New Humanism in the time of Neurosciences and Artificial Intelligence

NHNAI newsletter 6

Illustrations of NHNAI's results and main complexities

The NHNAI project (*New Humanism in the Time of Neurosciences and Artificial Intelligence*) explores what it means to be human in the face of radical technological advances. Coordinated by the Confluence: Sciences and Humanities Research Center at Lyon Catholic University, under the aegis of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU), the project spans 9 countries and brings together over 70 academic experts.

Launched in 2022, NHNAI involves a dynamic and participatory approach: face-to-face workshops, online debates, and synthesis reports have collectively shaped a new understanding of AI and neuroscience's impact on human freedom, education, health, and democracy.

The first and second wave of face-to-face and digital discussions with social actors allowed to identify a series of nexuses of complexity. Indeed, being human in the time of artificial intelligence and neurosciences implies to carefully explore nexuses of complexity where valid ideas are nonetheless in tension, manifesting subtleties and challenges one should not overlook.

This newsletter explores few nexuses of complexity, to end with an ethical compass, illustrated by Users Matter.

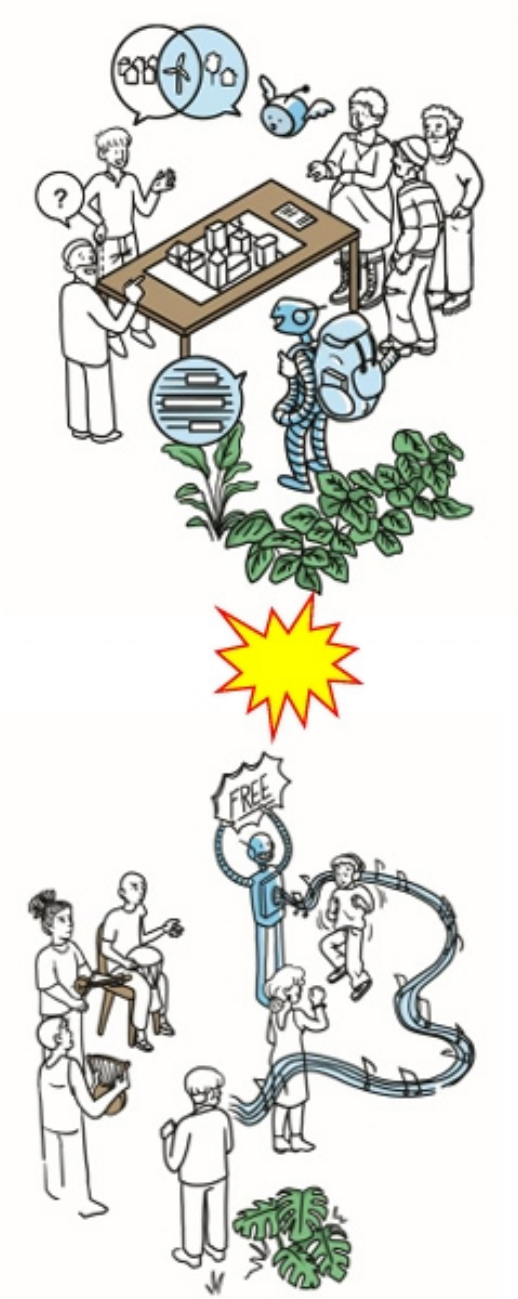
AI at the service of humanity?...

NHNAI global discussions highlight the natural need for human being to seek to improve himself, to enhance his physical, intellectual, social and emotional capabilities. AI and new technologies present several possibilities to improve performances and productivity and perhaps becoming a great tool at the service of humanity.

However, one must be cautious of the "techno-solutionist" vision, which assumes technology is always the sole solution to a problem. Instead, it is essential to identify real needs and evaluate whether AI technologies are truly relevant and useful, rather than relying on technology indiscriminately.

Democracy

AI has the potential to reinforce collective intelligence. For instance, it can enhance the quality of information, by supporting the fight against (deep) fake news or by playing a role in moderation of online contents. It can be a great tool in helping decision-making. Moreover, AI can help to ensure security and safety with enhanced video surveillance capabilities, or by forecasting potential crisis such as epidemics or natural disasters. In addition, AI can trigger enormous gains in productivity and efficiency in work (by automating repetitive or boring tasks).

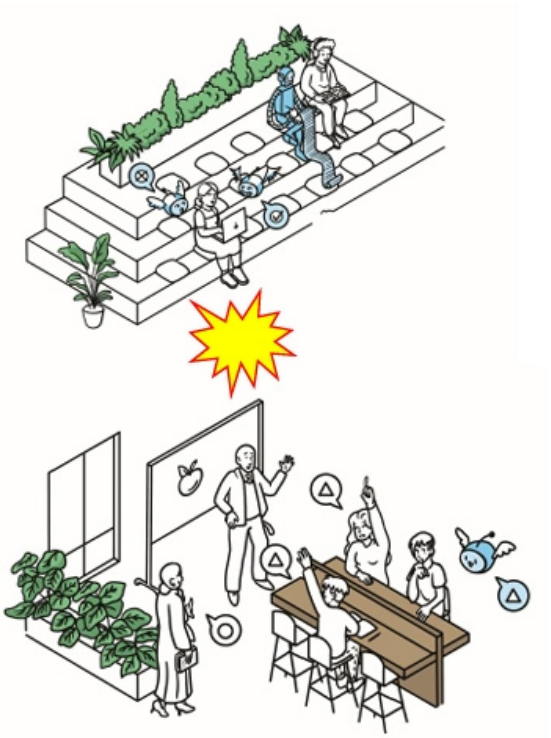


However, AI is not neutral. As the major financial benefits of AI are in hands of few people only, it can reinforce inequalities all over the world. Countries can become highly dependent of big Tech industries because of the lack of infrastructures and financial means, threatening their sovereign digital capacities. Moreover, free services have deleterious consequences for employment. On one hand, people who lived from providing similar services cannot sell them anymore. On the other hand, the cost-free model is based on data collection and leads to skills and intelligence exfiltration (allowing for task automation). In addition, one can wonder if the gains in efficiency and time-saving thanks to automation will trigger additional pressure to produce. Finally, every learning database contains bias that could perpetuate discriminations toward groups of people.

Education

AI has the potential to reinforce learning. For instance, by making more accessible pedagogical contents (and sometimes with gamification) as well as with tools that help learners with disabilities

(language difficulties, deaf or hearing-impaired persons), or by personalizing educational paths and exercises.



However, relying too much on AI can be highly problematic, as it can influence our cognitive abilities to think, to create and to remember. AI technologies participate to the principle of “the least effort” which is detrimental for the cognitive development, and risk transforming learning into a passive process instead of an active process, whereas the personal effort is an important part of this process.

Health

AI has the potential to reinforce healthcare systems as well as our capacity to care. For instance, it can support health professionals in medical decision-making (for instance, by identifying tumors or abnormalities faster than humans in medical imaging), and automating certain tasks may give more time for the human dimensions of caregiving and healthcare.

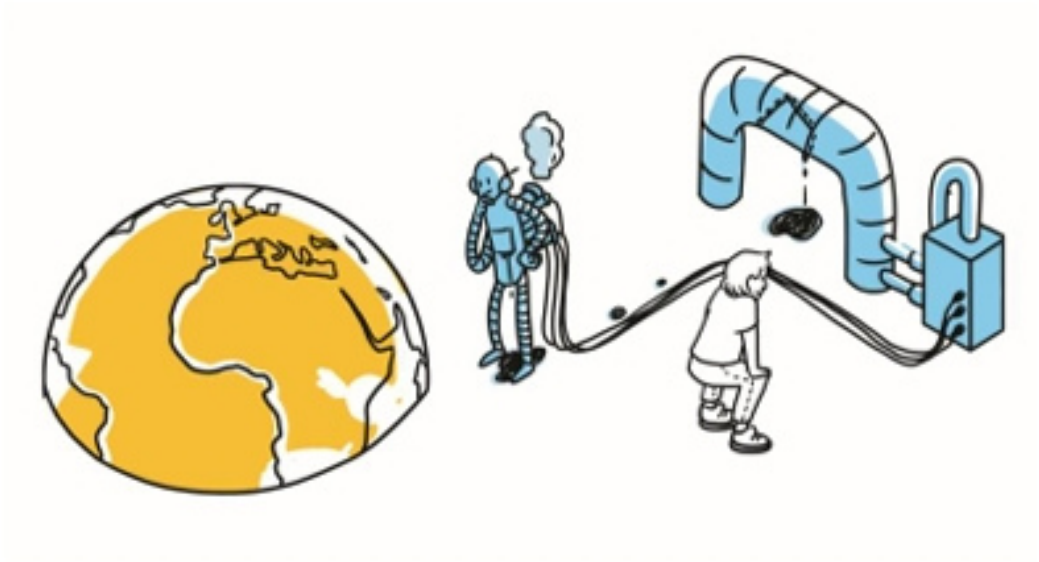
However, introducing AI in healthcare systems to enhance performance and efficiency may be detrimental if we lose sight of persons with their singularity and diversity. Patients remain humans who should be approached through a comprehensive way, making room to all relevant dimensions and firmly rooted in empathy and human relationships. The latter are key for the healing process and the doctor-patient relationship. Thus, the risk is to pay too much attention to quantitative and what can be measured, reducing patients to data (with the risk of medicine and healthcare becoming overly prescriptive and coercive).

The ethical compass

After considering the challenges and potential threats AI poses to humanity, it is crucial to establish major principles to guide responsible and ethical development and use. These principles help to ensure that AI technology truly serves humanity.

Collectively define the right place for each technology

Improving our lives and societies by taking into account other living beings and the environment

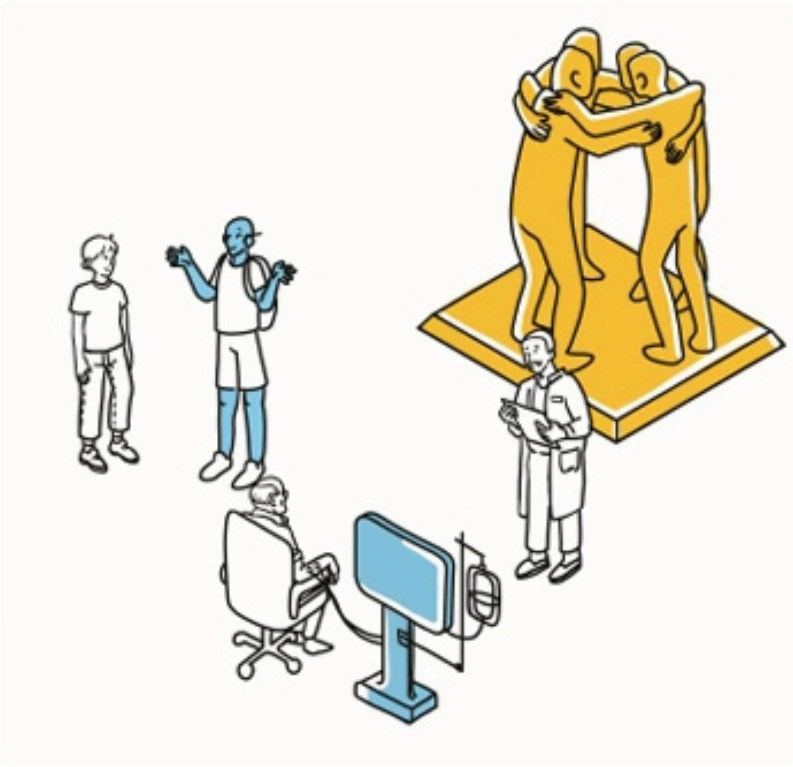


Take into account negative externalities and collateral damage

Preserve and stimulate creativity (particularly through AI), enrich and multiply ways of being in the world, and give a more nuanced place to the experience of error.

Preserve the freedom to do without AI

Positioning oneself appropriately in relation to machines (critical thinking, the uniqueness of humans and living beings in relation to AI systems that imitate them, etc)



Leveraging data without reducing humans and life to those data

Stay connected!

Project website

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