

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) means profound changes to the ways in which we live. At the Council of Europe, we are acutely aware of the challenges that this poses to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Because of this, we are working on a range of instruments to ensure that AI conforms to common European standards, rather than undermining them. Key among these initiatives is the work of our ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI), which is identifying specific the elements of a legal framework for the design, development and application of AI.

The quality of our democracies is of course contingent on a healthy cultural sector. This too is changing as a consequence of new technologies. Artificial intelligence is opening up new possibilities in art and culture, often altering artists' creative roles.

To understand this, it is crucial to hear from those who are experiencing – and leading – that change on the frontline. That is the purpose of this special publication. I am grateful to the renowned cultural personalities who have contributed their time and knowledge. From these analyses, think pieces and practical insights, we can observe both the theory and the corresponding reality of technology-driven change. Culture will continue to enrich citizens' lives in Europe and throughout the world, but AI is speeding its evolution. These authors open our eyes to what that really means.



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~~E-RELEVANCE~~
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~~AND CULTURE~~
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E-RELEVANCE

THE ROLE OF ARTS AND CULTURE IN THE AGE OF AI

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The aim of this publication is to help humans find common ground in creating a democratic future with the use of technology. It is the conviction of many of us who are involved in this project that the public dialogue about our shared future with machines needs to be broader and to include a better understanding of the role of the arts and culture.

THREE FLAWS OF THE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DEBATE AMONG HUMANS

First, what makes any serious dialogue difficult is the lack of agreement on what technologies and techniques can be considered as artificial intelligence (AI). Does AI include thinking simulators or replicators such as (un)supervised learning, deep learning, machine vision, neural networks and expert systems? What about applications like recommendation engines, predictive policing, radiology imaging and the Chinese system of social credit? Should we also include hardware solutions such as robots, self-driving cars, autonomous weapons and personal conversational assistants? What about the super-pervasive internet of things which is awaiting the imminent deployment of G5 network capabilities? It's complicated.

The second obstacle to dialogue is the treatment of prophecies as givens. Much of the public dialogue about AI is based on flamboyant claims about the future that have been extrapolated from current research or simply fabricated. Both optimistic and pessimistic outlooks about the technological future are being fed these stories, and the echo chamber of contemporary media serves only to amplify the noise of hope and fear. It's confusing.

The third and most consequential obstacle to public debate is the frequently hidden vested interests of various groups. Commercial interests seem to be the most common, but military and geostrategic interests are also framing the dominant narrative, thus priming global societies towards the normalisation of new or augmented social relations. It's cloaked.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND HUMAN CULTURE

Frenetic global discussions about the World Wide Web, then dot-coms, and after that social media have now been forgotten and the talk is all about artificial intelligence. If we just step back a little, we should be able to see some common elements that connect all these debates: our conversations about (digital) technology are typically triggered by cyclical waves of military (or) industrial optimism about improvements in hardware, software or infrastructure.

If we step back just a little more, we shall see that, since the beginning of human presence on earth, one of the key influences on our (well-)being has been the tools we use; hence we have retroactively named the evolutionary stages of human society after the dominant technology of each era. But there is more to it than that. Expressions such as “Neolithic culture” and “Industrial Revolution” not only point at technologies, but also mark social contexts and processes. Humanity’s movement through stages of technological change can also be called an evolution through cultures. Any discussion about technology cannot be separated from reflections on culture, and vice versa.

Within our present time frame, the relation of AI and culture is framed as a painful adaptation to something that seems almost magical, whereas it should rather be regarded as a call to action. The public consensus will depend on the kind of democracy we want in our information society. If decisions on our future culture are going to be made predominantly by proponents of technological or AI solutions, we will have a society that doesn’t necessarily build on fundamentals such as Enlightenment principles or human rights but instead is a banal intersection of commercial profit and political control. In such circumstances it would be hard to envisage a peaceful coexistence between humans and machines made and owned by other humans. Such coexistence, based on mutual respect and learning from each other, may easily slip onto a less noble path.

Culture is often regarded (with not a little suspicion) as simply an industry that makes an economic contribution to society, but it encompasses a range of important issues such as how humans live and work, the place and function of machines, and the role of industry.

The influence of AI systems on our ways of consuming mass culture (as it is traditionally understood) is well documented, as are the ways in which those changes influence the production of this culture.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND HUMAN ARTS

Paradoxically, most of what we now call AI was first articulated in science fiction comics and films. It is 100 years since the Czech writer Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R.*, which introduced us to the idea of robots as well as the word "robot". The extreme scenarios and artistic visions from the 1950s and 1960s, which were intended as commercial entertainment, have since influenced the imaginations of the engineers who have given us AI. Which current forms of the arts and culture will be driving the young innovators of tomorrow? Some of those artworks are being created with or even by AI, which makes the question even more interesting.

In the last 50 years the arts have oscillated between unquestioning endorsement of the potential of consumer technologies, on the one hand, and a critical attitude towards it, on the other. The most successful, and ultimately most influential, works – regardless of the academic grants they have garnered or the media attention they have attracted – are those that propose a critique of the technology. The art that withstands the test of time is that which questions the tools, techniques and context of the artwork.

The act of perceiving is also a creative one, as we have come to realise in the past century. This approach has helped us to appreciate the visual and other outputs of early computers, precisely for their limitations, and this has given rise to "glitch poetics". In much the same way, some AI systems are being