



## Editorial

# Anthropology and the rise of artificial intelligence

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Let us overcome the polemic regarding the “exact” definition, if any, of both anthropology and artificial intelligence (AI), and ask an AI chatbot “how anthropology is affected by AI?”.

That is a summary of a sample of results obtained:

- In archaeology, AI integration will enhance artifact analysis, enable reconstruction of ancient environments, and aid in identifying undiscovered sites.
- Biological anthropology will benefit from accelerated complex genetic data analysis and reconstructions of early humans.
- In linguistic anthropology, AI will offer new opportunities for studying, reclaiming, and teaching endangered languages.
- Cultural and applied anthropologists will leverage AI to reveal hidden cultural patterns, spot emerging trends, and gain a better understanding of our past and future interventions.
- The job of anthropologists will be influenced by AI, but it is unlikely to be completely replaced by artificial intelligence.
- AI is set to reshape research in anthropology by enabling faster data processing, analysis, and hypothesis generation, as well as identifying patterns and extracting meaningful information from large datasets.
- Anthropologists can leverage AI to enhance their work, gain new insights, and speed up the research process. However, the interpretative skills, nuanced understanding of human behavior, cultural nuances, empathy, and deep understanding of culture and history that anthropologists bring cannot be fully replicated by AI... Therefore, while AI will impact the field of anthropology, the role of anthropologists remains essential for in-depth cultural analysis and understanding human behavior.

Anthropology, as every field in science, is and will be affected by the recent and coming developments of AI. One of the relevant questions is: to what extent AI will affect the work of anthropologists and if this influence will be different compared to other scientific fields. Very few have been said about that, and for a good reason. For anthropology in special and Humanities in general, it is difficult to make predictions on how the practice of science will evolve in interaction with the expected huge developments of AI in the few next decades. So, I will leave this question without answer, because I do not have any that goes beyond speculation, and turn to another one which is, to my sense, more exciting and already subject of interesting debates: Anthropology of AI!

Anthropology have been increasingly recognized as an efficient approach to investigate AI in a more holistic and critical manner by offering insights into AI technologies as a sociotechnical phenomenon (Sartori and Theodorou 2022). Additionally, rather than defining variables in advance and testing hypotheses, anthropology fieldwork can lead to original discoveries of how individuals and institutions design, create, and use AI technologies, through in-depth interviews and observation of the different stakeholders (such as developers, users, investors).

Another stimulating subject, that anthropology can and should address, is the human-nonhuman interaction, such as interaction of human with robots or with generative AI software systems (chatbots). However, most current anthropological studies on AI, tend to focus on a binary narrative of humans versus algorithms, culture versus technology, or humans versus computers, which to my sense, oversimplifies the relationship between humans and AI, as they are deeply intertwined; it is impossible, or at least useless, to study one without considering the other. Recognizing the complexity of human–AI relations requires moving beyond the stereotypical narratives that currently dominate discussions around technology in general and AI in particular, and this one of the most challenging subjects for modern anthropology (van Voors and Ahlin 2024).

## References

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