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Dieter Huber in an interview
by Christian Domke-Seidel

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When turning off an AI becomes a kill

Dieter Huber is an Austrian media artist who has been dealing with technical innovations and the social debates about them for decades.
He talks to sonicboom about artificial intelligence.

It seems as if all it took was the snap of a finger by a wise man from Silicon Valley and suddenly various artificial intelligences are creating images. They write meaningful texts, create music and would even pass university courses. What does this mean for us humans? When machines can imitate our ways of thinking and working so well that they are indistinguishable from human ones, perhaps it is time to become more creative. In an interview, Dieter Huber explains what artificial intelligence could mean for society, media and ethics. Huber is the best-known Austrian media artist. What is constant here is above all constant disruption. Accordingly, he deals with the effects of the new technology analytically - without a doomsday scenario and promises of salvation.

Mr Huber, can you enjoy an image created by an AI in an attempt to create art in the same way as an image made by a human?

That depends entirely on how the experiment turned out. But of course this also applies to works of human origin, although I would generally assign the enjoyment aspect more to culture and less to art. Whether an image is old or new, by whomever it may have been created, even if it was calculated by an algorithm, is completely insignificant in this context and thus irrelevant.

What are the prerequisites for creating art with the help of AI? And what do you need to create art that you personally like?

Which immediately brings us to a basic problem: what is *art* supposed to be anyway? Art, at least as I understand it, can certainly have to do with enjoyment. But that is neither a prerequisite nor a criterion. The aesthetics of a work, the irritation it is able to trigger in me, a process of cognition that gets underway, a connection of some kind that is established, emotions and feelings that are evoked, a guess, a surprise, an ambivalence, even a shock would be good reasons for me to get involved with an artefact of art in the first place. The decisive factor is the respective impulse or
The "bait" through which the communication between a work and a recipient is initiated in the first place. The visualisation or the way of realisation as well as qualitative criteria are also decisive aspects for perceiving something as "art". The *medium* itself - and as such I see AI in the context of art - initially plays a subordinate role.

The question here is who triggered these emotions in the first place.

Where does the authorship of an AI artist lie? The AI uses materials from other artists and authors that are subject to copyright under current law. The creation of the image comes from an AI based on the *coding of the* developers of the algorithm and the *intellectual property of* a company. The contribution of the "AI artist" is thus reduced to the input of the *prompt*. This so-called "artistic" performance is fundamentally *parasitic* and consists only of a few words, at best sentences.

A quote from an article addressing the question of whether ChatGPT should be used in the classroom: "Applications like ChatGPT can comprehend texts, some of which are almost indistinguishable from human-written texts."
Isn't the challenge rather to develop our writing in such a way that it is more clearly distinguishable from machine language?
An AI shows us the parts of our intellectual work that are more comparable to assembly line work and are therefore replaceable. However, combining further thinking and creating something new is still an exclusively human ability.

In my view, we have adopted the term artificial "intelligence" somewhat unreflectively and hastily. Artificial yes, intelligence perhaps. However, in order to be able to attribute *intelligence to* a human being, at least two aspects of thinking are necessary:

On the one hand, *causal learning*: combining things, perceptions and events in a meaningful way, deriving subjective conclusions from them and taking corresponding actions. If I repeat a certain sequence of events several times, I condition myself and I learn from it.

We have this in common with "higher" animals. This *statistical, incremental learning,* the emotions associated with it and the intuition based on *it* form the basis with which the human brain manoeuvres us through life. We build on this *mental setting* culturally and historically and we are able to pass on this knowledge at least partially over generations - in contrast to the octopus with nine brains, which cannot pass on its considerable knowledge.

And the other?

The second and much more exciting thinking process is *free associative dynamic learning*. Thinking that is based on a far-reaching consciousness, that is capable of grasping complex issues quickly and thereby arriving at *impulse-like solutions.*
Only a few people have this kind of thinking, and often only in a special field that they have learned and lived in for a lifetime. For all others, it is only in a lucky starry hour that a *light occasionally* comes on.

With a smile, I will call it the "MacGyver method of the mind". The solution-oriented improvisation skills of the early series star in real-life predicaments, transferred to the immaterial thought process. Causal thinking gets from A to B, on to C, sometimes to D, eventually and just maybe to Z. But never beyond the "alphabet", only *thinking with insight* can do that. Only in this way does the "*really* new" come into the world.

ChatGPT, as well as all the algorithms I know of so far, link available data in a primitive causal sense - like a Neanderthal - but with access to the entire Google world, as with *Bard,* which has just been released in Europe - but which did not really convince in my tests. I definitely don't think it's intelligent. Dietmar Hansch, a Swiss specialist in internal medicine and psychotherapy, calls this process " simulated thinking" in the FAZ (Wed. 1 March 2023; No. 51, page N2).

Which means that we can leave one kind of thinking to computers and not the other?

Broken down, I agree with you: If an algorithm's product is indistinguishable from that of a human being, it is qualitatively a standard that we should confidently leave to computers and robotics. We humans can turn to "higher goals". Just as a "working class" that was no longer necessary disappeared after industrialisation, there is now hope that we can finally leave behind a world that is regulated by bureaucratic thinking - and I mean that in a comprehensive sense.
I am well aware that such a statement, should it be true, will have dramatic and hardly foreseeable effects on a future labour market and society as a whole.

Forgeries have existed ever since pictures were taken. Even oil portraits were optimised for the benefit of the rulers. Photos themselves can only ever depict one moment and only from one angle. You have witnessed the discussion on image processing yourself. Are there any differences between the current debate and the previous ones?

The *fake debate* accompanies the entire history of culture. Until the nineties, a real-looking photograph was initially still considered to have a high *truth content.* To be able to believe what we see and perceive is one of the fundamental

human needs, which we now look for and, to a certain extent, find in different bubbles. Although we know very well that we live in a thoroughly *deep-fabricated world* and have access, at least digitally, to individually tailored information. Think of the Constantinian donation, forged coins, relics, political propaganda of all kinds, and even today's label cult and body and *personality optimisation*. The debate is the same, the difference to the present lies in the often astonishing ignorance of many people, for whom even reading a wikipedia entry still seems too much effort. Not to speak of contextualised or even independent thinking. With the *continuation of* unreflective opinions and an all-embracing comfort, we will always run in the same circle, seemingly *free of responsibility.* Sometimes it helps to look back in order to understand the present and to develop the awareness to be able to shape our future.

With the help of AI, pictures and videos can be forged within seconds. Doesn't that open up a mass market for forgeries? What problems can arise as a result? How can we counter this?

In 1996, I installed a window on a Mac in a copperplate engraving by Goya in a completely closed tower. This *digital light* led to my image cycle KLONES, which deals with genetic engineering and manipulation. These images were shown in many countries on several continents and earned me the attribution "pioneer of computer-generated images". At that time, the technology was a laborious path, from the real object to the analogue image material, via digitalisation to image processing, subsequent return to the analogue and materialisation as a work of art. Today, we can seemingly do similar things in real time with an app on our mobile phones.

Decisive for a creative creation is the intention: What and why? The point on the linear timeline: When? The method of realisation: How? The perspective: Where to? The significance beyond the personal: What is the social relevance? This list can be extended at will. *Playing games* on a mobile phone is not enough.

A work of art usually goes beyond the digital: it manifests itself in a medial form in the material world. Depending on the realisation, it can thus become a special *unique piece.* The aspect of forgery is central in life because it always leads us *astray.* In the field of art, I consider it almost irrelevant: when I look at my Andy Warhol
it doesn't matter whether it is a fake or *not.* The personal approach to the work is decisive. However, if I am not interested in the *value but in* the *price of* the art, such a forgery would at least be *Bad Luck.*

Do we need to change the way we consume media - mass, maximum excitement, extremely decentralised? If so, in which direction?

From the nightly news on a state broadcaster's TV programme, the self-proclaimed quality media to the YouTube blog and channel - perhaps we take it all a little too *seriously*: the press releases of an almost pitiful caste of politicians, the *breaking news on the* climate and war fronts, the financial market *ups and downs, woke correctness*, two super-rich celebrities in cage (at least more tolerable than the feudal lords' wars), the famous fallen Indian bicycle....

Personally, I had very different *phases of media reception*. The more intensively and broadly I informed myself, the more negative my basic mood became. Less consumption and more selection are now an adequate solution for me. First of all, I try to reflect on *different points of view* and positions as *value-free* as possible.
What scares me the most is often the most exciting.

ChatGPT has managed to get the topic of 'artificial intelligence' talked about in all areas of business and society. About the benefits, the dangers and the consequences. Isn't that also a core task of art? Or at least a result that many artists would like to see? Especially since artificial intelligence has been used in many areas for years. But until now, it has only been talked about by an expert audience. Seen in this light, ChatGPT is almost a whistleblower.

The products that *Dall-E*, *Midjourney* or *Stabile Diffusion have* delivered so far are formally quite impressive, but not very enlightening. The Pope in designer clothes, fantasy landscapes, digital caricatures, celebrities in embarrassing situations, contemporary art in a historical context - all this does not necessarily correspond to my *understanding of art*.
In the art business, it is certainly enough for a new *global hype* and for a short- to medium-term investment strategy. First comes the excitement and only then will there be media reflection. It was no different with the new imaging systems in the eighties. It's quicker with a tragedy or a catastrophe. I see enormous potential for AI as a research, design and implementation medium. I also work with it. Ultimately, the decisive factors are a contextualisation that gives meaning to the content, social relevance and an adequate formal and material implementation.

As early as 1966, *Joseph Weizenbaum* created *Eliza* at MIT, a programme that enabled communication via speech between humans and machines.
Just because I don't know something, it can be new to me, although it is of course old hat.

How should we as a society approach this new technology in order to see it less as a danger?

I see the greater danger in people themselves and less in technology.
I don't think the EU's attempt to create a set of rules is very effective. In the end, such a highly potent and self-learning technology will hardly be controlled by laws. And, incidentally, not by the technicians who invented it and who apparently don't understand it themselves in many areas. Just compare the discussion and implementation in the field of biotechnology over the past decades. No matter how we decide today, at some point a necessity will be *generated* and what is implemented will not be what is permitted, but everything that is technically possible.
Moreover, we do not have enough imagination to imagine the radical consequences for all humanity if such an AI were to come into the possession of an ayatollah, dictator, autocratic political system or profit-oriented corporation.

Then the question of ethics arises.

The questions of ethics, responsibility, liability, authorship will also remain unresolved. Only in global cooperation would something like this be feasible. Within the current global

In view of the *fundamental paradigm shift in* the social, political, economic and military spheres, a common solution that serves humanity is not in sight.

As long as *causal additive thinking is* the basic principle of the algorithm, every result will only be a combination of the available data including the conscious and unconscious *biases.* Currently, these data still refer to human sources. However, with every AI query, new machine-generated data is created, i.e. access to human sources is diluting exponentially. So the time does not seem too far away until a self-empowered algorithm classifies human-based sources as unspecific or irrelevant. The human component may become a *glitch*.

And the machine becomes an intelligent being.

An algorithm with complex *insightful thinking* would not merely be an "intelligent being", we would then have to grant it a "consciousness". A Turing test would be a piece of cake for such a "self-referential" being. Such a *conscious algorithm* would have *individuality and* would therefore no longer be a tool that we can simply dispose of. Ethical rights and duties would be derived from this. In addition, many questions of responsibility would be the consequence. A "switch-off", for example, would be tantamount to a "switch-off". "Killing" equals.

In addition to complex ethical questions, the Austrian philosopher *Otto Neumeier* also points to another basic problem: to what extent have humans been adapting to the structure and specifications of computer systems for decades? Would it not be more effective for all of us to work with systems that correspond to the human spirit and human needs? (Lectures: What does "Artificial Intelligence" have to do with ethics?, 5th Austrian Artificial Intelligence Conference 1989, advanced training conference of South Tyrolean philosophy teachers 1990, University of Linz, 1993).

In the end, it probably doesn't matter whether society sees AI as a blessing or a danger, regardless of what is discussed on the net, what politicians decree or what the media report. Economic and power-political interests will continue to be decisive. In the *ranking of* the ten most important research centres on AI, nine are in China and MIT in the USA is *number 10.* Europe no longer features at all.

Nevertheless, I am confident that we humans will use the opportunities to develop our consciousness, to learn insightful thinking, to understand our connection to everything, and to understand every new technology as a tool and support on our *path to perfection.*

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