# editorial

## artificial humanities

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In 1749, French cartographer Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville did something unusual. Preparing a new map of Africa, he didn't use all the information available. Out went everything that he could not be certain about. Mountain ranges, rivers and other geographical features that had flowed from one authority's guesswork into another's and had furnished the continent's cartographic imagination for two centuries gave way to blank space. D'Anville had decided that the difference between knowing and supposing was worth putting on the page. Large language models rarely do this. As probability machines, they abhor a gap. Even if an AI chatbot knows little about an issue, even if a case is complicated, contradictory or inconclusive, chances are that the model will return confident prose. They 'like' to fill the blanks. The four contributions that open this issue all circle this problem from different directions, and none of them arrives at a comfortable answer.

Felix Ehlers does not shy away from the big questions and asks about the relationship between AI and human creativity. Taking a historical approach, he shows that ideas about what human creativity is and how it comes about are not entirely incommensurable with the probabilistic mode in which AI models work. Ehlers illustrates how interacting with an AI can help to overcome different variations of writer's block and can thus foster and channel human creativity. For this to work, we need to be thoroughly AI literate, Ehlers says, and he warns of what he calls 'narrative levelling': the smoothing of the narrative edges that happens when you rely on what has already been said many times.




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Gabriele Klein reads the relationship between humans and AI through Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance. Drawing on the example of the dance-theatre piece *A Perfect Sky*, she isolates unavailability – *Unverfügbarkeit* – as the condition without which resonance cannot occur. What responds instantly, predictably and always in tune with our current emotional state does not resonate with us. It simply reflects us. Klein's worry is less that we will be deceived by this but that we will get used to it, that we will grow accustomed to comfort without reciprocity.

Alma Stephan carefully listens to chatbots' Western accents and highlights how their silences are not evenly distributed. The training of AI models largely relies on sources in a few major languages that are readily available on the internet. This creates a strong cultural bias as well as uneven access to reliable knowledge. Where the training data thins out, as when AI models operate in less widespread languages, output becomes less reliable and less helpful but is usually presented with the same confidence. Combined with our disposition to trust a seemingly objective algorithm more than a person, this does beg the question 'who gets to speak in the future'?

I should say plainly that my own contribution has aged fast, too fast maybe. The essay on the Resolute desk was meant to explore the potential and pitfalls of AI support in scholarly writing. The piece was drafted in spring 2026 with a model that has since been superseded twice over, under a protocol that followed curiosity more than practicability and has long been overtaken by current practice. From the perspective of autumn 2026, the approach seems not only outdated but outright naïve. This is precisely why we decided to leave it as it stands, rather than repair it. The text is a testimony to how fast the field moves and how hard it is to first become and then stay AI literate.

While the second half of the issue does not directly engage with AI, its broader concerns are similar. Toby Yuen-Gen Liang examines the orthogonal view, the perpendicular perspective from directly above. He shows that its very ubiquity has exempted it from scrutiny. We take it as a natural perspective, when it is in fact an assembly of impossible viewpoints that makes some relations legible and dissolves others. Arnika Fuhrmann's reading of Narges Kalhor's ~~*Shahid*~~ follows a film that breaks its own frame repeatedly, shows the apparatus, films the argument about how to film and declines to resolve what it has opened. Doğukan Akbaş's report from the workshop on cartographic blank space emphasises that blankness, as the participants concluded over two days, is not innocent. It can be erasure dressed as restraint, and what a map declines to show can always be read as available for the taking as Toby Yuen-Gen Liang also stresses in his interpretation of d'Anville's white interior.

Blanks are invitations. But whether and how we follow these invitations, how we interpret them, is for us to decide. We can try to fill them, or we let them fuel our imagination. The contributions gathered here try to do both.



Fig. 01
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(Photo: Lambert Strehke)