AI News Digest

10/19/2026 - 10/25/2026

WEEKLY DIGEST: HUMANITIES & CULTURAL STUDIES

Humanities Push Back: AI's Societal Risks Under Scrutiny

Across campuses and city halls, scholars and activists are foregrounding the human cost of rapid AI deployment. MIT's SHASS symposium showcased interdisciplinary work-from Indigenous language preservation to new theories about AI's "messy" mind-highlighting the need for human-centered research. A recent paper links the intentional randomness in early AI models to today's hallucination problem, underscoring a trade-off between creativity and reliability. Meanwhile, New York's mayor and cultural critics such as Arundhati Roy argue that AI is being weaponized as a capitalist engine, urging citizens to demand stronger oversight and democratic control.

KEY FINDINGS

✓ MIT's two-day SHASS symposium emphasized interdisciplinary approaches, including the Indigenous Languages Initiative, to embed human understanding in AI research.

✓ New scholarly work connects early AI randomness to modern hallucinations, revealing inherent trade-offs between creative output and factual accuracy.

✓ Civic leaders and cultural commentators (Mayor Zohran Mamdani, Arundhati Roy) frame AI deployment as a socio-economic threat and call for public resistance and policy intervention.

IMPLICATIONS

→ Policymakers are likely to face heightened pressure to craft regulations that embed humanities-derived ethical standards into AI development.

→ Academic institutions may expand curricula that blend AI technical training with language preservation, ethics, and critical cultural studies.

→ Growing public discourse could accelerate the formation of citizen-led oversight bodies and demand transparency from AI firms.

> Key Metrics: Two-day MIT SHASS symposium; No explicit quantitative metrics were provided in the source articles

1. Reinforcing the value of human understanding at MIT

Category: Education
Departments: Political Science & Public Administration, Philosophy, Sociology & Anthropology, Chicano Studies, Languages & Linguistics, Educational Leadership
Topics: AI Ethics & Safety, Chatbot Human Attachment, Machine Selfness Modeling, AI Curriculum Redesign, Endangered Language AI

Impact Score: 22.0
Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 2	Educational Value: 4	Innovation / Novelty: 3
Practical Impact: 3	Interdisciplinary Potential: 5	Ethical / Policy Implications: 5

The two-day MIT SHASS symposium presented recent research, teaching innovations, and interdisciplinary performances to illustrate the school's current work and future agenda. Faculty highlighted programs such as the Indigenous Languages Initiative, the DEDP master's, and MISTI, while scholars like Eric Klopfer and D. Fox Harrell discussed the need to redesign AI-related instruction and the narrative construction of machine "selfness." Sherry Turkle warned that AI chatbots may undermine human capacity for attachment, and economist David Autor emphasized the high stakes of AI's societal impact. Alumni presentations, including linguist Jessica Coon's work on endangered languages, demonstrated the lasting influence of SHASS training across disciplines.

https://news.mit.edu/2026/reinforcing-value-of-human-understanding-at-mit-1023

2. Q&A;: How AI came to model the "messy" human mind

Category: Research
Departments: Computer Science, Psychology, Philosophy
Topics: AI Ethics & Safety, Hallucination-Creativity Tradeoff, Stochastic Neural Networks, Productive Mistake Modeling

Impact Score: 17.0
Rubric Scores

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

Early AI researchers deliberately added randomness to deterministic algorithms to emulate creative thinking, a practice the new paper in Past and Present links to the origins of modern AI hallucinations and predicts inherent trade-offs between creativity and predictability. Engineers of the 1950s, influenced by thinkers like John Pierce, argued that chance and irregularity were essential for insight, using artificial neural networks to model the brain's "productive mistakes." Those early advocates prized systems that occasionally produced unexpected or bizarre answers, whereas contemporary AI like ChatGPT is optimized for reliable, correct outputs and suppresses such strangeness due to real-world legal and commercial pressures.

https://news.mit.edu/2026/qa-how-ai-came-to-model-messy-human-mind-1023

3. Mamdani says feds have abdicated on AI, urges New Yorkers to push back

Category: Policy & Ethics
Departments: Political Science & Public Administration, Sociology & Anthropology, Philosophy
Topics: AI Ethics & Safety, Municipal AI Regulation, AI Accountability Frameworks, Public Participation Governance

Impact Score: 14.0
Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 0	Educational Value: 2	Innovation / Novelty: 1
Practical Impact: 3	Interdisciplinary Potential: 3	Ethical / Policy Implications: 5

Mayor Zohran Mamdani and activist Ilana Glazer discussed AI at the People's AI Assembly in Manhattan, with Glazer questioning the mayor on AI's societal impact. Mamdani emphasized that the rapid deployment of AI is not inevitable and urged public officials to hold AI companies accountable. He highlighted the federal government's limited regulatory action, arguing that cities must take independent steps to manage AI risks. The event was organized by the AI Now Institute, which studies AI's social implications.

https://ainowinstitute.org/news/press/mamdani-says-feds-have-abdicated-on-ai-urges-new-yorkers-to-push-back

4. "Apocalypse Now and Then": Author Arundhati Roy on Artificial Intelligence, Capitalism & More

Category: Policy & Ethics
Departments: Political Science & Public Administration, Sociology & Anthropology, Philosophy, Economics & Finance
Topics: AI Ethics & Safety, AI Governance, AI Socioeconomic Impact, AI Capitalism Critique

Impact Score: 11.0
Rubric Scores

Research Relevance: 0	Educational Value: 2	Innovation / Novelty: 1
Practical Impact: 1	Interdisciplinary Potential: 3	Ethical / Policy Implications: 4

Following the People's AI Assembly, author Arundhati Roy appeared with Amy Goodman and Nermeen Shaikh to discuss her new essay on artificial intelligence. Roy characterizes AI as "capitalism's final destination," framing it as a critical socio-economic development. The full interview is available for viewing online.

https://ainowinstitute.org/news/apocalypse-now-and-then-author-arundhati-roy-on-artificial-intelligence-capitalism-more