

I am not very intelligent, but I am not artificial.

Since 2021, FECRIS has taken part in the work of the Commission on AI and Human Rights within the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe.

On 5 May, on the occasion of Europe Day, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mrs Marija Pejčinović Burić, reminded us that the impact of artificial intelligence forms part of the “Reykjavik Roadmap” and that AI is among the major challenges of our time.

Experts agree that there are barely a dozen people in the world who truly know what artificial intelligence is. I am still trying to understand.

Data storage

As a layman, I tend to think of artificial intelligence as first and foremost a new way of storing human thought, and that its use will determine whether this artificial tool becomes a new form of culture for future generations. If the first printed pages of the 15th century, as supports for human thought, initially served religion, printing later enabled the rise of science.

I hope the same will be true for AI.

There is, however, a difference between storing thought on paper and storing it digitally: in one case, the medium is inert, exposed only to rats and book burnings; in the other, it can easily be manipulated, transformed, falsified, and appears endowed with autonomous life—so much so that AI has already been elevated to religious status. Its followers are convinced that, being everywhere and nowhere, knowing everything about everyone, thinking independently of us, and being immortal (until the fatal power cut), AI is the new God of the world to come. From “predictive,” artificial intelligence will become creative!

Of course, AI already plays an important role in education; in medicine with the concept of the “digital twin”; in cognitive learning processes; or in the possibility of remote care. The judicial system is also leaning towards AI (in France through its “Artificial Intelligence Laboratory”), not just to assist in decision-making but also with the aim of anticipating criminal acts. I won’t even mention military applications...

AI is therefore a classification system that carries within it the risk of drifting towards social classification.

Psychological targeting

For example, in judicial and policing fields, there is a search for “weak signals,” reminiscent of 19th-century classification theories up to the idea of the “born criminal” that the Italian Cesare Lombroso claimed to detect in facial features, influenced by the phrenology of the German Franz Joseph Gall or the physiognomy of the Swiss Johann Caspar Lavater. Facial features were supposed to reveal the innermost nature of humankind.

Surveillance

Facial recognition helps streamline passenger filtering at airports; video surveillance can prevent abnormal behaviour in public spaces; tax authorities use AI to target “irregularities.”

The dream of permanent control—always the dream of totalitarian systems, and therefore of cultic systems, even before any wrongful act has been committed—is now achievable. A cult group now has at its disposal a far more powerful tool than denunciation among members, since a soulless algorithm can provide information based on the “biases” fed into the machine, whether to recruit a future follower or to “analyse” a disciple’s shortcomings in following the guru’s rules, from an image capture decoding behaviour.

The new man

Access to new technologies and the availability of online platforms expand our possibilities in the perspective of the “augmented human”; but they also increase the risks we face, for example reinforcing belief in the emergence of a new man—a “man of the fifth kingdom,” the man of the new race, or a cloned man. Every culture has dreamed of recreated, prolonged, artificially generated life: alchemists believed in the possibility of giving life to the homunculus; rabbis in the golem; lamas in autonomous entities; and Pygmalion in Galatea.

Is the man of the Global Village about to succumb to the imaginary of AI?

Exoteric / esoteric digital

In the field that concerns us—that of cults—technology already allows gurus to hide themselves, to no longer appear, to claim dematerialisation while giving their doctrine an ever-wider reach. They can already encrypt their teachings, thus increasing their “hermetic” and esoteric character.

They diversify their connections in rhizomes, multiply their bait-products, their advertising, and propaganda by increasingly “uberising” a pseudo-culture. Social networks have long since replaced the telepathy that cultic movements touted in the 1970s; AI makes it possible to read thoughts. What guru wouldn’t dream of that?

Recruitment through algorithms

If the storage of information and its exploitation by AI already raise questions, another concern lies in the use of algorithms in the service of growing proselytism and targeted recruitment of future followers. AI has reinvented commerce, able to anticipate our desires and amplify them. AI will reinvent the psycho-spiritual market by amplifying the various instruments of control. Cults will be able to target psychological profiles more precisely than ever, refining their approach by analysing the narcissistic displays of intimate information that the trust created by social networks has accustomed our contemporaries to.

Algorithmic surveillance

The use of algorithms enables abusive leaders to know everything about their future prey.

AI makes it possible to improve the analytical processes of data collected without the knowledge of users of digital tools, social networks, and the multitude of sites we visit daily. When I buy a book or a video online, when I use facial or voice recognition, the data collected is analysed and placed at the disposal of whoever can pay for its use.

Fingerprint reading to open my computer, a modern form of chiromancy, could even serve as a psychometric chart for the guru.

I wrote these few lines using voice dictation. The software analysed the terms used, the ideas. Claiming to improve its performance, it pays particular attention to my interests and even analyses

my feelings. It will recognise them later; but it also recognises me through my identifiers. Thus, personalised targeting can constantly be refined.

Within a cultic group, dematerialised exchanges between followers could be known to the leader thanks to AI as an analytical tool.

This need to know everything about others, within the group and beyond in the outside world that the group distrusts, with the aim of transforming and subjecting everything to the fantasised model, is not science fiction: a few decades ago a well-known cult group provided IT maintenance services to the French administration, which gave them access to secret data.

Today, AI can instantly identify interrelationships, patterns, areas of interest within datasets. The improvement of machine learning leads to deep learning, which opens limitless prospects for machines capable of learning on their own and correcting their errors.

Each of us may have used an automatic translation system, been warned by our mobile phone of malicious calls, or responded to a chatbot asking us to confirm that we are not a robot—as if the robot itself distrusted other robots. The chatbot can also conduct dialogue and interact with each follower within the guru's ideological framework. Thus, the doctrine, key element of the subjection process, will be fed endlessly.

Analysts are able to exploit the data, whatever it may be. We are generally unaware of this because we lack the culture of profiteers. And precisely because we lack this culture, we hardly perceive the risks.

Disinformation and propaganda

AI makes it possible to generate on a large scale a world of lies, fake news, and to create a logic of group conspiratorial thinking that takes the place of individual thinking and the scientific approach. “New Age” thinking benefits from digital tools beyond what their creators imagined in their project of replacing rationality with intuition. AI Itself is “intuitive”!

Hijacking of AI

Behind artificial intelligence looms the shadow of Big Brother—that is, the possibility of governing social groups by bypassing the enlightened will of citizens participating in democratic governance. The political project of cultic movements finds in AI the ideal instrument. The tool is at hand: the proliferation of hacker attacks on computer systems proves it. Today, “Aum Shinrikyo” would no longer need sarin gas to take control of the Japanese government. The instrumentalisation of terror would occur through the digital paralysis of the economy and social relations. Cultic movements have long used “black propaganda,” a form of manipulation now surpassed by the multiple forms of fake news and conspiracy theories to which AI can lend plausibility through sheer volume.

It is therefore essential to have a clear vision of the risks. Legal frameworks must be developed to put in place controls to protect citizens.

We know that a guru's trademark is to bypass citizen counter-powers by controlling the making of internal rules, their implementation in the executive sphere, and their sanction. Each of these spheres is impacted by AI!

Freedom at risk

The management of data, their traceability, access control, and their security are becoming major concerns for government institutions. One path might be to require that AI be “explainable,” that it

respond to ethical requirements and be subject to human oversight. Yet the human controller is already the one who can invest tens of trillions of euros in these tools. The ordinary citizen can only watch helplessly, questioning the risks of disinformation or indoctrination while using the tool that is free!

Yet everyone knows that “when it’s free, you are the product.”

The law makes us free

Certain uses of AI are prohibited, such as social scoring systems, emotion recognition in education or the workplace. Biometric identification tools that could be used to manipulate behaviour or exploit vulnerabilities are banned. We know that cultic control aims precisely to create vulnerabilities in order to exploit them. We know that ethics have never been among the concerns of cultic groups. Prohibitions may therefore, as far as cultic groups are concerned, turn into incentives. For these movements, for example, the principle of “non-discrimination” translates instead into a search for discrimination corresponding to the elitist dimension on which they base their approach. Facial recognition, the data provided by future targets online, enable targeted recruitment of the chosen adept.

AI is seen by companies as a “growth accelerator.” We can bet that AI will also be this accelerator of growth for cultic groups, thereby increasing the number of people under control.

I wanted to test ChatGPT on the Solar Temple case, which I know well. ChatGPT gave me factual information but also some errors. I noticed its reluctance to correct them. Will it have taken account of corrections for those who question it after me?

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe concluded her Europe Day speech by saying: “let us have confidence in the future.” On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe, she recalled that the organisation has established legal standards in the field of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, so that citizens of our 46 member states can live in peace, security, and dignity.

We all know here that the future is built, and that confidence must not be blind.

FECRIS must continue to open the eyes of those who work for the future by warning of the risks posed to citizens and democracy by cultic obscurantism based on Artificial Unculture.

It is another way of saying that “science without conscience is but the ruin of the soul.” Rabelais was Gutenberg’s contemporary!