



Report on B'AI Global Forum × CulturIA

Collaborative Workshop: Cultural Imaginaries of AI: From technology to art

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- Dates: Central European Summer Time (CEST): May 13, 2024 (Mon) 9:00-12:30
Japan Standard Time (JST): May 13, 2024 (Mon) 16:00-19:30
- Format: Online (Zoom Webinar)
- Language: English
- Speakers : Ai Hisano (The University of Tokyo)
Antonio Somaini (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3)
Galina Shyndriayeva ((Musashi University/The University of Tokyo)
Lionel Obadia (Université Lumière Lyon 2)
Yuko Itatsu (The University of Tokyo)
Pierre Cassou-Noguès (Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis)
& Gwenola Wagon (Artist/Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)
- Moderator : Carla Marand (The Sciences Po Center for History)

On May 13, 2024, a collaborative workshop titled "Cultural Imaginaries of AI: From Technology to Art" was held by the ANR (Agence nationale de la recherche) cultural history of AI project, CulturIA, and the B'AI Global Forum. The workshop featured seven speakers advancing discussions on cultural imaginations and practices surrounding AI from historical, artistic, anthropological, and sociological viewpoints. The event was divided into two parts, each with a 20-minute Q&A session.

In the first part, Dr. Ai Hisano (University of Tokyo Interfaculty Initiative in Information Studies/B'AI Global Forum), Dr. Antonio Somaini (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3), and Dr. Galina Shyndriayeva (Musashi University/B'AI Global Forum) gave presentations focusing on the relationship between AI technology and various senses such as vision, hearing and smell.

The first speaker, Dr. Hisano, under the title "Technology as Practice: Body, Materiality, and Aesthetic Intelligence," discussed how contemporary uses of AI technology in sensory sciences transform people's aesthetic experiences: the sensorial, bodily, and political realms

of life. Given that acquiring a body is a progressive enterprise that produces at once a sensory medium and a sensitive world, Dr. Hisano highlighted that AI-based systems in the current sensory science influence people's perceptions and thoughts without a physical body contradicting the fact that traditional sensory science assumed the acquisition of a sensory body. She introduced the example of recent VR machines that employ AI algorithms to provide olfactory information, making virtual reality feel more realistic. She examined this in a historical context, comparing it to 19th-century panoramas and 20th-century Sensorama technology. She described this transformation as a new way of acquiring bodies in the AI era, urging a perspective that can reveal social structures and implicit conventions by looking closely at the distribution of the sensible and aesthetic experiences of people.

The second speaker, Dr. Somaini, titled his presentation "The Visible and the Sayable. On the Biases of Text-to-Image Models and the Strategies to Counter Them," and discussed how AI algorithms reorganize the relationship between images and words, or the visible and the sayable. He pointed out that a series of algorithms and models belonging to the vast domain of AI bring about technical transformations in contemporary visual culture, necessitating critical reflection and artistic responses. In machine vision systems, what is visible depends on what can be named; for instance, the ability to visualize something depends on what can be written when inputting prompts to generate images or videos. Dr. Somaini referred to banned prompts, default styles, and censored images, set to prevent the output of violent images, and emphasized the political implications inherent in the various phases of managing image-generating AI models. Of particular note is the latent space, which serves as the space where all generative AI models produce new data. In the latent space, generative AI models convert digital objects into numerical vectors, learn their underlying patterns, and generate new digital objects based on them. Therefore, the latent space possesses characteristics of being multidimensional, abstract, unintuitive, and impossible to perceive and imagine directly. He introduced two ways of artistic responses to that: (a) to inject new images into the vast field of online images, which can then be embedded and visualized in latent space, and (b) to introduce new entities that were absent in the ontological landscape of existing latent space. These approaches shed light on a critical perspective against the noticeable prevalence of latent space regarding cultural processing, exploration, and transformation.

Dr. Shyndriayeva, the third speaker, under the title "Automating Creativity: Artificial Intelligence in Perfumery and Design," discussed specific examples of AI use in the perfumery industry, as one of the creative industries, and examined the changes brought about by AI from the perspective of automating creativity. In the early 20th century, perfumery relied on

human perfumers who used refined instincts and artistic senses while lacking systematic knowledge of the art. Over time, the perfumery industry developed scientific systems to classify, measure, and predict likes, dislikes, and sensory pleasure or discomfort, thus objectifying subjective senses. Dr. Shyndriayeva outlined how this objectification trend has recently evolved in the perfumery industry through the discourses of developers and user perfumers concerning three major AI perfumers. These discourses depict AI perfumers as tools that simplify and streamline the work of human creators, emphasizing that the quality of perfumes, as the materials included are not pure chemicals, can only be appropriately judged within the realm of perfumers' subjectivity.

In the Q&A session, questions were raised about the anticipated consequences of data generated by machines being incorporated into latent space, the future impact of the absence of physical experience in generative AI, and the potential influence of AI on expressions of what cannot be sensed or verbalized, leading to heated discussions.

In the second part, the focus shifted to human representations of AI and representations generated by AI. The speakers who led these discussions were Dr. Lionel Obadia (Université Lumière Lyon 2), Dr. Yuko Itatsu (University of Tokyo Interfaculty Initiative in Information Studies/B'AI Global Forum), Dr. Pierre Cassou-Noguès (Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis), and Dr. Gwenola Wagon (Artist/Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne).

Dr. Obadia, the first speaker of the second part, presented under the title "'Official' Aesthetics and Narratives of AI in Contrast: Comparing Japan and France," examining the "official" representations and attitudes of technological museums in Japan and France regarding AI technological development. Amid the global trend towards standardization in robotics and software development, Dr. Obadia positioned his comparison of the technological perspectives of Japan and France within a critical examination of whether this standardization trend erases diverse aesthetic expressions across different cultural spheres, thereby unifying the world under a single technological culture. He noted that it has been said that Japan, due to its cosmological perspective and high affinity with animism, adopts a technologically harmonious attitude, while France, though stemming from similar cultural and religious backgrounds, forms a technologically distrustful attitude as a different repertoire. However, in Dr. Obadia's view, these comparative arguments tend to involve excessive simplification or generalization. The comparison of narratives from technological museums (Miraikan in Japan and Cité des Sciences in France) revealed that Japan progressively showcases the potential ecological and societal contributions of technology, while France demonstrates an ambivalent

attitude towards AI, highlighting potential dangers and offering cautious prospects based on historical reflection. Dr. Obadia pointed out that representations regarding the technology of both countries exhibit significant contrasts despite the use of similar symbols. He emphasized the need for further anthropological endeavors that carefully examine these cultural differences without falling into cultural essentialism.

Dr. Itatsu, the second speaker, presented under the title "To love and be loved: Tales of the Fictoromantic," exploring the concept of fictoromantic, a term describing romantic attraction to fictional characters or AI avatars. Individuals who have decided to have romantic relationships with or marry fictional entities have been emphasizing in their narratives the benefits of controlling intimate relationships free from the complexities and pains of human relationships. Many a fictoromantic individual and researchers view these relationships have certain positive effects healing traumas from human interactions and thus be almost substitutable for human intimate relationships. Dr. Itatsu then contrasted this positive point of view with Patrick Galbraith's argument, which interprets the phenomenon as an escape from social and economic relationships or as antisocial behavior. Galbraith's argument, however, potentially obscures the pathological societal and economic structures underlying it. Dr. Itatsu emphasized the need to read these inner changes in people as a reflection of a highly capitalist society where individuals increasingly commodify themselves and others based on aesthetic standards. According to Dr. Itatsu, however, there is a risk that Galbraith's argument interpreting the phenomenon in question as an escape or retreat from society may obscure the pathology of the underlying social and economic structures. In response, Dr. Itatsu emphasized that the inclination towards the fictoromantic reflects an aspect of advanced capitalist society, wherein people increasingly commodify themselves and others using beauty and ugliness as a barometer. She then concluded the lecture by emphasizing the necessity of reading the changes in people's inner minds as reflections of history.

Finally, Drs. Cassou-Noguès and Wagon, in their report titled "Uncanny homes: living in AI," introduced several art projects exploring the uncanniness produced by generative AI using images generated by Dall-e and Midjourney. The first project focused on images of real estate advertisements generated by Dall-e, highlighting how rough, inattentive emotional content is projected. The attention humans pay towards housing differs from the recognized details projected onto other humans or living beings as visualized in concepts like fictoromanticism. The uncanniness of image output by AI precisely provides us with refreshing reflections on our familiarity with objects we are less attentive to but onto which we still project certain emotions, even though they are not the subject of our usual careful observation. Drs. Cassou-

Noguès and Wagon also presented an installation video "Chronicles of the Dark Sun," composed of AI-generated images based on accumulated human memories, depicting a fictional Third World War scenario, and "Anarchives of the Fire," an AI-generated historical chronicle of areas affected by the mega-fire. These works explore how generative AI abstracts atmospheres and recreates them with completely different contents, providing profound insights into the principle of defamiliarization with familiar objects.

The Q&A session saw questions about the potential of AI to replace the presence of deceased people in grief care, the role of marketing and commercial strategies in promoting romantic relationships with AI services, whether AI-generated images and texts should be considered "fiction" or alternative desires slightly deviating from dataset averages, and the possibility/feasibility of converting anarchive images into statistical graphs to make the messages regarding environmental crisis more persuasive, leading to lively discussions.