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## Introduction Issue 2: Humanities in the time of ChatGPT and other forms of AI

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# Introduction Issue 2: Humanities in the time of ChatGPT and other forms of AI

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**Dr Barbara Postema** is a lecturer at the University of Groningen. She is known for publications on wordless comics, on Canadian and American comics (including a roundtable in Seth's *Clyde Fans* for *The Comics Journal*), and on form and narratology. Her work has been recognized by associations in the US, Brazil, New Zealand, and Germany, leading to invitations to present keynote lectures and to the translation of her monograph, *Narrative Structure in Comics*, into Brazilian Portuguese. She was part of the research group "History in Comics" based out of Palacky University in Czechia in 2021-22. Barbara is a former president of the Canadian Society of the Study of Comics and a founding member of the Comics Studies Society. She is a co-editor of the Wilfrid Laurier UP book series *Crossing Lines*, and regularly contributes peer reviews on manuscripts and journal articles for a variety of publishers and journals.

**Puspa Damai** teaches at Marshall University and is the Editor-in-Chief of *Critical Humanities*. He also co-edits Routledge's new Book Series, "South Asian Literature in Focus."

Since GPT-3 was launched in November 2022, universities worldwide have been scrambling to address if and how students will be allowed to use AI for coursework, with numerous department and committee meetings devoted to brainstorming how to AI-proof assignments and adjusting the language of plagiarism statements and exam board regulations to include the use of LLMs. “ChatGPT Breeds Suspicion and Mistrust” shouts an article title in *WO & O*, a Dutch publication from the tertiary education union AOb. The article itself is more nuanced, with instructors pointing out not just problems caused by student use of ChatGPT and the like, but potential benefits for students as well. Like many tools, AI can be used for good as well as ill. At the moment, it is also hard to keep up, with the capabilities of AI tools developing faster than the language to clarify their use can be generated—unless we outsource that to AI as well, perhaps. New applications that integrate AI tools for academic work are already being offered, from Chatpdf.com, which will summarize texts for you, to consensus.app, which can find articles related to a certain topic or research question, and can synthesize arguments, to researchrabbit.ai, which combines mapping research areas across publications with a reference manager. AI can be used to find our sources, summarize them, and even create arguments. We have never had more resources, and our work has never been more precarious, as it seems students may as well cut out university professors as go-betweens for academic learning and just use AI instead.

The articles in this second issue of *Critical Humanities* devoted to the Humanities in the time of ChatGPT cover the entire range of responses to AI use, from the dire warnings to celebrating the promise of new possibilities. The first special issue on this topic (Vol. 2, Iss. 1) opened with the notion that current attitudes see AI as an employment crisis in the making, and the author of that article, Mich Ciurria, suggested that any response to this should include the perspectives of people who had been historically marginalized in the job market, people with disabilities and Indigenous peoples. Similarly, the first article in the second issue turns to the perspective of marginalized people in considering early shifts to adopting AI, this time in the educational context. Ethnohistorians Jeffrey Washburn and Jennifer Monroe McCutchen, in the article “AI Meets AI: ChatGPT as a Pedagogical Tool to Teach American Indian History”, share how they have been meeting the urgency of coming to terms with AI with the urgency of teaching Native American history. By having students use AI for several assignments, they turned it into an experiential learning tool: students were challenged to see the Eurocentric biases built into LLMs due to the underrepresentation of Indigenous text and cultural artifacts in amongst the texts used to train these LLMs. In getting students to engage with AI for peer-evaluation, critical thinking and collaborative assignments, they encouraged students to center Indigenous perspectives. Simultaneously, Washburn and McCutchen draw attention to the importance of using AI in

constructive ways, so that instructors do not allow it to erode their trust in students.

The second article, “From Polygraphs to Truth Machines: Artificial Intelligence in Lie Detection,” by Jo Ann Oravec, takes a different approach to the questions about the ethics of AI use in education. Rather than thinking about AI as a case of cheating, she considers the application of invasive means of AI-enhanced lie detection in a number of different settings. While AI lie detection may seem less intrusive and rigorous than taking a polygraph, the potentially unnoticed data collection and interpretation that can serve as the basis of AI lie detection has much greater implications for leading to biases and abuse, infringing on people’s privacy and everyday lives.

Richard Haslam, in “‘This Wonderful Machine’: How Should We Teach Humanities Texts Like *Gulliver’s Travels* in the Time of ChatGPT?”, reflects on his own experiences as a university professor of English Literature, as well as some experiences published by undergraduate students, to consider what the best pedagogical responses will be to LLMs. He discusses how he redesigned several of his courses to create a greater focus on critical thinking, switching to written assignments that were completed in class, instead of at home. Haslam’s report from the field is that he prefers the handwritten, spelling error-ridden in-class assignments to the “perpetual hermeneutics-of-suspicion mode when encountering potential GPT-chattering.”

The article “ChatGPT and Death of an Author” by Al Kareem Dato and Kamran Akhtar Siddiqui posits another kind of erosion that could result from the general adoption of AI. As numerous writing-related tasks get relegated to ChatGPT, they suggest, the result may be the demise of the author. Machine learning may supersede human learning once and for all. By looking at AI use by several undergraduate students in Pakistan, Dato and Siddiqui create a sense of the many different aspects of writing for which students turn to AI, from brainstorming to streamlining the language, and from finding sources to structuring their texts. Even the students who participated in the research project themselves note that their learning is changing as a result of their AI use, and Dato and Siddiqui conclude that the attractiveness of AI use is mostly due to its convenience and speed. For the cognitive and imaginative processes related to writing, speed is a detriment, and for students who rely on AI to take over some of their tasks as authors, the results will be loss of agency and authenticity, even alienation from their own studies. An emphasis on praxis might be an antidote to this.

David Arellano Smith, author of the next article, “How Fears of AI in the Classroom Reflect Anxieties about Choosing Sophistry over True Knowledge in the American Education System,” takes to task the American system of education: as the focus has been on high scores on tests, rather than on learning in and of itself, fertile ground has been prepared for the use of

ChatGPT, as critical thinking has been deemphasized. Smith lays the blame not with students tempted to use AI, but with educators failing their students. He also suggests what can be done to address concerns about AI use: if the kind of learning that can be mimicked by AI gets less attention in the classroom, if education is no longer focused on commercialized test results, then more holistic knowledge and critical thinking will be generated, the kind of learning that cannot be replicated by AI.

The final contribution to our issues on Artificial Intelligence moves away from the realm of education again. Shiva Hari Mainaly contributes “An Affirmation of Co-existence between Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Human Intelligence (HI): An Inquiry into the Structure of and Human Intelligence (HI): An Inquiry into the Structure of Kazuo Ishiguro’s Novel *Klara and the Sun*”, in which she considers the contrasts drawn between human thinking and machine intelligence in a literary novel, in a fictional narrative. The novel is set in a futuristic world with AI caregivers and common practices of prenatal gene editing, but it raises contemporary issues, as science fiction so often does.

The final article is on a general topic, but like the previous article focuses on a contemporary novel. “Catastrophe of War: Acute Trauma and Distorted Memory in Narayan Wagle’s *Palpasa Café*” by Sujit Kumar Singh and Ayushi Jaiswal, discusses Nepalese political events in the recent past, and takes to task Eurocentric trauma theory in considering the trauma resulting

from civil war and violence in Nepal that is fictionalized in Wagle’s novel.

In addition to the articles, this issue includes a discussion with Ilan Manouach, scholar of the effect of frontier technologies on the comics industry and co-creator of several AI-generated comics, who enters into a conversation about these synthetic comics with Barbara Postema. The title of the discussion, “The Hard Work of Programming Germinates Soft Pleasures,” is taken from a speech balloon in *Fastwalkers* (2021), but also reflects some of the process of creating the comic that Manouach elucidates, which involved an incredible amount of data gathering and programming that is invisible, and perhaps incomprehensible, to the readers of such works. On the other hand, the responses to reading such a work, the “soft pleasures” it evokes, are very different from the impact of non-synthetic comics, something the images will hopefully provide a taste of.

A review of Mustafa Suleyman’s stunning book *The Coming Wave* (2023) is also included in this issue, which concludes by showcasing in the Artwork section of the journal two intriguing pages from Manouach’s AI magnum opus *Fastwalkers*.

## References

Lucassen, Miro. "ChatGPT Breeds Suspicion and Mistrust." *WO & O* (January 2024): 4-7.