach to style brings to light new dimensions that we did not realise could be relevant.

Another, more concrete way of making space for ‘gaps of solitude and silence’ may be to work more consciously on being selective about who is given a voice (Hansen 2018)

This will require that journalism education and journalistic practice increasingly shift from focusing primarily on distributing available information to instead focusing on working discursively with discourses, challenging discourses put forward by strategically powerful communicative voices, working analytically to consider what forms of silence these discourses express and how to further less obvious alternative voices. Eventually supplemented by a renewed insistence that the real service of journalism is not so much what information is conveyed, but what information is actively deselected prior to distribution.⁶

Democratic dialogues still need professional, normatively grounded help. However, it is becoming increasingly important that journalists are taught to be able to do this work in a new competitive situation, in which it is not necessarily a given that silent thoughtfulness is actively demanded by consumers of news content – but in which such content is nonetheless produced and distributed so that citizens can sense the stylistic difference between engaging in exchanges with other people versus being informed by artificial intelligence.

⁶Early theoretical work within this way of thinking about journalism has been formulated as ‘slow journalism’ – e.g. in Masurier 2015. A further elaboration on these ideas can be found in Hansen 2026.

VII. Literature

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