

AI News Digest

06/29/2026 - 07/05/2026

WEEKLY DIGEST: HUMANITIES & CULTURAL STUDIES

AI's Role in Shaping Cultural Narratives Explored

Recent studies and projects highlight the evolving intersection of artificial intelligence and the humanities. Researchers are investigating AI's potential to create digital representations of deceased individuals for interactive conversations, while new frameworks for recommender systems are being proposed to enhance humanistic inquiry. Additionally, exhibitions and reviews are examining the aesthetic dimensions of AI in creative fields. However, challenges remain, as AI-generated narratives often lack depth in character development.

KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ AI can create digital avatars for deceased individuals, enabling interactive conversations.
- ✓ New frameworks for AI recommender systems focus on humanistic inquiry rather than commercial use.
- ✓ AI-generated narratives frequently lack complexity and mystery in character development.

IMPLICATIONS

- The integration of AI in the humanities could redefine how we engage with historical and cultural narratives.
- There is potential for AI to enhance scholarly collaboration and interdisciplinary research in the humanities.
- Addressing the limitations of AI in narrative complexity may lead to more engaging and meaningful storytelling.

Key Metrics: 5,000 historic restaurant menus analyzed from 1880 to 1920.; Interactive sessions conducted with volunteers to communicate with AI-generated ghosts.

1. If you could chat with an AI ghost, what would you want them to say? New study explores

Category: Research

Departments: Psychology, Computer Science, Philosophy, Social Work

Topics: Generative AI, AI Avatars, Emotional Impact Assessment, Digital Twin Technology

Impact Score: 27.0

Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 5

Educational Value: 4

Innovation / Novelty: 5

Practical Impact: 4

Interdisciplinary Potential: 5

Ethical / Policy Implications: 4

Researchers at CU Boulder, led by Jack Manning and Jed Brubaker, are exploring the use of AI to create digital representations of deceased individuals for interactive conversations. Volunteers engage in Zoom sessions where they communicate with these AI-generated avatars, designed to mimic the personalities and characteristics of lost loved ones. This project aims to investigate the emotional and psychological impacts of interacting with AI representations of the deceased.

<https://techxplore.com/news/2026-07-chat-ai-ghost-explores.html>

2. Editors' Choice: Speculative Recommendation: Reframing AI for Interpretive Practice in the Digital Humanities

Category: Research

Departments: Computer Science, Educational Leadership, Art, Philosophy

Topics: Computer Vision, Recommender Systems, Stochastic Machine Learning, Visual Similarity Analysis, Digital Humanities

Impact Score: 26.0

Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 5

Educational Value: 4

Innovation / Novelty: 5

Practical Impact: 4

Interdisciplinary Potential: 5

Ethical / Policy Implications: 3

In their paper, River Rain and Houda Lamqaddam propose a novel approach to recommender systems, framing them as tools for humanistic inquiry instead of commercial personalization. They present a fine-tuned computer vision pipeline that analyzes visual similarities across 2,341 animated films, revealing patterns of artistic influence and aesthetic shifts. The authors advocate for embracing the stochastic nature of machine learning as a means of interpretive exploration, rather than merely correcting for errors. Their methodology integrates a VGG16 network with vector search to facilitate the exploration of large-scale digital heritage collections without relying on strict predictive models.

<https://digitalhumanitiesnow.org/2026/07/speculative-recommendation-reframing-ai-for-interpretive-practice-in-the-digital-humanities/>

3. 3 Questions: Beyond data-driven aesthetics

Category: Applications

Departments: Computer Science, Art, Philosophy, Engineering Education & Leadership

Topics: Generative AI, Algorithmic Aesthetics, Aesthetic Evaluation Techniques, Interactive Visualizations

Impact Score: 23.0

Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 4

Educational Value: 4

Innovation / Novelty: 5

Practical Impact: 3

Interdisciplinary Potential: 5

Ethical / Policy Implications: 2

The exhibition "Beyond Data-Driven Aesthetics," curated by Alexandros Haridis at the MIT Keller Gallery, explores the intersection of computing, creativity, and aesthetic judgment in architecture and the applied arts. It draws on historical and contemporary research from various fields, including philosophy and design computation, to translate complex algorithms and machine-learning systems into physical installations and interactive visualizations. The exhibition is organized into five thematic areas-Aesthetic Measure, Aesthetic Guidelines, Algorithmic Aesthetics, Aesthetic Appropriation, and Aesthetic Novelty-each reflecting distinct computational approaches to aesthetic evaluation. This initiative aims to make abstract computational concepts more tangible and interpretable through design and visualization techniques.

<https://news.mit.edu/2026/3-questions-beyond-data-driven-aesthetics-alexandros-haridis-0629>

4. Why AI fiction still feels flat: New test shows characters lack mystery and complexity

Category: Research

Departments: Creative Writing, Computer Science, Philosophy

Topics: Generative AI, Character Complexity, Narrative Engagement, AI Creative Writing

Impact Score: 23.0

Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 5

Educational Value: 4

Innovation / Novelty: 4

Practical Impact: 3

Interdisciplinary Potential: 3

Ethical / Policy Implications: 4

Researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have discovered that although artificial intelligence can generate increasingly plausible narratives, the characters within these stories often lack a key element of engaging fiction: mystery. This finding suggests that AI-generated characters may not evoke the same depth of intrigue as those created by human authors. The study highlights a potential limitation in the current capabilities of AI in creative writing.

<https://techxplora.com/news/2026-07-ai-fiction-flat-characters-lack.html>

5. Review: Inventar Colombia

Category: Research

Departments: Earth, Environmental & Resource Sciences, Computer Science, Philosophy

Topics: Digital Humanities, Ecological Data Analysis, Cultural Heritage Documentation, Biodiversity Mapping

Impact Score: 21.0

Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 4

Educational Value: 3

Innovation / Novelty: 4

Practical Impact: 3

Interdisciplinary Potential: 5

Ethical / Policy Implications: 2

The article reviews "Inventar Colombia: una mirada desde el Orinoco," a digital study focused on the Orinoco River, led by Maria José Afanador Llach. The study aims to document and analyze the ecological, cultural, and historical significance of the Orinoco River region. It employs digital tools to enhance accessibility and engagement with the data, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the area's biodiversity and cultural heritage. The review highlights the project's contributions to environmental studies and digital humanities.

<https://reviewsindh.pubpub.org/pub/inventar-colombia>

6. Editors' Note: June 2026

Category: Research

Departments: Computer Science, Educational Leadership, Philosophy, Communication, Sociology & Anthropology

Topics: Digital Humanities, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, Methodological Rigor, Emerging Trends, Technology and Humanities

Impact Score: 20.0

Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 3

Educational Value: 4

Innovation / Novelty: 3

Practical Impact: 2

Interdisciplinary Potential: 5

Ethical / Policy Implications: 3

The Editors' Note for the June 2026 issue of Reviews in Digital Humanities outlines the journal's commitment to advancing the field of digital humanities through critical analysis and interdisciplinary collaboration. It highlights recent contributions that explore the intersection of technology and humanities scholarship, emphasizing the importance of methodological rigor and innovative approaches. The note also discusses the evolving landscape of digital humanities research and the journal's role in fostering dialogue among scholars. Additionally, it encourages submissions that address emerging trends and challenges within the discipline.

<https://reviewsindh.pubpub.org/pub/editors-note-june-2026>

7. Report: 5,000 Restaurant Menus, Years 1880-1920

Category: Applications
Departments: Art, Communication, History
Topics: Generative AI, Interactive Data Visualization, Culinary Language Analysis, Historical Menu Analysis

Impact Score: 15.0

Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 2	Educational Value: 3	Innovation / Novelty: 3
Practical Impact: 2	Interdisciplinary Potential: 4	Ethical / Policy Implications: 1

The project team presents an interactive visualization of a curated archive containing 5,000 historic menus from the New York Public Library's Buttolph Collection, dating from 1880 to 1920. This resource aims to illustrate the early evolution of the modern restaurant by allowing users to engage with the data through features such as panning and zooming. The analysis reveals significant differences in menu layout, item volume, and culinary language when compared to contemporary dining practices.

<https://digitalhumanitiesnow.org/2026/07/5000-restaurant-menus-years-1880-1920/>

8. New Google commercial imagines a Declaration of Independence written with help from AI

Category: Other
Departments: Political Science & Public Administration, Communication, History, Computer Science
Topics: Generative AI, AI-Assisted Collaboration, Historical Contextualization of AI, AI in Political Communication

Impact Score: 12.0

Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 1	Educational Value: 2	Innovation / Novelty: 2
Practical Impact: 3	Interdisciplinary Potential: 2	Ethical / Policy Implications: 2

Google's recent advertisement imagines a scenario where the Founding Fathers utilize Google Workspace during the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, incorporating tools like Google Docs, Calendar, and Meet, alongside AI features such as a visualization tool and note-taking assistance from Gemini. The ad employs humor to depict a collaborative process, while the role of AI is presented in a relatively understated manner compared to other tech promotions. Viewer reactions have been mixed, with positive feedback on platforms like YouTube and Instagram, contrasted by critical responses on Bluesky, where some users questioned the portrayal of AI's utility in historical collaboration. Historian Angus Johnston highlighted the ad's failure to convincingly demonstrate AI's effectiveness in political organizing or writing.

<https://techcrunch.com/2026/07/04/new-google-commercial-imagines-a-declaration-of-independence-written-with-help-from-ai/>

9. Building a scholarly community

Category: Education

Departments: Educational Leadership, Communication, Sociology & Anthropology, Philosophy

Topics: AI Policy & Regulation, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, Research Development Programs, Scholarly Community Building

Impact Score: 11.0

Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 1

Educational Value: 2

Innovation / Novelty: 2

Practical Impact: 1

Interdisciplinary Potential: 4

Ethical / Policy Implications: 1

The SHASS Faculty Fellows program at MIT, launched in spring 2023, aims to enhance scholarly collaboration among faculty from diverse disciplines within the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences. The program facilitates biweekly meetings where faculty members present their research, receive feedback, and engage in interdisciplinary discussions. Associate professor Emily Richmond Pollock shared her work on a book about five American opera festivals, highlighting the program's role in providing focused time for research development. The initiative is administered by the MIT Human Insight Collaborative and seeks to foster a collegial community while enriching faculty scholarship.

<https://news.mit.edu/2026/building-scholarly-community-shass-faculty-fellows-0702>