



E-relevance of Culture in the Age of AI

*Expert seminar on culture, creativity and artificial intelligence
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CONCLUSIONS

AI solutions are now an invisible part of virtually any digital system and have greatly enhanced their usefulness. What is new in recent years is that the fundamental computer-science developments from the previous decade have been complemented with the gradual advancement of hardware and the exponential growth of available volume of data. Growth of investor optimism, media-induced public hype and the apparent new role of AI as a topic in global geo-politics are defining our time.

The Rijeka seminar focused on the repercussions of these circumstances for the Arts and Culture. Below are its conclusions:

AI is FROM culture, ...

1. Art & Culture are the historical fertile soil for the AI imaginary

Throughout the works of mythology and fiction in the last several millennia, fields of art and technology have cross-fertilized each other, thus setting the stage and expectations that engineers are now fulfilling with their contributions.

The long history of Artificial Intelligence begins in antiquity (mechanical Automaton throughout Greek mythology), continues through the early middle ages (elaborate programmable humanoid automata of early Islamic art) and comes to our times via Byron's daughter Ada Lovelace ("the engine might compose elaborate pieces of music"). During the post-war era, the whole sector of science fiction is dedicated to exploring the speculative development of engineered sentience, in turn greatly influencing the actual engineers' work on AI.

... AI is ABOUT culture, ...

2. Arts & Culture are an irreplaceable means of expression of the human genius, its infinite innate inventiveness and creativity, its power of self-determination and its manifest human rights.

A number of definitions of AI describe systems that replace aspects of the human brain. Typically these have a tendency to cross from 'basic' cerebral operations to 'higher' processes, sometimes including creativity. In order to make progress, AI often uses reductionist models of the brain where subtleties and "broad frames" are omitted. Unlike the fields of economy or AI, arts and culture operate with a definition of humanity that is not reduced to rationality. We need to talk about that.

3. Arts & Culture stimulate active engagement and creativity in citizens and hence diversity in production, against the odds of global cultural standardisation and homogenization.

Human idiosyncrasies, as well as broad cultural diversity, are all under increasing pressure to homogenize under globalized economic circumstances. It is imperative to understand the deep logics of cultural production as a basic human activity in order to have more realistic expectations of the advancement of AI.

4. Arts and Culture, in combination with education, are champions for ensuring a human-centred and humanistic approach when dealing with the challenges and opportunities of AI and promoting an “Internet of Citizens”.

Social governance approaches that avoid a genuinely citizen-centred outlook can survive - even in long term - but end up being the complete opposite of democracies. Each time a society engages with citizen-centred practices, it quickly becomes inseparable from cultural productions. This is the European way.

5. Arts & Culture are key vectors in generating the necessary social intelligence and emancipation to accompany new life practices marked by increasing human-machine interaction.

Much of contemporary art practice - especially in the field of critical media art - is aimed precisely at speculative scenarios of human-machine interaction, thus generating a vast body of tangible experiences that prove to be a good basis for citizens' adaptation to new work/life conditions.

... so it has to grow WITH culture.

6. Arts & Culture need to be part of the dialogue about the information society (be it about digital transformation at large, or AI in particular).

Engineering and the business interests deriving from it are undoubtedly a social sub-system with the power to seriously influence social relations. Democratic procedures are often presented as an obstacle to progress, but time and again it is being proven that careless (or lawless in the case of early Internet) reign of corporate interest is generally damaging basic human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

7. Arts & Culture provide essential contributions to the deliberations about our common technology-influenced future, both in terms of realistic insight (through critical media art) and sense of direction (reflexive and holistic approach).

While sincerely respecting the type of innovation and creativity needed in AI engineering, the fact remains that only lateral and holistic thinking that is not narrowly goal-oriented and is not serving linear economic growth can ensure the necessary mutual respect between AI and the rest of society. This mutuality is the key prerequisite for any trustworthiness.

8. Arts & Culture lend themselves to surprising co-operation with AI-based systems to allow for the protection and promotion of the diverse cultural heritage in Europe and showcase how the past and the future can successfully meet.

The majority of current AI applications are in predictable arenas, dominated by consumer electronics. Beyond any doubt, AI could offer great help in the domain of preserving and

advancing the issues of massively heterogeneous and rich human heritage. Very little is being done in this field.

9. Arts & Culture allow the elaboration of alternative development models. They demonstrate the need for transparent, open, participative, shared, non-normalised, quality-content based, decentralised, de-monopolized infrastructure (data sets, sources, search/filtering machines, processes) and the need for a genuine European approach to AI (and big data) that avoids the pitfalls of data and surveillance capitalism, or of total government control.

Many artists and artistic collectives are active in the field of AI and technology, focusing their attention specifically to incubating functional alternative models of various social and democratic processes. That space is seemingly the only laboratory for genuine social innovation and AI and it deserves serious attention and support.

10. Arts and Culture, in combination with education, contribute to standard-setting in the digital area in the form of three Recommendations of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers [Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)10 on culture's contribution to strengthening the internet as an emancipatory force; Recommendation CM/Rec (2016)2 on the Internet of Citizens and Recommendation CM/Rec (2017)8 on Big Data for Culture, Literacy and Democracy] and can effectively inspire policy makers and practitioners.

The Council of Europe's practice to include Arts & Culture in its deliberations shows how such work can function and should be continued.

**** This text has been prepared by Vuk Ćosić for the Council of Europe. The views expressed in this document are those of its author and not necessarily those of the Council of Europe.*

