

The World Screened: Generative AI and Us

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Abstract

For many commentators, user-friendly generative AI technologies, such as Dall-E, ChatGPT, and Runway, herald an onslaught of unreal, informatic simulacra that eclipse the creative work of reading, writing, watching, and making. Media theorist Matthew Kirschenbaum, for example, has predicted a “textpocalypse” in which human-authored texts will be lost in a sea of machine-generated facsimiles. A flashpoint in these debates was the 2023 Hollywood writers' strike, which sought to limit the corporate exploitation of AI as a tool for replacing human workers. But is the situation really so simple and well-defined, such that we can speak of an inhuman informatics that stands opposite to the supposed agency, originality, and critical spirit of human readers and writers?

This talk argues for a new formulation of the problem, attentive to how recent AI technologies tend to catalyze, or even embody, anachronistic humanisms. Among other shortcomings, this simplistic binary creates to more or less purified poles—human and machine—with little or no “mediation” operating between them. Only by transfiguring the entrenched opposition between technics and the human can we achieve a properly humanist (or, for that matter, anti-humanist) philosophy equal to the demands of the present. In particular, I offer a sketch of a critical theory that privileges “intermediation” over opposition in accounting for the work of emerging AI technologies.

Keywords

LLMs, AI, Humanism, humanism, antihumanism, media theory

Bio

Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan is a media theorist and historian of technology based in Gothenburg and London. An overarching theme of his research is how “cultural” sciences shape—and are shaped by—digital media. This concern spans his writing on the mutual constitution of cybernetics and the human sciences, ethnicity and AI, and the role of mid-twentieth century military vigilance in the development of multimedia interactivity. His attention to cultural factors in technical systems also figured in his work as a curator, notably for the Anthropocene and Technosphere projects at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt. His book [Code: From Information Theory to French Theory](#) examines how liberal technocratic projects, with roots in colonialism, mental health, and industrial capitalism, shaped early conceptions of digital media and cybernetics. It offers a revisionist history of “French Theory” as an effort to come to terms with technical ideas of communications and as a predecessor to the digital humanities. His current book project, *Screenscapes: How Graphics Render Territories*, draws on infrastructure studies and format studies to offer a radical account of how digital screens produce global space. Bernard received a binational (cotutelle) PhD in media studies from Northwestern and Bauhaus Universities.