

The aim of the project is to investigate the cultural change in which reading and writing techniques are no longer performed exclusively by humans, but are taken over by machines. I want to investigate the technological and discursive aspects of this phenomenon. The reason for the research is the emergence of large language models (including Chat GPT models), which have caused strong reactions in society. The discussion around this phenomenon attempts to answer the question of whether the ability to write makes large language models similar to humans. My research is based on a critique of this question. I believe that we should not compare writing machines with humans. This comparison is usually based on the false assumption that the category of the human (how we understand what defines humanity) remains unchanging in culture. Similarly, this discussion treats writing as a universal and unchanging phenomenon. My project is based on the assumption that the category of the human changes over time (influenced by cultural, scientific, and technical changes), and therefore we have to take into account that the presence of large language models changes how we define humanity. For a long time, humanity was defined on account of our ability to use language. The moment machines begin to use language, this definition stops being relevant.

My research shows that the phenomenon of reading and writing machines goes back in time, probably dating back to the early 19th century. That is why I introduce the concept of the "machining" of writing. I use it to describe the interference of machines into the practices of reading and writing of humans. I want to investigate what this machining is: how the techniques of mechanical reading and writing affect humans, how they understand these processes and how they understand themselves.

I use the verb "to machine" to indicate the material nature of the phenomenon. Machines interfere with the material dimension of writing. I examine four such interferences, or rather four techniques of the machining of reading and writing. The first concerns "cutting". Machines cut the written material that people present to them for processing. This cutting changes writing from the human system of organization to a mechanical system. Therefore, I examine techniques that transform human writing into language of machines, and vice versa, the techniques that translation writing of machines into human concepts. Here, I focus mainly on techniques related to punched cards and telegraphy. The second technique is copying. Machines used for replication (faxes, scanners, copiers, etc.) are usually not considered to be devices that read and write. However, I consider them to do just that, because human culture too is full of similar techniques and traditions that involve copying (e.g., in the medieval scriptoria or when learning to write). In this part, I examine the office practices associated with copying machines. How do they affect the processes and procedures of human reading and writing? Which processes are being replaced by machines? What is changing in human reading and writing? The third technique is the automation of the body. Large language models limit the physical engagement of humans in reading and writing. After all, most of the work is done by machines. I find past practices of such automation in the techniques of spiritualists and in the psychomotor experiments. Both traditions sought to limit the human engagement in reading and writing. The spiritual mediums claimed to write without using their minds. Psychomotor experiments found out that the movement of the eyes during reading is in part unconscious. Here, I am investigating the relationship between these practices and the body (or rather its erasure), relating the past of automation to the present culture. The fourth technique is randomizing. Large language models are based on stochastic algorithms that predict sequences of sentences. This prediction is based on random electrical impulses that travel through computer processors. I compare this situation with the work of the slot machines used in gambling. I see these machines as text generators. Although the texts they generate are random, the texts can trigger varied reactions in people. They carry meanings. I seek to find out how the random nature of text generators undermines traditional assumptions about writing as a result of conscious and intentional work of the human mind.

I use the methods of discursive analysis developed by Michel Foucault, Friedrich Kittler, and Bernhard Siegert. I treat the work of machines as a component of discursive systems. My research aims to understand the influence of machining on contemporary culture, especially in relation to the changing definition of humanity.