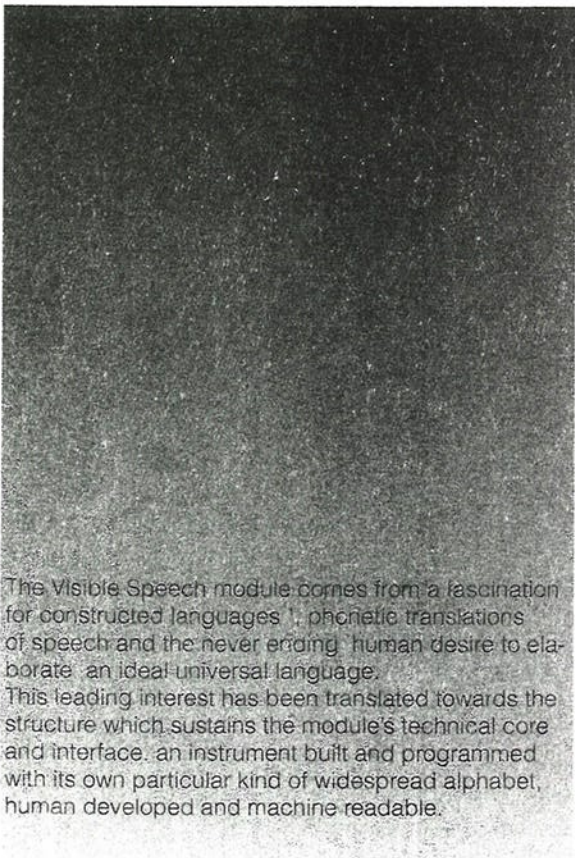# Visible Speech *

{ Visible Speech employs phonetic vocabularies and other
oddities to visually reproduce conversations. Not only as
a stand alone unit, but also as a part of a collective act
when combined with other modules.
It communicates by using constructed and non-constructed
languages, through alphabets read by both humans and
machines. }

The Visible Speech module comes from a fascination
for constructed languages [1], phonetic translations
of speech and the never ending human desire to ela-
borate an ideal universal language.
This leading interest has been translated towards the
structure which sustains the module's technical core
and interface, an instrument built and programmed
with its own particular kind of widespread alphabet,
human developed and machine readable.

"[...]learned men have long since
thought of some kind of lan-
guage or universal characteri-
stic by which all concepts and
things can be put in beautiful
order."
Gottfried W. Leibniz,
On the General Characteristics
[1679]

During the 17th century, Gottfried W. Leibniz – the
German philosopher, famed as inventor of the modern
binary number system and also for his exceptional op-
timism - started to dream about a universal language.
He was trying to create a vocabulary able to rationali-
se universal concepts and numbers. A similar pattern
to the machine language used in today's encoding
systems based on binary arithmetics.
Today, four centuries after Leibniz's utopian system
was theorised, we can ask to what degree his dream
has been accomplished.

Are our machines speaking the ultimate Characteristica Universalis?

Leibniz's ideal language was conceived to be effecti-
vely expressive so as to become universal.
Today, by contrast, we perhaps face the opposite
condition. We can see the proliferation of too many
universal languages, aiming for the same result but
differing at their cores.
The dream of a Characteristica Universalis seems
stuck in the complexity arising from the duality of
human languages and machine languages, caught
between the aim for entirety and the impossibility of
reducing plurality.
In a similar way machine languages of today can
be really far removed from the user-friendliness that
Leibniz theorised: "[...] a new language or script, that
could be learned in one week or two".[2]
Unfortunately today's scenario presents itself as
radically different. While anyone can use and interact
with programmed technologies, the knowledge of their
language is limited to a comparatively small group of
people.
This language, whether it is the Characteristica Uni-
versalis we were supposed to reach, is trapped and
carried by people everyday, as a blackbox filling our
our rooms and pockets.

1. A constructed language is a language (also known as a conlang, glossopo-
eia, artificial language, auxiliary language, and ideal language) that has been
consciously created by an individual or group.
2. Gottfried W. Leibniz, Letter to Johan Friedrich von Hannover [1679].