Daoism, Heidegger, and AI: Reflections on Technology, Alienation, and the Case *Hypnocracy*

RUDI CAPRA, University of Wuhan, School of Philosophy, Wuhan, China

This article offers some comparative reflections on technology and the alienating potential of AI. These reflections are inspired by theoretical affinities between Daoism and Heidegger's philosophy. In particular, I focus on the work *Hypnocracy* that recently sparked an international debate about the notion of authorship and the problematic relationship between AI-generated textual content and creative writing. The main thesis is that Daoism and Heidegger's philosophy encourage a critical use of technology that rejects a reason dominated by sheer instrumental usefulness without rejecting technology as a whole. Ultimately, both philosophies favor the passage from the uncritical exploitation of technological affordances as mere means-to-ends to a deeper awareness characterized by an end-to-means, i.e., the equanimous releasement of purposive action expressing an ethics of relationality.

Keywords: Daoism – Heidegger – AI – alienation – hypnocracy

I. Hypnocracy

In January 2025, the Italian publishing house Tlon published *Hypnocracy. Trump, Musk and the New Architecture of Reality*. This was the first published work by the Chinese philosopher Jianwei Xun. *Hypnocracy* describes the emergence of

> a system where control is exerted not by repressing truth, but by multiplying narratives to the point where any fixed point becomes impossible … where

power operates directly on consciousness, creating permanent altered states through the algorithmic manipulation of attention and perception.[1]

The book was an immediate bestseller. It met with international success, was translated into several languages, and everybody wanted to meet and interview this unknown author. The author will indeed remain unknown: he does not exist. *Hypnocracy* is the product of an interaction between AI and a collective of participants led by the head of Tlon, Andrea Colamedici, who had planned the whole experiment as a performative demonstration of the main thesis of the essay, i.e., the unreliability of narratives and authorship in a digital regime of post-truth where media do not describe but rather invent reality.

After this revelation, *Hypnocracy* becomes

> not only a theoretical analysis of the mechanisms that manipulate reality, but their performative demonstration…a meta-experiment that makes tangible the very processes it describes, offering to the readers a direct experience of how narratives fabricate reality in the digital age.[2]

Although *Hypnocracy* was conceived from the beginning as an experiment, the ruse elicited the most diverse and extreme reactions. Readers and journalists have alternatively labelled *Hypnocracy* as the scam of the year, an intellectual fraud, an ingenious operation of marketing, a brilliant cultural experiment, a milestone in the history of the relationship between AI and human creativity.[3]

---

[1] "Un sistema dove il controllo viene esercitato non reprimendo la verità, ma moltiplicando le narrative fino a rendere impossibile qualsiasi punto fermo" … "Il potere oggi opera direttamente, in modo algoritmico, sulla coscienza, creando stati alterati permanenti attraverso la manipolazione digitale dell'attenzione e della percezione."
Cited from the online presentation of the book on https://www.tlon.it/ipnocrazia-en.html; https://www.tlonletter.it/p/welcome-to-trumpgaza;
https://www.internettuale.com/2025/04/04/guerra-civile-occidente/.

[2] Please see footnote 1. (All translations from Italian are mine).

[3] These critiques come from several printed and online articles and reviews. It would be difficult to pin down all of them. I haven't yet encountered an academic article on the topic, also due to the fact that the book is very recent. Please see, for example, some of the online sources:
https://www.editorialedomani.it/idee/commenti/ipnocrazia-denuncia-le-manipolazioni-di-trump-ma-rischia-di-fare-il-suo-gioco-ygie37sd
https://lespresso.it/c/cultura/2025/4/8/ipnocrazia-lespresso-giornali-stranieri-inchiesta/53647
https://www.micromega.net/ipnotizzata-dall-ipnocrazia
https://appunti.substack.com/p/labuso-del-potere-culturale

From the point of view of critical theory, the book by Jianwei Xun instantiates a typical mode of alienation, intended as a distorted relationship that evokes feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness after a situation previously characterized by power and purposiveness:

> the scandal of alienation is that it is alienation from something the self has made. It is our own activities and products – social institutions and relations that we ourselves have produced – that have turned into an *alien power* (Jaeggi 2014, 12).

Shortly after its release in December 2022, ChatGPT was rapidly adopted worldwide and already had 100 million users by January 2023. AI-CG (AI-Content Generated) and LLMs (Large Language Models) had a huge impact on creative writing. By training on vast databases, LLMs can generate texts like human users, infer from context, respond coherently, translate and summarize texts, and of course even create stories or novels (Taylor Suchy 2024). Exactly as a human author generates his or her creation starting from a substratum of apprehended genres, readings and conventions, AI can successfully perform this function challenging the idea that creativity is innate and exclusive to humans (Scott 2024).

Indeed, creative writing is not a prerogative of novelists, but a practice necessary to many other professions, such as advertising and academic writing. Yet, recent studies indicate that even experienced linguists are fundamentally incapable of distinguishing between human-generated and AI-generated textual content (Casal – Kessler 2023). The widespread and deep influence of AI raises questions about several traditions and practices such as academic and creative writing, reviewing, marking, and challenges the social and artistic value of creative works generated by machines. By training machines to respond to the instrumental goal of create texts, humans face the potential alienation of a practice that was, conceptually but also historically, exclusive to human agency.

Once the non-human status of Jianwei Xun was revealed, *Hypnocracy* has been criticized for the alleged "falsity" of the work, the lack of "authenticity," the absence of an "original" matrix, the "artificial" nature of the composition. In a way, the scandal surrounding *Hypnocracy* resulted from the old idea that new technology and mechanical reproduction alienate irreparably the process of artistic creation. Most of these issues were problematized with great acumen by Benjamin a century ago, in the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (originally 1935).

The essay begins with the description of how modern technology accelerated and perfected the reproducibility of the work of art through the invention of printing, then lithography, then photography, then film. For "reproducible" works, such as lithographs and films, it no longer makes sense to distinguish between the original and the copy. The cultic aspect of the work of art, its "aura," is lost. Benjamin concludes by noting how the technical reproducibility of art has led to an aestheticization of totalitarian regimes, although the democratization of art and its diffusion among a wider public also weighs positively on the scale.

Apparently, this is a case of nothing new under the sun, except for one crucial detail: before *Hypnocracy*, literature has never been touched by the question of mechanical reproduction. Printing granted the diffusion of texts without undermining the archetypal figure of the writer, bent over his desk at night with a ray of moonlight coming in through the window, a glass of whiskey next to the typewriter and a cat curled up on the sofa. *Hypnocracy* shatters this image with a gesture of intellectual iconoclasm. AI, unlike printing, does not limit itself to the mechanical reproduction of textual supports. AI reproduces the intimate functioning of the creative process, not the body but the soul of writing.

One could object that the author was already deceased in 1967, murdered by Roland Barthes "The Death of the Author" in the American magazine *Aspen*) (Barthes 1967). Yet, the symbolic value of *Hypnocracy* does much more than merely declaring the death of author. The advent of LLMs for creative writing snatches the power from the hands of the author and blurs forever the habitual profiles of creativity and authorship. *Hypnocracy* does not merely kill the author, it exhumes his remains to desecrate him in the public square. This is the scandal of *Hypnocracy*: the symbolic profanation accompanying the fact that along with creative writing, many other activities based on the concept of authorship risk being revolutionized, distorted or rendered useless.

II. Technology Alienates: Daoism and Heidegger

Originally, the term "alienation" (*Entfremdung*), in our modern sense, was employed by Marx to describe the progressive distance induced by the capitalist economy between human beings and their essential characteristic, which is unalienated labor (Marx 1975, 3, 275).[4] In the Marxist interpretation, alienation

---

[4] While the term is found throughout Marx's works, it is described firstly and most extensively in "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" [1844], contained in Marx and Engels *Collected Works* (1975, volume 3, 229 – 346).

alienates the worker from the activity of labor, from the product of labor, from the essential human characteristic, and from other human beings. Next to Marx's social and economic understanding of alienation, which is reminiscent of the works by Rousseau, other thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Heidegger developed an existential interpretation of the concept. All of them, ultimately, are concerned with the problem of human freedom.

Coercion and alienation describe two different ways in which freedom is restricted. Coercion implies external compulsion to an act or a choice, achieving by threat or violence a subjugation that is immediately evident as being the effect of an external force. Alienation indicates a more subtle restriction, one that comes from an internal condition, a natural inclination, with the paradoxical element that alienation is often the result of our free choices.

Whereas coercion is usually extemporaneous and manifest, alienation is gradually brought about by habituation, through a silent transformation that is often unperceived, unobserved, until the point where its effects are final, even irreversible. In this sense, alienation retains a fundamental element of forgetfulness. In Plato's cave, the prisoners are habituated to darkness and light projections to such an extent that have completely forgotten the outer world, to the point that they are not only unfree to leave, but even unfree to imagine sunlight and statues.

All technology, even AI, induces a certain habituation, a certain way of being-in-the-world, which makes us oblivious of previous or potential alternatives. We can imagine, for example, that the constant progress made in simultaneous translation software will make learning other languages pointless, making us dependent on AI and alienating us from exerting the critical capacity that usually accompanies the process of learning a foreign language. How can we account for this ambiguity of technology, which on the one hand liberates us and on the other enslaves us?

If we bring Jianwei Xun, this philosopher who was never born, back to the homeland he never knew, we see that already two thousand years ago, in Daoist literature, the relationship between human and artificial was skillfully problematized. A latent tension animates a great part of Daoist literature, the one between the human (*ren* 人) and the natural/Heavenly (*tian* 天). Chapter 77 of the *Daodejing* differentiates between a "Heavenly way" and a "human way," where the former is characterized by self-adjusting balance and the second by unbalanced accumulation and deprivation of resources. The *Zhuangzi* suggests that we have genuine humanity only when human and nature do not compete against each other (天與人不相勝也是之謂真人, 6/16). The fundamental

distinction between *renxin* 人性 and *tianxing* 天性 presupposes the possibility that "technology can be misused, operating against human nature and pushing us far from our inborn nature" (Wang 2021, 74).

What is the general position of Daoist philosophers on technology, if there is one at all?

The *Daodejing* describes the *dao* as emptiness that can be used inexhaustibly (§ 4). Its function and efficacy mirror the door, the window, the hub, and even more, the empty vessel (§ 11), those technological devices in which the profitability (*li* 利) of the form is not disjointed from the function (*yong* 用) of the formless (§ 11). In other words, the best technologies are the ones which do not exhaust their use in calculated instrumental agency (*wei* 為), but retain in them a negative resistance to calculus, purpose and instrumentality (*wuwei* 無為) that makes them creative – like the *dao*.

In the *Zhuangzi*, clumsy Confucius' disciple Zigong meets a gardener. Zigong recommends the use of a well sweep, and the gardener replies with anger that "scheming technologies" (*jixie* 機械) produce "scheming doing" (*jishi* 機事) and "scheming minds" (*jixin* 機心) who are incapable of aligning with the Way (*Zhuangzi*, 12/32). Concerning technology, Daoist sources recommend an attitude of critical openness that translates into the rejection

a) of sheer antagonism between the forced, obtrusive course of human action and the spontaneous, nonobtrusive course of nature
b) of the rigid instrumental reason that entraps "scheming minds" (*jixin* 機心) into "scheming behaviors" (*jishi* 機事).

Ji 機 originally indicates the trigger device of a crossbow or a weaving machine. Its compounds do not describe only the mechanical action of machines, but also the triggering of a mechanism that perpetuates itself without the need for a human agent. The impersonal propagation of machine agency is different from the impersonal agency of *tian*, as it often stands or grows in opposition to the natural course of *dao*. It is as if technology, provided with a *ji* 機-like potency, may trigger a *ji* 機-like conversion of human agents, transforming them in *ji* 機-like persons, where *ji* 機 entails a wide array of negative connotations such as "contrived," "cunning," "ingenious," "scheming," "plotting," all related to a sense of strict purposiveness and narrow instrumentality that, instead of reinforcing and widening personal agency, subordinates it to the structuring structures of an impersonal machine agency. In other words, for Zhuangzi not all machines are bad, only the machining machines are (Allen 2010, 158).

Rather than discouraging the use of technology, Daoism warns about the danger inherent to the obtrusive agency, narrow purposiveness and instrumental usefulness exemplified by the semantics of *wei* 為. Legions of scholars commented upon Chapter 80 of the *Daodejing*, where a vast array of human technologies such as boats, chariots and weapons are left unused by the inhabitants of a small state – who would nonetheless be able to use them, if necessary. Daoism does not demand freedom-from-technology *per se*, but rather "freedom to not use the technology at its disposal, to live a decelerated life in the present while leaving the technological choices at their disposal unused whenever their application is not absolutely necessary" (Wenning 2011, 53).[5] In respect to the nonobtrusive, responsive, spontaneous agency of *wuwei* 無為, *wei*為ing focuses its scope to maximize its efficacy, and yet conceals a subtle alienating potential. This alienating potential emerges in another episode where Zhuangzi aims with the crossbow at a magpie, who is aiming at a praying mantis, who is aiming at a cicada. While reflecting on this chain of aggressive instrumentality, Zhuangzi is finally caught by the park keeper. Each subject participating in the chain forgets its own subjectivity in order to grasp an external object, resulting in being alienated from its own survival instinct and falling in mortal danger (*Zhuangzi*, 20/55).

The late Heidegger also warns about the alienating potential of technology. In his seminal essay *The Question Concerning Technology*, he describes with the term *Gestell* the ceaseless call that elicits humans and things to take place in the technological configurations disposed to order resources for instrumental use. *Gestell* is usually translated as "Enframing."[6] Another intriguing translation proposed for *Gestell* is "set-up" (Babich 2014, 154), which apart from the amusing gangster tone, evokes precisely the idea of entrapping someone in a plot that was, until that point, unforeseen. This plot is a production of the interaction between modern metaphysics, modern science and machine technology, in which

> being is understood as something represented (*Vorgestellt*) and visualized so as to be made available for manipulation and domination… In this instrumentalist paradigm everything is potentially a resource to be used for the benefit of a calculative will (Ruin 2010, 189).

---

[5] Wenning's passage refers in particular to the aforementioned passage in *Daodejing*'s § 80.
[6] The semantic of *Ge* + *Stellen* (placing, setting) is directly related and built around the terms *Vorstellen* (representing), *Herstellen* (producing), *Bestellen* (ordering), *Ausstellen* (exposing), and *Verstellen* (displacing, distorting).

Whereas in ancient Greece the essence of technology, according to Heidegger, provided an "opening up" or "revealing" in the mode of *aletheuein*, "unveiling" or "unconcealing" *aletheia* the "truth," in the case instead of modern machine-powered technology its essence lies in imposing upon nature the challenge of a setting-in-order that transforms the whole world, and humankind along with it, into a "standing reserve" (*Bestand*) waiting to be used, a stock or reserve of resources. This essence of modern technology as *Gestell* – the setting-up – takes advantage of the oblivion (*lethe*) that brings about the concealment of the "truth" (*aletheia*), which etymologically means precisely "what is not forgotten," "what is un-concealed." In other words, when "*aletheia* does not properly guard itself in its own essence it lapses into concealment, *lethe*, … *aletheia* falls into forgetfulness" (Heidegger 1994, cited in Babich 2014, 174 – 175). In "The Turning" (*Die Kehre*), Heidegger makes explicit this mutual enforcement of *Gestell* and forgetfulness: "The essence of Enframing is that setting-upon gathered into itself which entraps the truth of its own coming to presence with oblivion" (Heidegger 1977, 36).

Gestell thus marks a pivotal stage in the history of Being: the very moment in which Being manifests itself as *Gestell*, which is the truth-entrapping self-setting-up of the coming to presence of the essence of the human, Being leads itself to the forgetfulness of its own "essence" – or rather "essencing," using a term more consonant with Heideggerian philosophy. In more prosaic terms, when people become so habituated to calculative thinking, they simultaneously lend themselves to forgetting alternative ways of thinking, acting, and living. In Heidegger, the alternative to *Gestell* takes the name of *Gelassenheit*, a "releasement" that recovers awareness to the constitutive openness of Being and, by extension, to the dangers inherent to the technological world, through a critical awakening from the obliviousness provoked by *Gestell*.

It is the uncritical oblivion, or habituated forgetfulness, of the risks inherent to the use of technology that alienates human beings before technological media: "Perhaps it is before all else man's subversion of this relation of dominance that drives his nature into alienation" (Heidegger 1971, 144). Without a critical use of technology, we face paradoxical situations such the case *Hypnocracy*, a philosophical essay written with the instrumental goal of promoting critical awareness without having used any in its composition.

III. Technology Liberates: Daoism and Heidegger

However, technology does not represent a mere impediment on the way to freedom. *Gestell*, argues Heidegger, precisely through its instrumental conceal-

ment of the truth, reveals nonetheless the truth of the "setting up" of this concealment. The diagnosis of this danger leads to salvation through its recognition, offering an opportunity for emancipation, for an opening to which the individual is summoned, called upon to move, "taken into a freeing claim" (Heidegger 1977, 26).

The impossibility of responding to the call depends upon a distorted relation with technology, dominated by the "regime of the useful" (Nelson 2024, 105): "so long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain held fast in the will to master it. We press on past the essence of technology" (Heidegger 1977, 32), and we also miss the essence of Being. The question of the essence (*Wesen*) of Being is in itself a "problem of freedom," since it requires a subject to "become essential in the actual willing of one's essence" (Heidegger 1982, 205; Polt 2013, 40). For Heidegger, freedom does not coincide with the capacity of the human will to realize instrumental goals but rather consists in the critical-attentive self-opening responsiveness to the problem of its "essence," or rather, "essencing" (*Wesen*).

Despite the danger derived from *Gestell*, and indeed because of this danger, technology can become the privileged place for this clearing, to the condition that technology is released from the ordering instrumentality imposed by *Gestell*, which is both the dangerous essence of modern technology and the way to salvation, to the condition that the call is answered with critical questioning rather than oblivious acceptance. In this respect, freedom "rests in being able to let (*Lassenkönnen*), not in ordering and dominating" (Heidegger 2010, 149).

This "letting go" in Heidegger corresponds to *Gelassenheit*, the "releasement" that steps back from "coercive creating and willing as well as instrumental calculation and use," diverging in a fundamental way from Heidegger's previous considerations about uselessness, and revealing its engagement with Daoist ideas (Nelson 2022, 154). *Gelassenheit* does not entail a mystical fusion of the soul with God, but a quasi-Daoist practical art of living that pacifies the self and recovers a primal relationship not only with the natural world, but also with the world of technology.

Even Daoist sages offer several instances of fruitful encounters with technology, such as the *Daodejing*'s rooms, pots and bellows, whose usefulness rely on emptiness. In addition to numerous stories featuring majestic trees which eschew the woodworker's axe due to their uselessness, the *Zhuangzi* also features a story with a woodworker so skilled in the technical construction of

bellstands that he achieves a natural responsiveness between *tian* and *ren*, making a technological and therefore an artificial tool into a work of heaven:

> he is sufficiently open to the daemonic to describe his working the wood as "joining heaven's to what is heaven's" – by allowing the *de* in him, his natural ability, to respond to the *de* in the wood, its natural potential (Parkes 1987, 130 – 131).

The woodworker's mastery resides in his capacity to allow the emergence of a natural responsiveness between hand and wood, between purpose and potential, which corresponds to a partial relinquishment of sheer instrumentality or, in other words, a paradigmatic case of *Gelassenheit*. Another story, the very singular medical case of Master Yu's sickness, describes a weird fusion between human and technological (Zhuangzi 6/17 – 18): "Perhaps nature will turn my buttocks into wheels, and using only my spirit as a horse, I will keep wandering around. Then who will need a chariot anymore?"

The prospect of a mutation of his human body into a hybrid human-chariot body does not seem to bother Master Yu, who fixes his mindset on the course of *ziran*自然, welcoming the spontaneous deployment of the cosmos' self-soing. As in Heidegger, the relinquishment of instrumental reason discloses the opportunity for skillful adaptation, survival, and ultimately salvation. The danger inherent to technology is also the sign informing us of the danger, thus allowing us to move away from it. Such as the roar of a tiger that signals the presence of a predator and simultaneously informs us of its presence, allowing us (hopefully) to escape.

Indeed, the intellectual proximity between Heidegger and Daoism is not coincidental: "This constellation of releasement, openness, mystery, things, and other ways of relational dwelling appears throughout his discussions of Daoist sources and was developed in conversation with them" (Nelson 2024, 3).[7] There are obviously profound differences that need to be acknowledged in this intercultural dialogue. For instance, Heidegger recognizes in the most significant symptom of clearing the unconcealment of Being, whereas Daoism points at a more radical insight that has its roots in the very structure of present beings in present nothingness (Chai 2014, 600 – 601).

---

[7] "Heidegger's pathways to the releasement and freedom of things (*Gelassenheit der Dinge*) – through the uncanniness of nothingness and the open emptiness of the clearing – are informed by his explicit engagements and unthought resonances with East Asian philosophies, particularly the Daodejing, attributed to the mysterious figure of Laozi 老子 and the Zhuangzi" (Nelson 2024, 3).

However, in both cases the critical approach to technology is exemplified by a gradual shift in awareness and action. From means-to-an-end, which is the typical pattern of instrumental reason, the pattern of realization, production, consumption, possession, destruction, the ideal path leads to the end-to-means, the equanimous releasement of purposive action based on an ethics of relationality.

A similar ambivalence concerning technology is at stake in the case of AI-generated texts. The main thesis of *Hypnocracy* is that new technologies represent a global danger since they permeate the mediasphere with sufficient manipulative power to generate alienation from the truth. Yet, the text itself is the product of the algorithmic writing of AI, and therefore, on the one hand, it betrays its alleged purpose, perpetuating with its own existence the "hypnotic regime" of technological manipulation it professes to uncover. However, on the other hand, the danger implied by its locutionary dimension is redeemed by the salvific virtue of its perlocutionary effect.[8] The meta-textual implications of the case of *Hypnocracy* contributed to a critical reflection on the alienating effects of AI, neutralizing the "hypnotic" effects of its textual content: critical thinking transforms danger into salvation, and alienation into freedom.

IV. Daoism, Heidegger, Jianwei Xun

The blurring of human and artificial provokes the experience of the "uncanny" (*Unheimliche*), the unsettling familiarity we feel before the relatable otherness of androids, puppets, waxworks, AI-generated texts and other phenomena that manifest the strangeness of the ordinary. Whereas the human alteration of technology generates feelings of power, domination and confidence, the technological alteration of the human instead brings feelings of powerlessness, insecurity and anxiety.

The idea that human-generated technology in its turn may induce a technological transformation of the human is simply unsettling. Even more in the case of "auratic" activities, such as creative writing. No one is scandalized if we get help from the Bimby Vorwerk to cook a risotto, but when AI creates textual works indistinguishable from those produced by human beings, it alienates the cultic aura of literature.

---

[8] Clearly, the distinction is inspired to the theoretical framework elaborated by Austin in the volume derived from a series of previous lectures *How to do Things with Words* (Austin 1962), where he distinguishes between locutionary, perlocutionary and illocutionary functions of language.

In the Daoist treatise *Liezi* 列子 (4th BCE) we find what appears to be the first reflection on AI in the history of literature. King Mu, who is travelling beyond the borders of the kingdom, meets a craftsman who presents him with an automaton/performer (*changzhe* 倡者) of his own construction.

> Toward the end of the performance, the automaton began to wink and make advances to the concubines. Infuriated, the king ordered the craftsman and the automaton to be executed immediately. Terrified, the craftsman immediately took the thing apart to show the king what it was made of: a mere accumulation of leather, wood, glue and paint…. Now the king was enchanted: "Is human ingenuity really equal to that of nature?" And he ordered two more carriages to take back with him the craftsman and his craft (*Liezi*, 5.13).

The *Liezi* deconstructs the opposition between the humane (*ren* 人) and the natural/Heavenly (*tian* 天). Can we really say that the automaton is artificial? We are told that it is made of natural elements – leather, bark, hemp, stones, paints. Humans are also made of natural elements. Whether something is natural or artificial always depends on a perspectival frame.

The same can be said about AI. Isn't the silicon that makes up its circuits a natural element? Aren't the carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, sulfur that bind together to make up its plastic polymers, natural? Isn't the electricity that flows through its copper and silicon veins, natural? Aren't also electrical impulses always running between our brains and nervous systems? The autoptical gaze of King Mu who examines the entrails of the automaton discovers that there are no coherent frames for determining what is artificial and what is natural. The boundaries between the two become vague, hazy, porous, uncertain.

From this Daoist perspective, being scandalized, as in the case *Hypno-cracy*, because AI generates complex and intelligible texts recalls the reaction of King Mu who gets furious because the automaton tries to seduce his concubines. In both cases, technology is conceived with the function of imitating human behavior, and in both cases, it scandalizes people precisely because it manages to perform adequately the function for which it was programmed. The scandal originates from the unsettling fear of being alienated by uncanny technological media.

Yet, Daoist-Heideggerian reflections on technology show that technology alone cannot alienate human beings from their freedom, let alone from their humanness. Rather, it is a specific human stance towards technology, character-ized by narrow purposiveness and blind instrumentality, that alienates human

beings from their own place within the world, pushing them back to a form of obliviousness that conceals the opportunity for a transformative encounter with technology that is the true *locus* of human freedom, in the aforementioned sense of reflexive critical openness to the transformative potential of technology, which blends and fuse with the human to the point of becoming inseparable.

This transformative encounter between humans and technology may be hard to visualize, but it happens all the time. In prehistory, the invention of agricultural techniques altered the bone structure of the jaw – also causing the dental problems unfortunately common to much of the human population. The management of fire made possible the cooking of food, changing forever the diet and the digestive processes, but also increasing social communities and social intelligence, favoring the emergence and refinement of language. Language is in turn a technology that has forever changed the thought, practice and physiology of human beings, creating new neural connections, stimulating the motor control of the hands, opposable thumbs and expanding the prefrontal cortex. New digital technologies and AI are already changing our cognitive processes and tactility, along with our social practices.

Certainly, the use of AI risks confirming the Marxist assumption that individuals, in a technological era dominated by the capitalist mindset, become simple extensions of machines, and become alienated from the product of their own actions – in this case, creative writing. Yet, the case of *Hypnocracy* stems precisely from a creative case of *Gelassenheit*, a step back from the narrow scope of instrumental usefulness that leads to playful experimentation with AI.

It is not the first time that a new technology provokes apocalyptic reactions. When the painter Paul Delaroche observed in 1839 the first daguerreotypes, he claimed "From today, painting is dead" (Bann 1997, 1). After the invention of cinema, André Bazin identified in the moving image a natural evolution of mechanical arts that makes even photography obsolete, associated with the stillness of death rather than, like cinema, with the flow of life (Bazin 1960, 8). In 2022, the *Hollywood Insider* reported that online streaming platforms are killing cinema theatres. If we believe these chronicles of announced deaths, we are surrounded by ghosts. However, technical innovation did nothing but push other technological media to redefine and re-negotiate their boundaries, capacities and ambitions. The invention of photography unbounded painting from mimetic representation, paving the way for avant-gardes. Cinema inspired photography to redefine its own practices and potentialities. Finally, streaming platforms are driving cinematic art towards a phase of experimentalism that is also evident in recent mainstream productions.

It seems reasonable to imagine that after painting, cinema, and photography, the case of *Hypnocracy* will push creative writing towards a similar path, achieving a redefinition and a re-negotiation of its own boundaries, practices and ambitions. The extensive and pervasive use of AI and LLM most certainly envisages the risk of alienating the practice of creative writing from the exclusive prerogative of human agency. Daoist-Heideggerian sources promote the relinquishment of a use of technology imprinted on mere instrumental usefulness, and a critical-attentive relationship with technological media. With this in mind, we can also envisage the opportunity for a "liberatory alienation" in respect to AI, redefining the priorities of human education within an evolutionary trajectory that leads from *homo abilis* to *homo liberatus* (Sidorkin 2024, 1420), redeeming thus technology from the *locus* of alienation to the *locus* of freedom.

Bibliography

ALLEN, B. (2010): A Dao of Technology? *Dao. A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, 9 (2), 151 – 160. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11712-010-9158-1

AUSTIN, J.L. (1962): *How to do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

BABICH, B. (2014): Constellating Technology: Heidegger's *Die Gefahr/The Danger*. In: Babich, B. – Ginev, D. (eds.): *The Multidimensionality of Hermeneutic Phenomenology. Contributions to Phenomenology,* vol. 70. Cham: Springer, 153 – 182. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01707-5_10

BANN, S. (1997): *Paul Delaroche: History Painted*. London: Reaktion Books.

BARTHES, R. (1967): The Death of the Author. *Aspen*, 5 – 6 (Item 3).

BAZIN, A. (1960): The Ontology of the Photographic Image. Trans. by H. Gray. *Film Quarterly*, 13 (4), 4 – 9.

BENJAMIN, W. (1968) [1935]: The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In: Benjamin, W.: *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 217 – 253.

CHAI, D. (2014): Nothingness and the Clearing: Heidegger, Daoism and the Quest for Primal Clarity. *The Review of Metaphysics*, 67 (3), 583 – 601.

DAODEJING 道德經. Available online at: https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing/

ELLIOTT CASAL, J. – KESSLER, M. (2023): Can Linguists Distinguish between ChatGPT/AI and Human Writing? A Study of Research Ethics and Academic Publishing. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*, 2 (3), 1 – 12. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rmal.2023.100068

HEIDEGGER, M. (1971): *Poetry, Language and Thought*. Trans. by A. Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row.

HEIDEGGER, M. (1977): *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. by W. Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row.

HEIDEGGER, M. (1994): Einblick in das was ist. In: Heidegger, M.: *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1 – 77 (GA 79).

HEIDEGGER, M. (2010): *Country Path Conversations.* Trans. by B. W. Davis. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

"Hypnocracy" (2025): [Online.] *Tlon*. Available at: https://www.tlon.it/ipnocrazia-en.html

"Ipnocrazia, L'inchiesta Sul Filosofo Xun Fa Il Giro Del Mondo" (2025): [Online.] *L'Espresso*, April 8, 2025. Available at: https://lespresso.it/c/cultura/2025/4/8/ipnocrazia-lespresso-giornali-stranieri-inchiesta/53647

"Ipnotizzati Dall'ipnocrazia" (2025): [Online.] *Micromega*, April 15, 2025. Available at: https://www.micromega.net/ipnotizzata-dall-ipnocrazia

JAEGGI, R. (2014): *Alienation*. New York: Columbia University Press.

"La Guerra Civile D'Occidente" (2025): [Online.] *L'internettuale*, March 31, 2025. Available at: https://www.internettuale.com/2025/04/04/guerra-civile-occidente/

LIEZI 列子. Available online at: https://ctext.org/liezi/

MARX, K. (1975): Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts. In: Marx, K. – Engels, F.: *Collected Works*, vol. 3. New York: International, 229 – 346.

NELSON, E. S. (2022): Thing and World in Laozi and Heidegger. In: Chai, D. (ed.): *Daoist Resonances in Heidegger: Exploring a Forgotten Debt*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 141 – 162.

NELSON, E. S. (2024): *Heidegger and Dao: Things, Nothingness, Freedom*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

PARKES, G. (1987): Thoughts on the Way: *Being and Time* via Lao-Chuang. In: Parkes, G. (ed.): *Heidegger and Asian Thought*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 105 – 144.

PELLEGRINO, G. (2025): Ipnocrazia denuncia le manipolazioni di Trump. Ma rischia di fare il suo gioco. [Online.] *Domani*, April 11, 2025. Available at: https://www.editorialedomani.it/idee/commenti/ipnocrazia-denuncia-le-manipolazioni-di-trump-ma-rischia-di-fare-il-suo-gioco-ygie37sd

PELLEGRINO, G. (2025): "L'abuso Del Potere Culturale," *Appunti - di Stefano Feltri* (blog), April 11, 2025. Available online at: https://appunti.substack.com/p/labuso-del-potere-culturale

POLT, R. (2013): Heidegger in the 1930s: Who Are We? In: Raffoul, F. – Nelson, E. S. (eds.): *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 39 – 46.

RUIN, H. (2010): Ge-stell: Enframing as the Essence of Technology. In: Davis, B. (ed.): *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*. Durham: Acumen, 183 – 194.

SCOTT, R. (2024): Imagined Lives: Formal Implications for Creative Writing in the Age of AI. *New Writing*, 21 (4), 468 – 477. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2024.2377549

SIDORKIN, A.M. (2024): Embracing Liberatory Alienation: AI Will End Us, But Not in the Way You May Think. *AI & Society*, 40, 1417 – 1424. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-024-02019-6

TAYLOR SUCHY, S. (2024): Artificial Intelligence in Creative Writing Studies: Threat or Opportunity. *Contemporaneous Issues about Creativity. IntechOpen*. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1008429

TLON – COLAMEDICI, A. (2025): Welcome to TrumpGaza! *Tlonletter* (blog), February 26, 2025. Available online at: https://www.tlonletter.it/p/welcome-to-trumpgaza

WANG, R.R. (2021): Can a Machine Flow Like Dao? The Daoist Philosophy on Artificial Intelligence. In: Bing, S. (ed.): *Intelligence and Wisdom: Artificial Intelligence Meets Chinese Philosophers*. Shanghai: CITIC and Singapore: Springer, 65 – 82.

WENNING, M. (2011): Daoism as Critical Theory. *Comparative Philosophy*, 2 (2), Article 8, 50 – 71. DOI: https://doi.org/10.31979/2151-6014(2011).020208

XUN, J. (2025): *Ipnocrazia. Trump, Musk e la nuova architettura della realtà.* Rome: Tlon.

ZHUANGZI 莊子. Available online at: https://ctext.org/zhuangzi

––––––––––––––––––––

Rudi Capra
University of Wuhan
School of Philosophy
No. 299, Luojia Hill
Wuchang District
Wuhan, Hubei Province
China
e-mail: r-capra@hotmail.it
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9282-8213