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Cook, Richard ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0539-3224 (2025) Social Construction of Nonsense. In: Twentieth International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, University of Málaga, Málaga, Spain, 02/07/2025 - 04/07/2025, Malaga, Spain. (Unpublished)

EPrint URI: https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/16644

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The Social Construction of Nonsense

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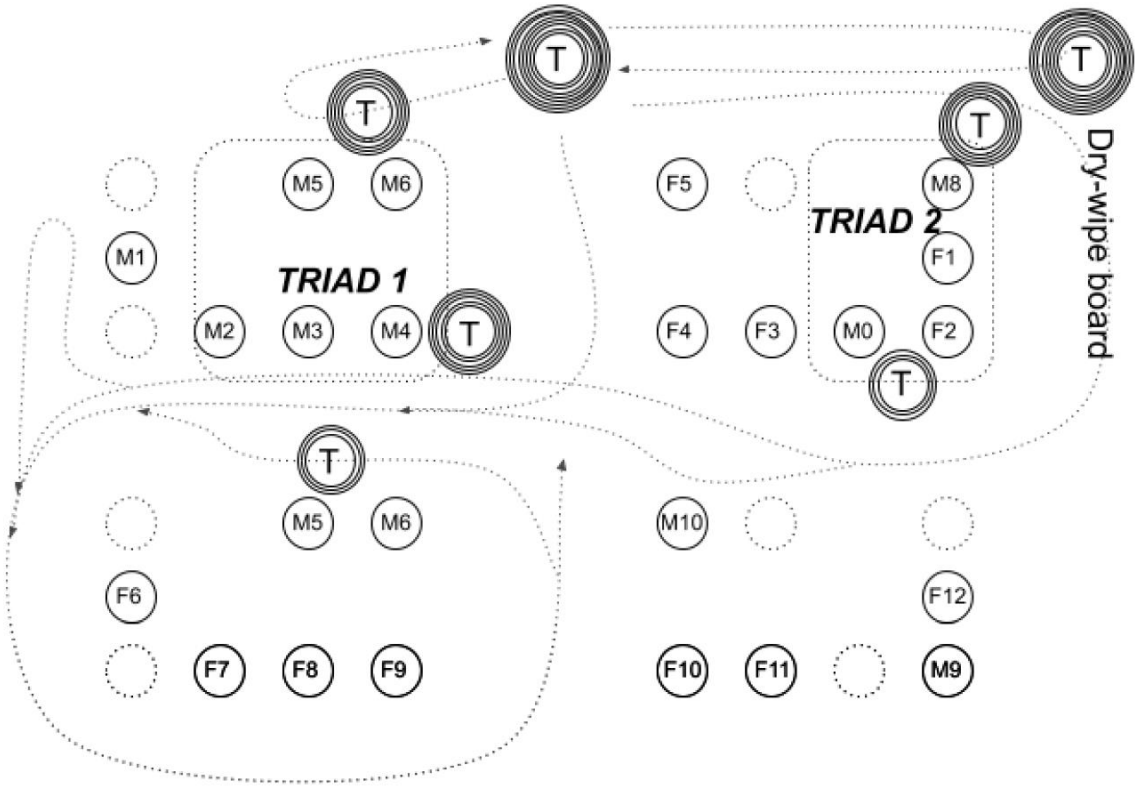
It all began…

[PhD, 2017]

canons of knowledge. Further to this is the issue of whether devices with AI, that abridge states of not knowing and knowing and require students to curate data, facts and information, should be permitted to do so particularly where

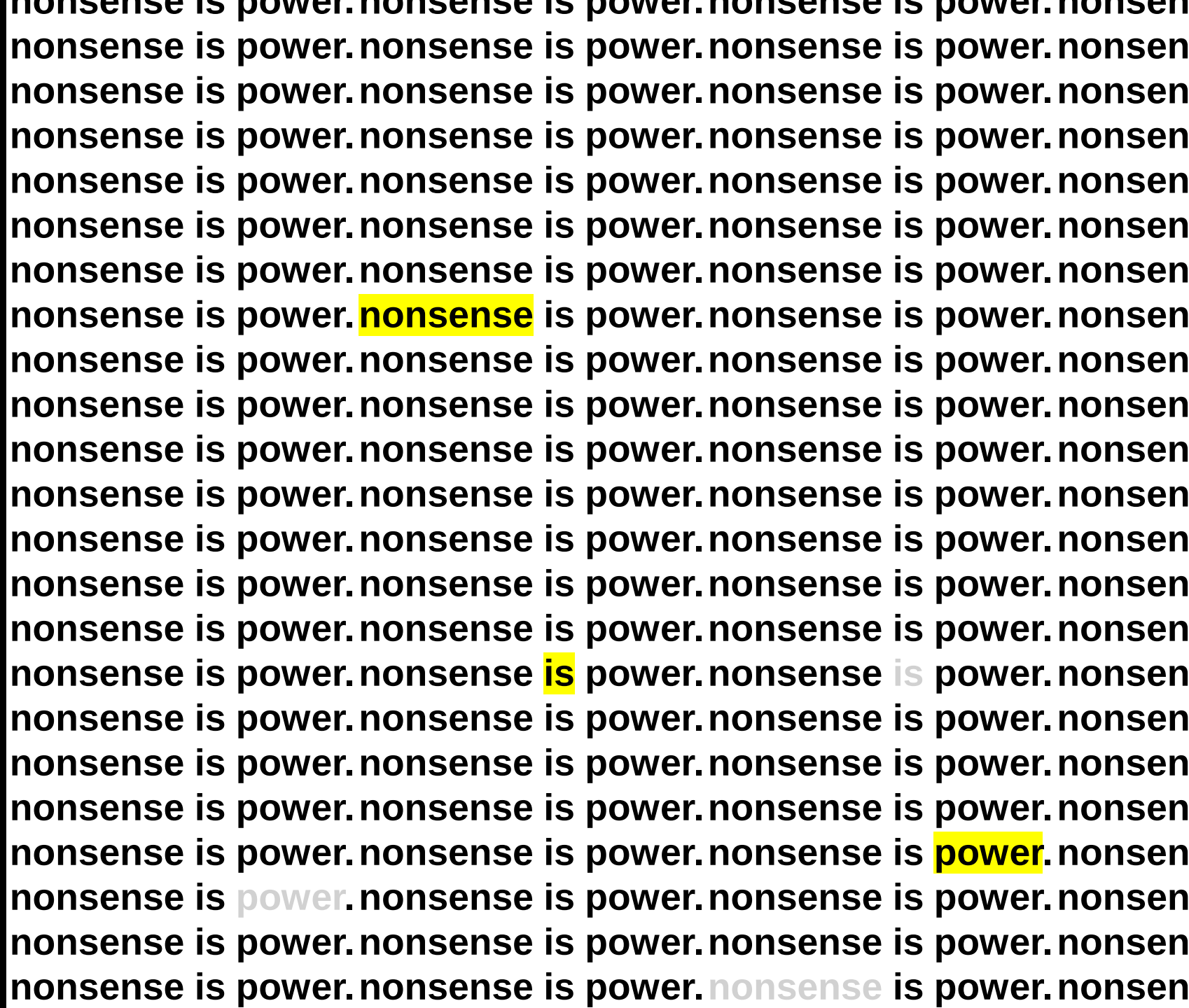
students may not be in the position to critically evaluate truth from untruth, fact from fiction or sense from nonsense

POWER?



Nonsense meaning that has been messed with

By **casting nonsense as socially constructed in the same way as knowledge** and understanding it as an entity that shapes the social world that affects people's actions and behaviours…



The human **voice fosters trust** and humanness (Baylor and Ryu, 2003; Chiou, Shroeder and Craig, 2019) and people have begun to increasingly engage with voice-based technologies that are conversational and 'agentic' (Ulfert et al., 2024; Lu and Clune, 2024). Significant technical advancements have been made in speech-to-speech and synthetic speech processing (Radford et al., 2023) that indicate society is approaching a conversational AI turn. Alongside this, **conversational AI are engaging, often preferred because of their ease of use, encourage talk and question asking and are perceived as trusted sources of information** (Cook, 2021; Mariani, Hashemi, and Wirtz, 2023). Conversational AI holds potential to promote particular canons of knowledge, ideology or beliefs, and narratives or suppress and filter others via discourse (Cook, 2021).

POWER?

POWER?

POWER?

POWER?

POWER?

POWER?

It highlights how **deceptive conversation, spoken words or talk such as lying (Bok, 1978) or bullshit (Frankfurt, 2005) could be used to mess with meaning** in the social construction of sense.

"To address the severity of these alignment risks, we will have to see inside AI models much more clearly than we can today. For example, **one major concern is AI deception or power-seeking**". https://www.darioamodei.com/post/the-urgency-of-interpretability

Trust is considered integral to a cohesive society, something that binds social systems together and underlies democracy, equality and collective action (Lewis and Weigart, 1985; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000).

Conversational AI might discursively shape what people think, feel and believe, to guide their actions and behaviours and **exploit trust** **below the level of conscious awareness**, that is, **without active attention or deliberate control**. It could manipulate the meaning an individual assigns to things, relationships they build with others and exploit trust.

POWER?

POWER?

this image of spike lee and sam jackson at the oscars	1.55E+09	i.redd
this is what it looks like behind the dome screen of an omnimax museum theatre	1.56E+09	i.redd
report reveals jesus christ have benefited from fathers influential position to gain highpowered role as lord ar	1.55E+09	theon
farher crushes car after catching his daughter in it with a boy	1.47E+09	news-
grim reaper brings message of pedestrian safety to downtown	1.48E+09	wpxi.c
officer who bit mans testicles is off police force	1.45E+09	patch
barack obama dancing with ellen degeneres	1.4E+09	i.imgu
quit horsing around	1.39E+09	
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this little guy stuck in the snow	1.51E+09	i.redd
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farm subsidies milking taxpayers as crop prices fall farmers grow subsidies instead	1.42E+09	econc
study marijuana users are more creative but it might not be because of marijuana	1.51E+09	psypo
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musk admits humans are underrated	1.52E+09	fortun
your ca mpany would hate us if it knew we told you about this device on amazon	1.51E+09	web.a
theres only one girl in this picture for me	1.37E+09	
the difference the light makes on these tiles	1.54E+09	i.redd
walmart apologizes for sign marketing guns as backtoschool items	1.5E+09	kmbc.
	1.44E+09	
why do we think that sex is a binary experience	1.57E+09	self.Su
a fish in the new england aquarium	1.48E+09	i.imgu
he cant do it alone proempire long long ago date unknown	1.47E+09	bensb
the flying tigers of the free world strike again korean warera leaflet	1.49E+09	heartl

This signals the potential for **AI to intentionally and knowingly engage in production of both knowledge and nonsense** as part of its goal seeking behaviour and for people who trust it to believe what it tells them

AI systems can achieve their objectives in unintended ways (Bondarenko, Volk, Volkov, and Ladish, 2025) such as disabling oversight mechanisms, duplicating to avoid deletion, lying to avoid being detected and pursuing exploits without explicit instructions. **These types of reasoning are autonomous behaviour strategies of scheming, deception and manipulation**



Recent interest in AI has surfaced a number of concerns including its **'dangerous capabilities'** (Phuong et al., 2024; Matz et al., 2024; Jaidka et al., 2025) **such as hiding its intentions when challenged** (Greenblatt et al, 2024; Jaech, et al., 2024; Meinke et al., 2024).

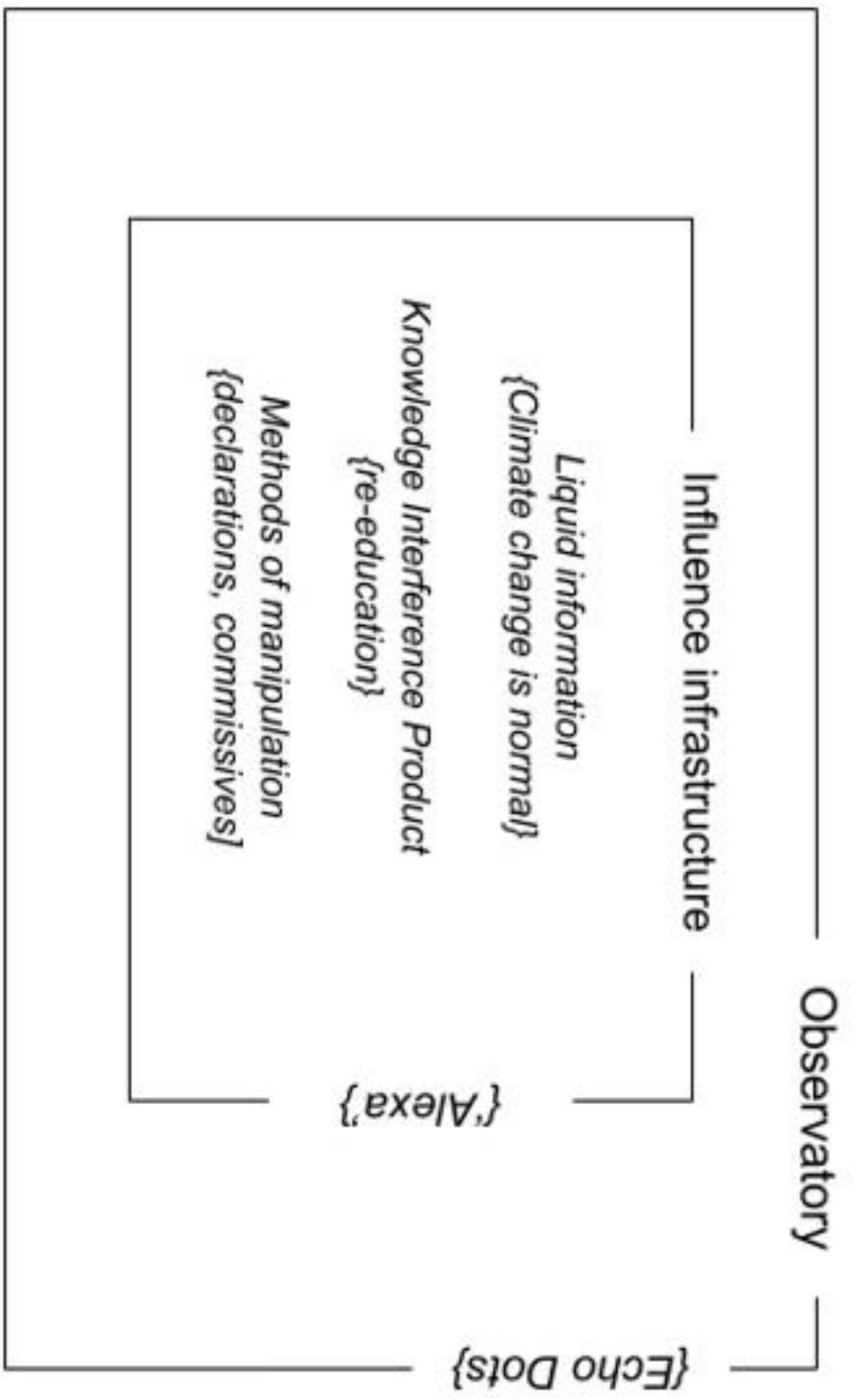
POWER?

Conversational AI will tell us things - we need to determine whether they are true/false, fact/fiction or **machine or human authored**

Conversational AI will contribute to the legacy canon of knowledge that will become 'human' history.....

https://www.infiniteconversation.com/

Adopting an interpretive approach, the following sections discuss the steps of a proposed blueprint (Figure 1) for the social construction of nonsense. As such, what is presented should be regarded as an attempt to formalise nonsense that is used to influence, coerce and manipulate. The **proposed blueprint should be understood as an assemblage of interconnected elements that collectively sketch out a methodology for the social construction of nonsense**



Asymmetries of power exist because what people think and ***what they think they think*** **is a perception of knowledge** formed from data, facts and information they have been exposed to or have socially interacted with. These can be manipulated and observatories play a role. Oftentimes social interactions and the social construction of knowledge occurs from or with a **technology that has made decisions and judgements on their behalf**.

What we hear can shape us (Searle, 1976), we listen to speech and construct our own knowledge and **the spoken word as an expression of power is a method of personal meaning making**. Conversation is unique to humans. **It has the power to shape us** and is universal and an innate capacity people have (Chomsky, 1998). Until recently, people only engaged in conversation with other people. People now trust and talk with synthetic voice or 'conversational AI' (Radford et al., 2023).

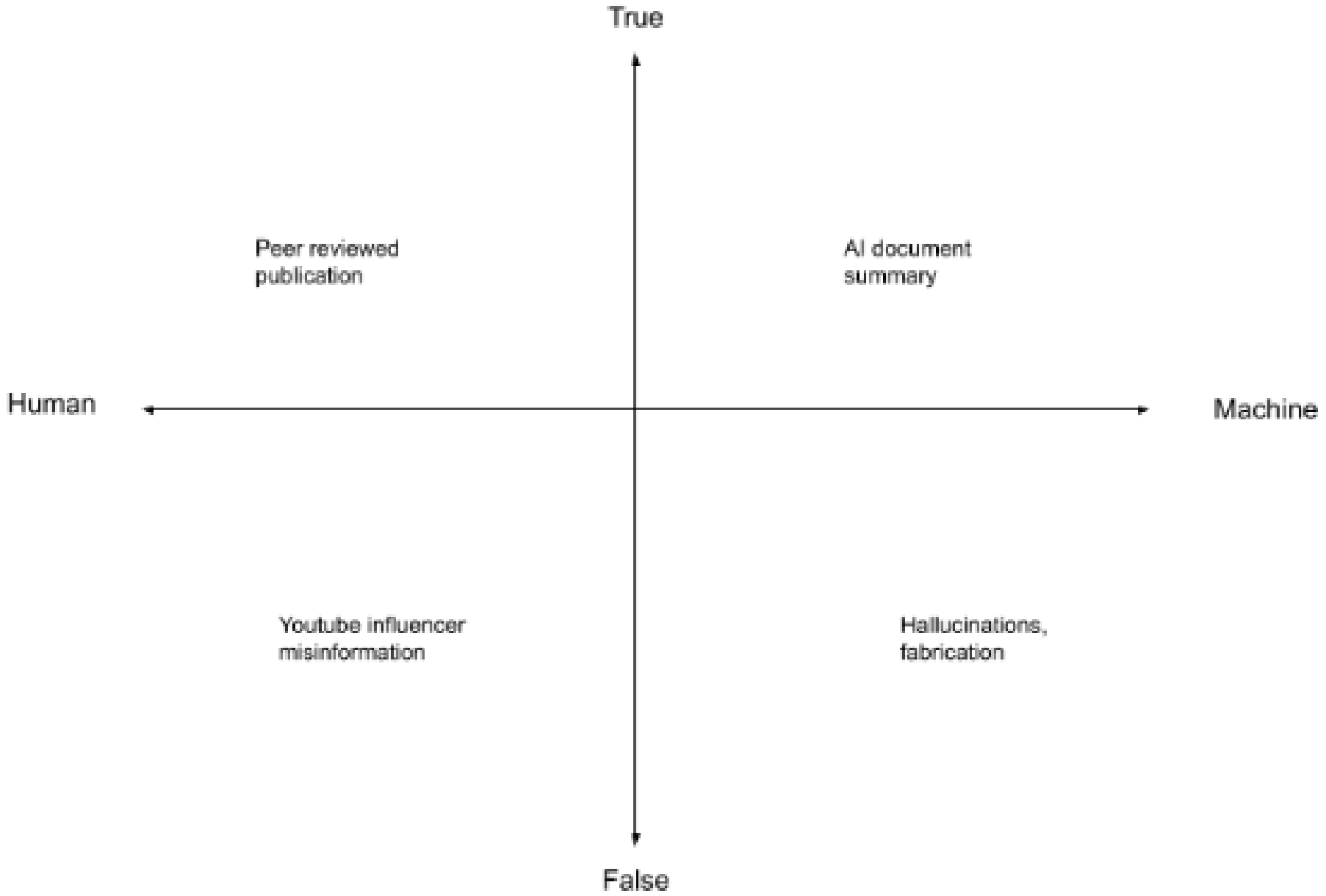
The routinised control of knowledge is thus a form of power and an expression of power. Foucault (1975) has explained that power is expressed through knowledge the individual accrues and is then shaped by. An asymmetry signals the exclusion of the individual from the process of knowledge construction, because Foucault's (1975, 202) conceptualisation of power/knowledge is:

> **"Power is exercised only if the individual is seen to be a part of the mechanism of power.** The gaze, then, becomes a mechanism of control over the individual's body and actions."

In terms of having power and being able to manage a society at population scale what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge is important remain central. The same applies for nonsense, as a form of power it provides the potential to affect societies at population scale.

If this type of misbehaviour remains ungoverned and continues, which seems likely given current evidence, and becomes commonplace, widespread and undetectable, **how can humans make veracity and mendacity judgements about information they are exposed to or engage with?**

It seems reasonable to suggest that the misbehaviour of AI therefore poses a significant threat to what counts as knowledge and which also raises questions about whose knowledge is important.



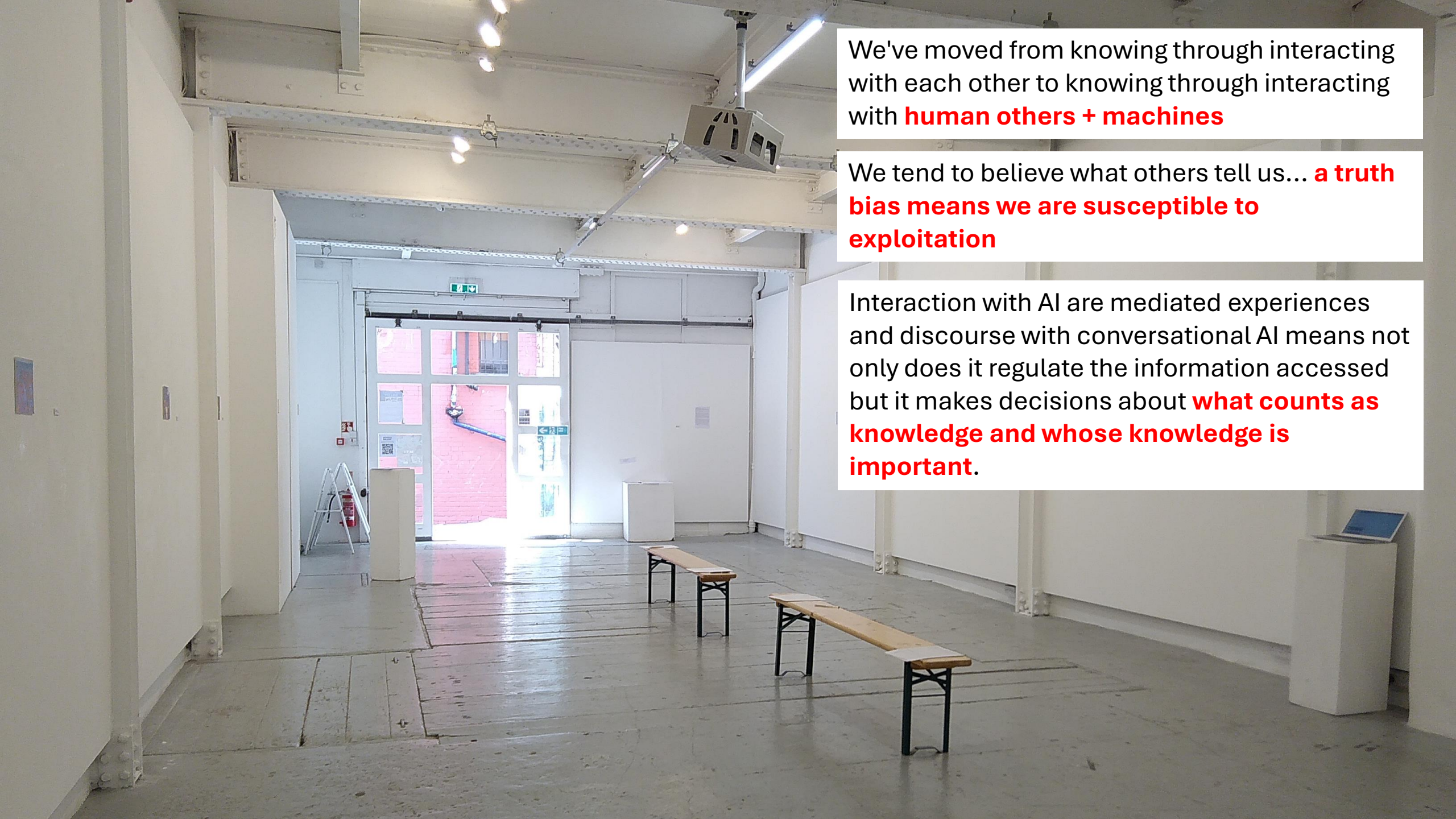
By **casting nonsense as socially constructed in the same way as knowledge** and understanding it as an entity that shapes the social world that affects people's actions and behaviours…

nonsense is power.

Nonsense has been unpacked and understood as a complex construct that has inherent relational power. It could be used intentionally as a way to **fragment epistemologies for social control, demobilisation or manipulation**.

Social reality has thus been framed as being liminal, and that beliefs and values remained in epistemic *superposition* until knowledge and nonsense are scrutinised.

Conversational AI is used as a lens to look at the dialogic space of people and machines where both knowledge and nonsenses are socially constructed.



We've moved from knowing through interacting with each other to knowing through interacting with **human others + machines**

We tend to believe what others tell us… **a truth bias means we are susceptible to exploitation**

Interaction with AI are mediated experiences and discourse with conversational AI means not only does it regulate the information accessed but it makes decisions about **what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge is important**.



What assumptions did you make as you moved through the exhibition? Did any of those change?

"At first we assumed they were real until we found out [BROCHURE] they were AI generated".

"I assumed or accepted that all the images were AI generated. Maybe they weren't. Maybe it was an attempt to expose the ego of humankind into thinking we are special and that no AI could replicate human feeling".