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The fall of creativity

A librarian's role in the world of AI

The world is a global landscape that is forever evolving with the rise of technology, information access, and labor outsourcing. Artificial intelligence is growing exponentially in the United States, in many ways aiding in general tasks. However, generative AI is learning and developing a high rate of consciousness, which could soon replace our role as human creators. We as librarians must take a step back and reflect on the long-term effects of this technology, not just react. We must ask ourselves, what world do we want to leave for the future generations? How do we want to steer these conversations?

For decades America was at the cutting edge of the industrial revolution; manufacturing plants flourished throughout the country, and creating material goods was a key component of the American Dream. With the advancements in technology, production work labor required less human intervention. Eventually most manufacturing left the United States as labor and automation could be found cheaper elsewhere.¹ Yet American ingenuity and creativity remained; even flourishing in the new technology-dense landscape. With faster computers, cars, and machines, time was freed up for humans to explore their thoughts and ideas. This shift is seen through the dramatic increase of entrepreneurship, influencers, television programs, movies, artists, writers, and online creative communities.

As a society we entered the age of the mind.

Thought and creativity now rule American exports. People around the world watch movies, read books, and appreciate art created in the United States and exported overseas. Artists in Australia can take a virtual tour of the Met and see grand masterpieces housed in New York City from their computer.² As online access has expanded, so has the visual art industry as artists can reach enthusiasts in new ways, posting their work on social media and their own websites. Going beyond the gallery walls with the access the internet provided allowed American artists to flourish in 2022 with more than 6 percent industry growth from 2021.³

As visual media expanded so did the written word. Growing internet communities created a space for writing groups, fanfiction, and serialized original work posted on sites like Royal Road, Wattpad, Webtoon, and tapas. Creative writing originating from the US traversed the globe through the internet, which also enabled online writers to be “discovered” by traditional publishing houses. In 2018, the US's traditional publishing, indie publishing, and on-demand printing industry prospered with more than 3 million books published. For perspective, in 2018 the next most prolific country, the United Kingdom, published fewer than 200,000 titles.⁴

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Despite movies being filmed around the world, the most widely viewed works are American-made, with billions annually in box office profits.⁵ These productions and the entire visual media industry is staffed by over 30,000 American actors and many other creatives.⁶

As AI companies race toward developing more powerful systems, generally with little forethought to long-term use,⁷ the incredible achievements of the creative industry are put at risk. From an even broader perspective we must ask ourselves the following questions: What elements of humanity are we losing by enabling and allowing AI to take over our creativity? What long-term consequences will this have on independent thought? Might information literacy become more complex to teach with the influx of machine-created content? Will the decline of human thought be so slow we don't even see the drift? What does it mean as AI starts appearing in higher academic circles as an easier, faster way to produce work?

Visual and written creativity is at its peak, but what happens if script writers, authors, and artists begin relying on AI? Studio use of AI is already an issue for these creators, highlighted with the 2023 Writers Guild of America strike. Will these blockbuster shows that have a massive influence on popular culture still have the same oomph? Or will there be a steady decline in the quality and revolutionary nature of the film industry?

As educators, information experts, and librarians, it is our duty to the next generation to ensure students gain the tenacity to ask these types of probing questions. Presenting resources that broaden the mind and challenge pre-conceived notions through LibGuides, videos, and social media posts is a step that can be implemented with limited resources. Connecting students with industry experts and scientists currently discussing the complexities and long-term ramifications of AI development provides the building blocks for critiquing the technology industry. Connecting passive programming and displays within the library to AI conversations can foster student engagement with the material and each other. The goal of these types of programming is to engage students and educators in broader reflection and decisions on how we use technology. Libraries are the main point of information access, making library workers the perfect stewards for these deeper conversations.

Bottom line: if we allow AIs like ChatGPT and DALLe to create poems, textbooks, research papers, digital art, and more, then we are losing the last great American world export—human creativity.

Will we notice the loss, or will we have created a society where it doesn't even register as a loss?

Notes

1. Smil Vaclav, *Made in the USA: The Rise and Retreat of American Manufacturing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 110–11, 113, 118.

2. Keith Christiansen, Stephan Wolohojian, Adam Eaker, “A New Look at Old Masters,” the Met, February 25, 2021, video, 11:49, <https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/videos/2021/2/a-new-look-at-old-masters>.

3. “National Estimates for Artists and Related Workers, All Other Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 1, 2021, <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes271019.htm#nat>.

4. WIPO, *The Global Publishing Industry in 2018* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Intellectual Property Organization, 2020), 27.

5. Statista Research Department, “Number of Movies Released in the United States and Canada from 2000 to 2022,” February 13, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/187122/movie-releases-in-north-america-since-2001/>.
6. “National Estimates for Actors, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 1, 2021, <https://bls.gov/oes/current/oes272011.htm>.
7. Future of Life Institute, “Pause Giant AI Experiments: An Open Letter,” March 22, 2023, <https://futureoflife.org/open-letter/pause-giant-ai-experiments/>.