

# Preface

The following essays were written between 2012 and 2020, a time that will hardly be remembered for any groundbreaking hardware or software inventions. The iPhone, the Tesla Roadster, Web 2.0, even the Infinite Scroll plug-in for WordPress – all belong to the glorious first decade of the new millennium.

The second decade was different, it was about talking, loud and clear.

“iPad keyboards provide a great typing experience” (Apple 2020); “We achieved quantum supremacy” (Google 2019); “I’ve built a simple AI” (Zuckerberg 2016); “Model S is a sophisticated computer on wheels” (Musk 2015); “If I ever say the word ‘user’ again, immediately charge me \$140” (Dorsey 2012).

The field of human–computer Interaction (HCI) and the IT industry at large invested in reforming their terminology: banning some words and reversing the meanings of others to camouflage the widening gap between users and developers, to smooth the transition from personal computers to “dumb terminals”, from servers to “buckets”, from double-clicking to saying “OK, Google”.

Computer users also learnt to talk, loud and clear, to be understood by Siri, Alexa, Google Glass, HoloLens, and other products that perform both listening and answering. Maybe it is exactly this amalgamation of input and output into a “conversation” that defines the past decade, and it will be the core of HCI research in the years to come.

Who is scripting the conversations with these invisible ears and mouths?  
How can users control their lines?

I hope this book will make computer users as well as designers aware of their roles, and their language. When hardware and software dissolve into anthropomorphic forms and formless “experiences”, words stop being mere names and metaphors. They do not only appeal to the imagination and give shape to invisible products. Words themselves become interfaces, and every change in vocabulary matters.

I’d like to thank Interface Critique for making my publication possible, and foremost for being a platform for this important discourse.

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