

# AI as a Design Material: Dealing with New Agencies

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a household word, a media buzzword but also an industry in itself, and a set of practices linked to business and professional goals. As a general symbolic technology with enormous investments behind it, it has impacted many spheres of activity. Chatbots populate the internet and are put to use for marketing (Wilson 2017) and political purposes (Bond et al. 2012), intelligent systems orchestrate logistic chains (Kückelhaus and Chung 2018), usher the attention of people towards products (Marinchak et al. 2018), influence their next purchase (Portugal et al. 2017), change their emotions (Booth 2014), interpret medical tests (Koch et al. 2018), interact with users in new ways (Siddike et al. 2018), decide who gets a grant or a loan (Agarwal 2019; Eubanks 2018), or when and how to fight war (Davis 2019). In some way or another, intelligent systems classify, schedule, plan, and build products, services, and experiences. They continuously make decisions regarding many aspects of our life, contributing to shaping it (Turkle 2006).

However, this is not the first time that AI techniques have undergone an upsurge in their application in industry. The 1980s and 90s saw a wealth of applications and high hopes for the technology but they ended in the first “Winter of AI” (AI Expert Newsletter; Russell and Norvig 2003), given the fragility shown in real use by the AI technologies of the time. Nowadays, the degree of digitization seen across entire sectors of activity and the improvement of many AI techniques have created a fertile ground for the widespread use of AI once again. Where the earlier versions of AI were driven by the so-called expert systems that were costly to develop and difficult to train, the combination of the current volume and availability of data for many types of applications has facilitated the use of Machine Learning techniques, historically a subdiscipline of AI. Machine Learning has sped up the construction and training of AI systems, overcoming the previous scarcity of sources from which knowledge could be extracted, and with which AI systems could perform their tasks.

There is a feeling nowadays that AI will play a central role in our societies. It is portrayed as a strategic asset that, as just one example, will impact international competition (Villani 2018; Webster et al. 2017; NSTC 2016; Hogarth 2018). AI has been tasked with an enormous influence, for better or for worse, in organizing everything from personal behaviors to economic strategies. Its connections with behavioral economics (Pedersen 2018), digital surveillance (Zuboff 2015), and military applications (Krishnan 2009) cast a dark shadow on the preeminence of AI as an orchestrator of life and have spawned intense activity concerning its ethical dimensions (Floridi 2019; Dignum 2018; Casacuberta and Guersenzvaig 2018).

Design as a professional practice and a sector in itself has also undergone the friction and the excitement of AI. Professionals in different areas of design have found themselves dealing with AI in several ways. Perhaps the first ones who felt the impact of AI were the design professionals involved in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and

User Experience (UX) (Winograd 2006; Grundin 2009), historically the place where the digital impacted design most intensely. But AI techniques, and Machine Learning techniques in particular, have also made inroads in others aspects of design.

Many generative approaches to design make extensive use of the interconnection between data and algorithms, especially machine learning algorithms, to devise and produce new products in such a way that the intelligent algorithm has taken a role which goes beyond that of a passive or reactive tool in the hands of designers (Koch 2017). Also, design has had to tackle new problems and goals when dealing with recommender services and intelligent assistants. Slowly, we realized too that some designs are actually being developed not by or with Artificial Intelligence but for these types of entities (DiSalvo 2011). AI systems, then, sometimes simultaneously play the role of a tool, a collaborator, and a user.

We felt that this situation invited some reflection from the standpoint of design and design engineering, and we sought to find a common theme that could be useful to explore the relationship between AI and Design as well as other emerging technologies such as the use of Big Data or intelligent materials. AI is mainly understood as a “soft” entity but it also has a material component, similar to other areas of Information and Computing (Dourish 2017, 33-59). We thought that this could be a good starting point for contrasting different interactions between AI and Design and, also, to start a possible clarification of the current state of these connections. However, in doing so we also wanted to stress that as a design material, AI has very peculiar characteristics. It is difficult to understand AI as a material that is passive and constant. On the contrary, it is not only malleable but it has a certain degree of “life,” of autonomy at least, by itself. Designing with AI is definitely working with a material that will evolve in ways that are more varied and more difficult to plan ahead, at least in comparison with other more traditional materials. Working with plywood or aluminum is fully bounded by the laws of physics, which makes them highly predictable materials. AI algorithms are not outside the realm of physics, of course, but their behavior, by their very nature, could be very difficult to anticipate in detail. There is, at the moment, no straightforward way to look into an AI model and make it fully predictable.

Is there a common concept that could help us consider, under the same light, the diverse types of design that are being done in connection with AI, Machine Learning, and data? Is there a concept used by both disciplines that could help us map the relationships between them? After some thought and deliberation, we concluded that the notion of “agency” was a good candidate to help us conceive a practical connection with the objects of AI, ML, Big Data, and Design. If nothing else, certain similarities in their conceptualization and use in practice in both disciplines were intriguing.

The difference that AI may introduce in general – but to design in particular – could be understood as a leap in the level of agency that the results from using AI as a material in design. In design, “agency” has been introduced and used in several subdisciplines and practices, for example, in design research but also to guide design practice. The notion

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of “agency” carries a certain tradition, for example, from fields such as Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2005; Yaneva 2009). In design, the agency of objects is recognized and may be connected to concepts such as affordances or might be applied in user research. In a way, agency is a concept accepted within design practice. Some concepts such as the idea of “Objects with intent” (Rozendaal 2016), for example, have strong similarities to the types of agency used in AI. One could say that AI is, in effect, now the discipline of creating artificial agents with their own goals, desires, and intentions. Scholars from the postphenomenological approach (e.g. Verbeek 2011) articulate a philosophical perspective in which (moral) agency becomes a matter of human-technology mediations rather than a strictly human issue.

Indeed, in Artificial Intelligence, the concept of agency and agencies has become central and is a basic construct to guide the construction of complex AI systems (Wooldridge 2002).

There are differences between the conceptualizations used in each discipline. In order to clarify them we could go back a little and explore the origins and goals of AI and why and how the concept of agency now plays a crucial role across disciplines.

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## AGENCY IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SYSTEMS

The beginning of Artificial Intelligence as a discipline is usually associated with the celebration of the Dartmouth Summer School on Artificial Intelligence in 1956 (McCarthy et al. 1955). Several researchers gathered there, representing mathematics, information theory, logic, computing, and psychology. They shared a common excitement about what computers could do. The Dartmouth pioneers envisioned these machines beyond their scope of use at the time. They thought that computers could be entities capable of doing much more than just crunching numbers. They thought that computers could manipulate many different types of representations, including representations of knowledge. Thinking could become, as Hobbes had said centuries earlier, just a matter of calculation. Although this view of calculation of new types of symbols, not just numbers, was the predominant one in the idea of machine intelligence that dominated the Dartmouth meeting, another part of the same original group was more interested in simpler calculations. Instead of dealing with complex symbolic structures they thought that replicating the simple signal combination of the neural infrastructure of intelligent, cognitive systems would lead to intelligence. Together, the Dartmouth group issued a declaration that, more than a precise program of scientific research, looked more like a list of examples of tasks that they associated with intelligent behavior and that they thought that should be explored. It is worth having a look at this list (McCarthy et al. 1955) since it sheds light on the ambition of the Dartmouth group vision but also on the limits of the imagination of that founding group: given the abilities of computers at the time, one had to be brave to



*The Cyborg Hand*, by Judit Parés. Elisava Final Degree project; Simultaneous Studies Program in Design and Industrial Design Engineering, 2018.

extract from them the extremely more complex tasks that making them intelligent could require in the future. It was an exercise in speculation and projection, perhaps inspired by a research milieu under the spell of the achievements that Alan Turing and others achieved in the 30s and that led Turing to write his seminal paper "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (Turing 1950). The overall goal of the budding Artificial Intelligence discipline was summarized by one of the participants at this historical meeting as:

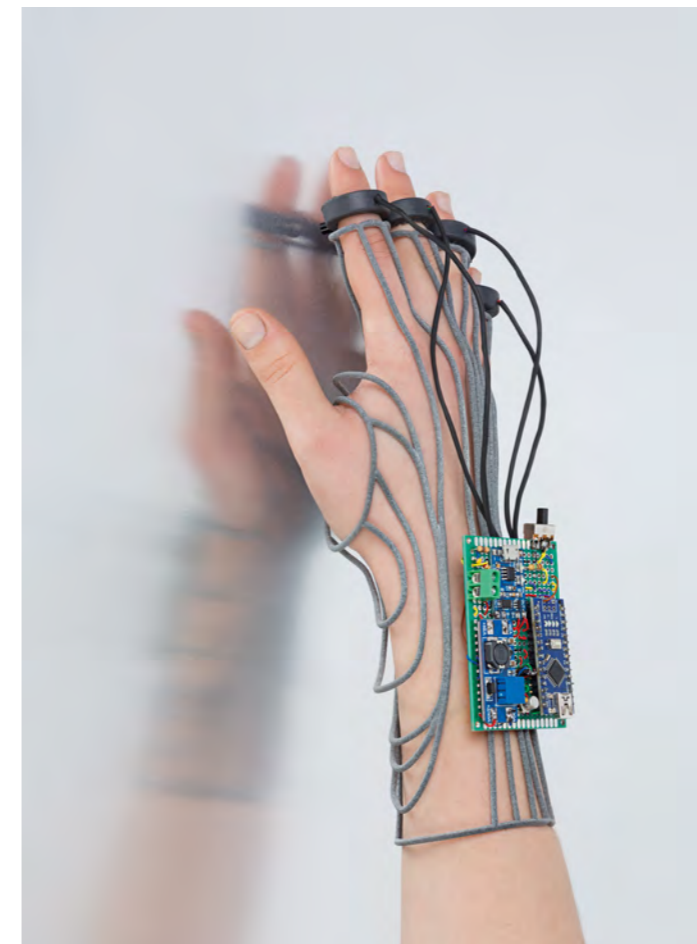
*“To study how to create systems that behave in a way that if they were humans it would be seen as ‘intelligent.’”* (Minsky 1986)

Interestingly enough, as practitioners of a newly born discipline, their ways of working towards this goal departed from the practices of the disciplines each of the participants came from. More than a scientific methodology – understood as the methods of the theoretical or experimental hard sciences – they preferred a constructive approach or, in later terminology, a constructionist approach. That is, they would learn how those goals could be reached by building systems to attain them and learning from the process. These are essentially the traits of a “culture of design” (Serra 1992), as Herbert Simon (one of the Dartmouth meeting’s most prominent attendees) would agree (Simon 1961).

After that meeting, a lot of activities started and many initial successes appeared rapidly. By the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the most promising area

in AI was Expert Systems. They would become Knowledge Systems and gave birth to a whole new discipline, Knowledge Engineering. Expert Systems were essentially reasoning systems that used a representation of the knowledge accumulated through practice by very proficient human experts. This knowledge was very restricted to an area of practice and was connected to the performance of an intelligent task: diagnosis, scheduling, or design, for example. There was a lot of interest in business about these Expert Systems, from Insurance to Aerospace, and huge amounts of money were invested in their construction and maintenance. But the systems at the time exhibited brittleness and rigidity. They had enormous difficulties in learning new things. Consequently, they were not able to adapt to changes in their environment rapidly enough, sometimes failing abruptly. The field of AI was under attack (Lighthill 1973). Research funds were cut and the different practical solutions and methods devised seemed unconnected and conceptually disparate. The discipline was in total disarray. There was a profound questioning of its initial goals and assumptions. Some wondered if it was necessary to reason to perform intelligently or if reasoning needed a symbolic representation (Brooks 1991). Was logic actually needed to reason and think or would simply imitating the connectivity of neural tissues be enough to perform intelligent tasks? Incidentally, what was an intelligent task? What was the common concept between, say, natural language processing and robotics? Was there any?

It took a while for the discipline to reorient itself. The creation of a common concept to characterize its object of interest was instrumental in its slow rebirth. The concept



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of Agent reorganized the interests and goals of the different subdisciplines (Russell and Norvig 2003). AI revolved around building intelligent agents that solved problems alone or collectively. In order to do so, agents had goals and applied any knowledge they already had or that they could gather from the environment they operated in. Agents had “agency.”

There were two main understandings of this agency. One was an ability subservient to another agent, which could be a human agent. That is, an intelligent agent acted on behalf of another agent (possibly human). To do so, it had a wide range of alternative ways to reach its goals on behalf of this other agent (i.e. the goals of the first agent were a translation of the ones of the second agent). In a stronger definition, “agency” meant the autonomy of an agent to pursue its own goals. Agents could “come to life” whenever their environment showed some configuration, some state that would prompt them into action. They would do whatever they could (including learning) to attain that goal in that configuration of the world. Agents could be completely software- or hardware-based, most frequently a mix of both. Multiagent systems were collective intelligence expansions of the agent paradigm (Russel 2003). In any case, an agent in modern AI is a special type of rational agent (Simon 1961) that operates in an environment and pursues its goals. The agent knows about the state of the environment through sensors and operates in it by using effectors. Action is the result of decision making that is arrived at by mobilizing the set of beliefs of the agent that connect the known information of the environment with knowledge. In some definitions of intelligent agents, desires represent the situation or situations that the agent would like to attain to arrive at its goals. Intentions represent the deliberative state of the agent, what the agent has chosen to do.

The agent concept put every subdiscipline in AI in a clearer position by locating itself depending on its view of the agent concept. Therefore, one could understand robotics as the creation of hardware agents that should interact physically with a physical environment. Analogously, one could create a software agent that could operate in a virtual environment. The discipline had finally found a common way to portray and compare the different types of AI systems: the quality of their agency.

### *Agents, data and learning*

One of the most important changes in the construction of systems using intelligent agents since this refoundation of Artificial Intelligence is the importance that machine learning methods have acquired. Increasingly, intelligent systems are built as a result of a process that starts with data that seem to be relevant to a given task. The data are used as the raw material for a machine learning system that extracts knowledge that can be implemented. For example, machine learning systems can help identify relevant patterns in an application domain. A machine learning algorithm is used to create a model that, when the system is later deployed, will let it decide if a given stream of information is representative or not of this pattern. This is the basis of classification systems that are routinely used in many applications, subsystems, and fully-fledged systems. For example, in identifying faces, classifying situations, objects, people, etc. In general, machine learning methods could be roughly divided into methods that



EIA: Espacio Interactivo Artesano, by Marian Brea, Nil Muriscot, Omar Josep Paul, and Nicolas Tarragó. Elisava Degree in Industrial Design Engineering, 2017.

give a criterion for clustering things together in unknown domains, classifying objects in domains where we know which are the main classes existing there, and, finally, methods that help an agent learn by itself how to improve its own performance, that is, getting better at a given task. Typically, these three types of learning are referred to as unsupervised learning, supervised learning, and reinforcement learning (Alpaydin 2017). There are other methods that do not fit so neatly in this classification, such as learning by analogy, metaphorical learning, or transferable learning. Another machine learning classification system would divide machine learning methods into analytical-descriptive or generative. That is, methods that help create a model to understand a domain and extract decision rules for the intelligent system to be deployed later based on that model, or methods that learn from data and create new things such as Generative Adversarial Networks, or GANS (Goodfellow et al. 2014).

Let us pause here to introduce an example to briefly explain the main differences between the earlier AI systems (expert- or knowledge-based) and the newer machine learning systems (based on big data and pattern recognition). Imagine you wanted to develop a system that could recognize a dog in a picture. The earlier systems would be trained to recognize characteristics of a dog (basic shape, ears, eyes, fur, nose, etc.) that were somehow defined beforehand. We could say, a dog has between zero and four legs. It has between zero and two ears, and the ears can be tiny or huge. To make a long story short, this never quite worked. The complexity of the world is simply too great to be described in advance. The new systems work the other way around, you train the system not by teaching what a dog looks like through abstractions, but by feeding it millions of pictures of dogs codified in a string of numbers. In the best case scenario, the system then learns what a dog looks like by recognizing numerical patterns that are present in those pictures. When you show the system a new picture of an animal, then the system can determine with a certain degree of accuracy whether that picture features a dog or not. It is important to note, that current ML systems, even if able to identify a dog, never really has a semantic understanding of what a dog is.

Within this landscape of methods and techniques, models based on neural networks have seen increased practical success over the last fifteen years and their application has become widespread. They are the basis of what is known as “Deep Learning Methods” (Goodfellow et al. 2016).

At present, most AI systems currently being deployed make very heavy use of machine learning techniques. That is, current AI agents tend to be learning agents with a higher possibility of autonomy than previous AI systems since machine learning can be triggered from new data whenever the agents decide that they need to better adapt to new situations. To build them, bigger, larger, and more diverse volumes of data are needed.

That doesn't mean that, in the entire process of creating these intelligent agents, there is no human element (not-so-autonomous). Rather, if you want a system to autonomously recognize dogs you need humans to tell the system: this is a dog. You also need a lot of expertise to put the right machine learning method in place for a given domain of application, to test the resulting models, and to fine-tune it

before deploying the final intelligent agent in its operating environment.

The fact that more and more systems have integrated some type of intelligent agent in their construction has opened up a wide range of intersections between the goals, tasks, and methods of design and artificial intelligence. The following highlights some of the areas in which AI is applied in design.

*Materials* can be understood as something passive and a given or, conversely, something that can be designed to exhibit a set of desired properties; potentially, materials can be seen as something that can make these properties evolve over time in response to an environment. Exploring the vast combinatorial space of the ways to combine existing matter or modify existing materials is one area where the use of artificial intelligence seems quite appropriate. Searching for different combinations and operations to modify individual elements or their combinations corresponds to a very old configuration of AI, that is, the one that understands intelligent behavior as the smart exploration of a search space using heuristics (Russell and Norvig 2003). One can trace some of this view on the application of AI to the creation of new materials back to the 80s.

More recently, one can also find the use of the “second wave” of artificial intelligence systems in the creation of new materials. That is, the typical cycle of data gathering, machine learning application, testing a model, and applying it to the task at hand. In this case, repositories of material properties and processes are used to come up with a possible set of combinations and procedures to obtain the desired performance of a material substrate that can be a composite or a more fundamental change, for example, pressure, thermal response, or elasticity. At a different scale, other properties of materials can be explored and generated through AI methods such as the texture of a surface and also to embed programmability in the materials themselves (Ion et al. 2017).

AI is being used in product design by extending its procedures at the level of the product. For example, the work of Troy Nachtigall explores the connection between data and materialities (Nachtigall et al. 2019). By using data about materials, properties, user behavior, and other sources, a system that learns from the interconnection of all of them is used to derive an ultra-personalized product. The models followed in design could also be the input of a learning system (Tucker 2016).

UX and HCI are likely the subdisciplines in which the most discussion and use of AI and ML methods has taken place. There are many descriptions of systems that have used some type or another of AI and ML to improve several aspects of interaction and HCI. The areas of personal assistants and interface design are very active in that sense. The classical conceptualization hinged on assumptions about the role of users' cognitive tasks, symbolic models of planning which, interestingly enough, had similarities to “Classic” or “First Wave” AI (up to the 90s) (Suchman 2007). However,

the behavior of machine-learning systems is done through complex numerical models of the world rather than symbolic descriptions, mediating the interaction of users with the world (Blackwell 2015).

The introduction of AI and ML in these areas has also sparked a very interesting discussion about which methods for design research should be used. The answer to this stems from the adaptation of current trends, such as user-centered design (Google Design), to other more innovative proposals that recognize the agency of the new materials and their different roles with respect to human users such as integration vs. interaction (Farooq 2016). The ability of intelligent agents to predict in order to adapt to the human (or non-human) user/agent has made some propose that such interaction should be understood as a variation of a general “anticipatory design” (Van Bodegraven 2017).

Putting human users and artificial agents on par, or nearly so, in terms of agency results in understanding and designing systems, services, and products “from the point of view of the agent” (Cruickshank 2017). This calls for new design methods. For example, “Thing ethnography” (Giaccardi, Cila, Speed, and Caldwell 2016a, 2016b) and animistic design research (Marenko and van Allen 2016) could be seen as approximations adopting a non-anthropocentric point of view of design (DiSalvo 2011). They try to come up with actionable methods within a post-human approach to design.

#### 4

### CHALLENGES

The overlapping of AI, Machine Learning, Big Data, and design has opened up new possibilities for design. Also, it has revealed new difficulties in different aspects of design. Without being in any way exhaustive, we discuss several challenges below.

#### *Assuming artificial*

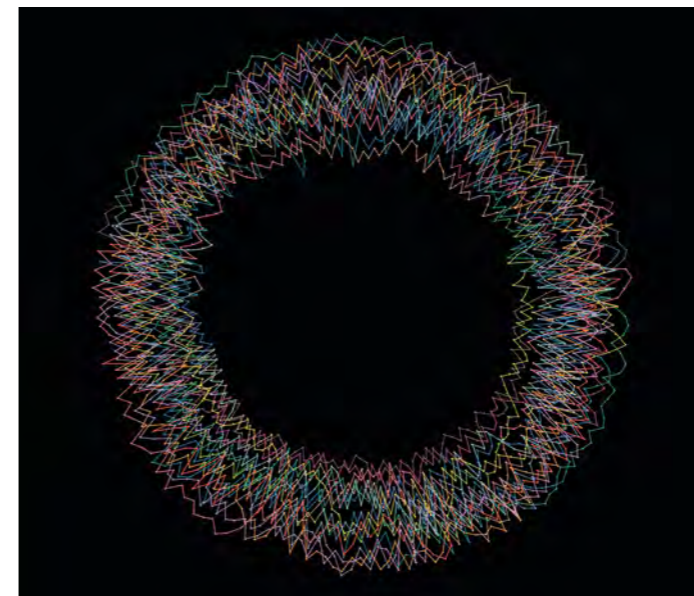
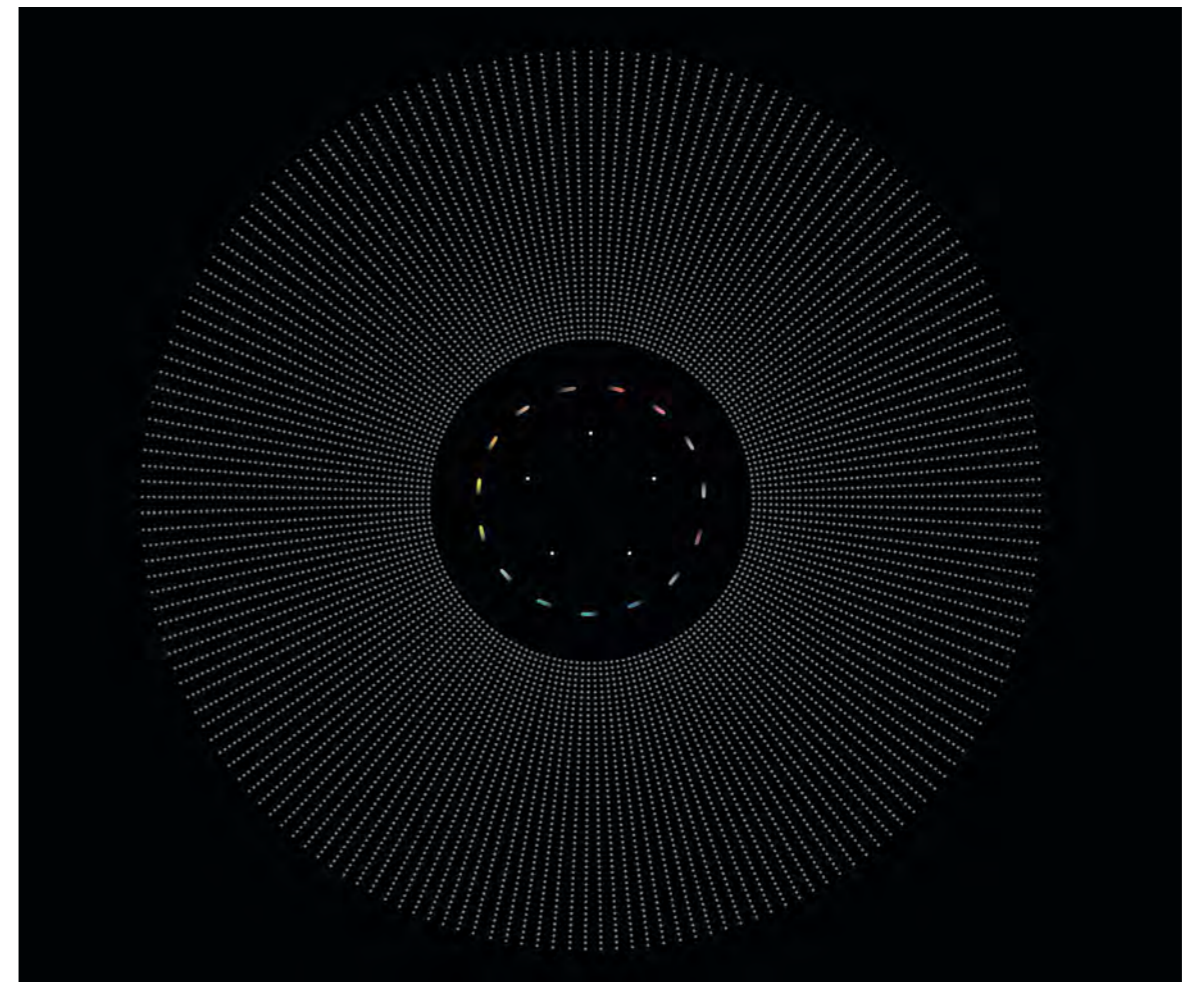
Going beyond the assumption that all users are necessarily human and that the level of agency of designed things is much greater than before puts into question some of the most frequent approaches in design. User-centered design is probably the methodology that is farthest from this assumption. Nevertheless, it is used by teams creating AI systems (Google Design). Some researchers in design start from that point and recognize the dynamic, evolutive nature of systems designed with AI (or for AI). In particular, learning creates new relationships of co-adaptation between users and systems (Leahu 2016). Recognizing the ongoing and changing relationship between the capabilities of human and artificial agents is the basis for approaches such as co-performance (Kuije and Giaccardi 2018), which questions the usual distribution of agency between human and artificial agents that are part of a system. Actually, both of them learn and change because they co-perform and co-evolve. As mentioned before, other approaches such as animistic design could also share this understanding of the mutual evolution through learning in mixed intelligent populations of agents (human or artificial) (van Allen 2013).

#### *Connecting AI, ML, data and design cultures*

As described above, the present relationship between data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence agents is closer than ever. This brings new requirements for design professionals. There is a need to get the right data for the intended goals of the system being designed. This data should somehow ensure that the resulting model is of quality and actionable. However, the current methods of Machine Learning in particular and Artificial Intelligence in general evaluate models from the perspective of data science and are not directly translatable to other evaluation criteria used in design and that have to do with more qualitative aspects, for example, the quality of the user experience, to name one (Dove 2017; Kuniavski 2017). There is a need to get the right data, the right ML method, and the right resulting model for the task at hand and it is still difficult to anticipate how this could impact design attributes. Studies of actual use of data for AI and Design show a rift between what is the usual practice in data engineering and machine learning with respect to design (Yang 2017). For the time being, it seems that the only way to proceed is through the creation of multidisciplinary teams (Girardin and Lathia 2017).

#### *Operationalizing new understandings of established concepts in design*

In dealing with systems composed by one or several artificial agencies, new situations arise for human users that demand an expansion of current design concepts. Usability is stressed under new demands. For example, understanding the behavior of an artificial intelligent agent with which a user interacts, and specifically an agent that learns, stresses the current approach based on plans and cognition (Suchman 2007; Van Allen 2017). Understanding why the agent made a decision to behave in a given way involves new aspects (Seshadri 2017; Huang 2017). Answers to these questions coming from the technical side (whether from ML, AI or Data Systems) are complex and difficult to communicate to the user in an effective, simple, and unobtrusive way. Current methods are divided into methods that resort to transparency (Kizilcec 2016; DTL 2018; Sangüesa 2018) or explanation (Gunning 2018). This lack of understanding creates lower quality user experience (Springer 2017; Kuniavsky 2017) and a lack of user confidence with respect to the intelligent system. Nevertheless, this is especially difficult in systems derived by an application of neural models, in particular Deep Learning (Lei 2016). This puts trust under attack given the known problematic implications of AI, Machine Learning, and Big Data: the transmission and amplification of bias (Eubanks 2018; Crawford 2016) and the reinforcement of discrimination (Eubanks 2018; Sweeney 2013; FATML 2017, 2018). The creation of trustworthy AI systems is still an open debate but definitely connects with the values and practices of design (Floridi 2019; IEEE 2018). The ethical design of intelligent systems requires combining these aspects with responsibility (Baylé 2019) and ethical expertise (Casacuberta and Guersenzvaig 2018). Last but not least, ethics for intelligent agents – technological systems based on an infrastructure that is environmentally quite demanding – should be understood in an open way, involving other entities and not just humans in their con-



sideration, that is, there is also a connection with efforts to design in a sustainable way in this area (DiSalvo 2010). These sustainability efforts must be extended to reduce the environmental impact that the development of AI systems generates. Recent research shows that the carbon footprint generated by training common large AI models is almost five times larger than the average American car, including the car itself and the fuel it consumes (Hao 2019). The numerical series present in patterns may perhaps belong to a Platonic realm unaffected by sustainability concerns. The hardware

that makes machine learning possible, however, has very real environmental effects. Developing more sustainable hardware is an ethical imperative.

All design has a normative dimension. From speed-bumps that make us slow down when we are driving a car to forks or spoons that roughly determine the amount of food that we put in our mouths. Designed artefacts contain and transmit norms and standards. As philosopher of technology Carl Mitcham (1995) writes, “different designs embody (implicitly or explicitly) distinct sociopolitical assumptions and visions of life, designing itself constitutes a new way of leading, or a leading into, different technological lifeworlds.” Even if the actual use of artefacts is never fully determined in advance by the designer, their decisions can and do have important ethical consequences. Simply by being concerned by “how things ought to be,” as Herbert Simon (1961) famously expressed, designers undertake an ethically challenging task for which they need to be prepared and aware of. This becomes the case especially when they are not the only agencies involved in actions that are vested with ethical relevance.

*Temes de Disseny* felt that there was room to invite reflection regarding this subject. We opened up a call to researchers and practitioners in design to share their explorations and

realizations that connected Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data, Intelligent materials, and other emerging technologies. We are happy to share with you the papers resulting from a thorough peer review selection process.

*Landscape Design Methodology*: pattern formation through the use of cellular automata by Sergi Abellán, Marcel Bilurbina, and Marilena Christodoulou shows how to apply a well-established artificial construct in computing, cellular automata, to help in the design of landscapes. Cellular automata can be seen as a collection of agents with simple rules that act as their “knowledge.” Nevertheless, collections of these automata typically exhibit very complex emergent behaviors that replicate the behaviors of colonies of living organisms. The comparison of the evolution of the artificial and natural counterparts shows a generative intelligent approach in the domain of landscape design but also points to a more general applicability.

*Designing Predictive Tools for Personalized Functionalities in Knitted Performance Wear* by Martijn ten Bhömer, Hai-Ning Liang, Difeng Yu, Yuanjin Liu, Yifan Zhang, Eva de Laat and Carola Leegwater, is an exploration of the possibilities of Industry 4.0 and how it impacts the creative design process. The combination of data, machine learning, and simulation brings new possibilities for extraordinary levels of personalization in textile manufacturing and in knitwear in particular. This article is a case study in this domain that explores how the predictive software inspired by machine learning can help in the processes. They focus in greater depth on the characteristics of this software that can help in the creativity of the designers involved, with a special view on the design of interactions and interfaces.

*Crafting Soft Wearables, with and through digital technologies* by Bruna Goveia, Kristina Andersen, and Oscar Tomico reviews and reflects on the last seven years of the Wearable Senses lab’s operation. The paper focuses on a view of intelligent wearables that takes them as a fully-programmable entity. The authors extend their reflection to the entire ecosystem around wearables, taking into account the different levels of personalization, the manufacturing processes, and the relationship with related services, users, and other stakeholders. In doing so, special interest is placed on the role of data and computing in all the processes.

*Practicing Fashion with the Anthropocene* by Patricia Wu approaches the practice of design from a speculative perspective where there is a displacement of the human-centric focus, a phenomenon that characterizes the Anthropocene. The author explores the consequences of this shift in agency in which the world is populated by non-human, highly autonomous entities, or “Odradeks.” Through the description of the author’s practice-based process, the possibility of reaching a fashion design practice that fully embodies an ecological, non-human-centric view is described.

*The biological encoding of design and the premises for a new generation of “living” products: the example of Sinapsi* by Sabriana Lucibello and Carmen Rotondi describes the process by which they created an intelligent device to help blind people navigate through different environments. In order to design in a world full of artificial intelligences, they used biological models to steer their design process. The authors argue that this helps improve the quality of life of the user of

an intelligent system and promotes human qualities as well. The fact that they tested their approach in a setting where the co-dependence of human users and artificial autonomous systems is so high reinforces the interest in their findings as they could point a way towards addressing other intelligent systems in other domains.

*Designing organs at the Transpecies Society: hybrid practices between cybernetics and artificial intelligence* by Tati-ana Afanador and Judit Parés. The Transpecies Society is an association that embraces the cybernetic and the artificial as their main material and the primary focus of their practice. The authors discuss, in a very practical manner, their work methods and how they are related to a culture based on data in a critical relationship with the tenets of Cybernetics and intelligent systems. They discuss their own practices by examining, for example, what goes on in the design and operation, or life, of cyborgs.

*The Service Design Platform for People with Dementia: Person-centred Reminiscence Therapy with Artificial Intelligence in Immersive Environments* by Jinyoung Lee explores the interconnection of design and virtual environments to facilitate reminiscence therapy for people with dementia and their caregivers. The system is centered around the storage, categorization, and retrieval of personal memories for patients. The changes introduced by the use of Virtual Reality environments in this regard are considered since, the author argues, they could expand the current way memories are represented and relived. The ethical aspects of these changes are also considered.

*Death Inc.* by the Domestic Data Streamers design collective. This pictorial shows an exhibit that was presented at the “Design Does” exhibition. This exhibition took place at The Design Museum of Barcelona and revolved around the different dimensions of contemporary design and its importance in society. Death Inc. was an installation about killer robots to spark debate about how Autonomous Weapon Systems failed the Principle of Discrimination. It referred to the Samsung SGR-A1 model, currently used in the demilitarized zone of the South Korea-North Korea border. This model, considered the first of its kind, is able to select and shoot human targets without requiring a person to authorize the operation.

*A framework for systematically applying humanistic ethics when using AI as a design material* by Richelle Dumond, Kyle Dent, and Mike Kuniavsky deals with the hard task of coming up with a consistent and comprehensive set of guidelines and practices to help designers confront the ethical dilemmas of their practice when dealing with the creation of intelligent systems. They place special focus on the difficulties brought about by the new levels of autonomy in these types of systems and how to tackle them to uphold human rights, respect individuals’ privacy, ensure personal data protection, and enable freedom of expression and equality, a set of conditions for maintaining a humanistic ethics.

We would like to thank all authors for their contributions and the reviewers for their efforts. We hope that this issue helps designers to position themselves with respect to AI and emerging technologies and brings about the best possible outcomes from their research and practice.

## BIOGRAPHIES

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menos de autonomía, en sí misma. Diseñar con IA es claramente trabajar con un material que evolucionará de maneras que son más variadas y más difíciles de planificar por adelantado, al menos en comparación con otros materiales más tradicionales. Trabajar con madera contrachapada o con aluminio está circunscrito totalmente a las leyes de la física, algo que los convierte en materiales altamente predecibles. Los algoritmos de IA no son ajenos al terreno de la física, por supuesto, pero a causa de su misma naturaleza su comportamiento podría ser muy complicado de vaticinar en detalle. Por el momento, no existe ningún modo directo de analizar un modelo de IA y hacer que sea totalmente predecible.

¿Existe algún concepto común que, siguiendo el mismo razonamiento, nos pueda ayudar a estudiar los distintos tipos de diseño que se están creando en relación a la IA, el aprendizaje automático y los datos? ¿Existe algún concepto que ambas disciplinas utilicen y que nos pueda ayudar a fijar las relaciones que hay entre ellas? Tras un tiempo de reflexión y debate llegamos a la conclusión de que la noción de “agencia” era una buena candidata para ayudarnos a dibujar una conexión práctica con los objetos de la IA, el aprendizaje automático, el Big Data y el diseño. Cuando menos, ciertas similitudes de conceptualización y uso práctico que había en ambas disciplinas eran intrigantes.

La diferencia que la IA puede introducir en general –y en el diseño en particular– podía interpretarse como un salto en el nivel de agencia debido al uso de la IA como material de diseño. En el diseño se ha introducido y utilizado la “agencia” en varias subdisciplinas y prácticas. Un ejemplo es la investigación de diseño, pero también se ha aplicado como guía en la práctica del diseño. La noción de “agencia” arrastra cierta tradición, por ejemplo, de campos como la Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2005; Yaneva 2009). En diseño, se reconoce la agencia de objetos, que puede guardar relación con conceptos como las affordances o puede aplicarse en investigación de usuario. De algún modo, la agencia es un concepto aceptado en la práctica del diseño. Conceptos como los “objetos intencionales” (Rozendaal 2016), por ejemplo, guardan una gran semejanza con los tipos de agencia que se utilizan en IA. Se podría decir que ahora la IA, en efecto, es la disciplina de crear agentes artificiales con sus propios objetivos, deseos e intenciones. Los académicos de la postfenomenología (por ejemplo, Verbeek 2011) articulan una perspectiva filosófica en la que la agencia (moral) se reduce a una cuestión de mediación entre personas y tecnologías en lugar de una cuestión puramente humana.

De hecho, en inteligencia artificial, el concepto de agencia y agencias se ha convertido en un elemento central y es un constructo fundamental para la construcción de sistemas complejos de IA (Wooldridge 2002).

Existen diferencias entre las conceptualizaciones utilizadas en cada disciplina. Para diferenciarlas podríamos retroceder un poco y analizar los orígenes y los objetivos de la IA y por qué y cómo el concepto de agencia actualmente desempeña un papel fundamental en varias disciplinas.

## 2 LA AGENCIA EN LOS SISTEMAS DE INTELIGENCIA ARTIFICIAL

El inicio de la inteligencia digital como disciplina suele asociarse con la celebración en 1956 de la Escuela de Verano de Dartmouth sobre Inteligencia Artificial (McCarthy et al. 1955). Aquel encuentro reunió a investigadores en matemáticas, tecnología de la información, lógica, computación y psicología. Todos compartían un mismo entusiasmo por las posibilidades que abrían los ordenadores. Los pioneros de Dartmouth previeron que aquellas máquinas podían superar el uso que tenían por aquel entonces. Pensaron que los ordenadores podían ser entidades capaces de hacer mucho más que simplemente procesar números. Pensaron que los ordenadores podrían manipular muchos tipos distintos de representaciones, incluidas representaciones del conocimiento. El pensamiento podía ser, como había dicho ya Hobbes siglos atrás, una mera cuestión de cálculo. Aunque esta visión de cálculo de nuevos tipos de símbolos, y no solo de números, era la dominante en la idea de inteligencia de las máquinas que caracterizó el encuentro de Dartmouth, otra parte del mismo grupo original estaba más interesada en cálculos más simples. Pensaban que llegarían a la inteligencia no con estructuras simbólicas complejas sino replicando la simple combinación de señales de la infraestructura neuronal de los sistemas inteligentes cognitivos. El grupo de Dartmouth emitió una declaración que, más que un programa detallado de investigación científica, tenía la

apariencia de una lista de ejemplos de tareas que asociaban al comportamiento inteligente y que pensaban que había que estudiar. Vale la pena echar una ojeada a la lista (McCarthy et al. 1955), pues arroja luz sobre la ambición del planteamiento del grupo de Dartmouth: y también sobre los límites de la imaginación de aquel grupo fundacional: teniendo en cuenta la capacidad que tenían los ordenadores en aquella época, había que ser valiente para obtener de aquellas máquinas las tareas extremamente más complejas que necesitarían en el futuro para atribuirles inteligencia. Era un ejercicio de especulación y proyección, quizás inspirado por un clima de investigación empapado de los logros de Alan Turing y otros científicos en los años treinta y que llevaron a Turing a escribir su artículo fundacional “Maquinaria computacional e inteligencia” (Turing 1950). Uno de los participantes en aquel histórico encuentro definió el objetivo global de la incipiente disciplina de la inteligencia artificial con las siguientes palabras:

*“Estudiar cómo crear sistemas que se comporten de un modo que, si fueran humanos, se pueda considerar ‘inteligente’”.* (Minsky 1986)

Curiosamente, cada uno de los participantes en aquella naciente disciplina abordaba el objetivo común desde la práctica de la disciplina de la que provenía. Más que una metodología científica –entendida como los métodos de las ciencias duras teóricas o experimentales–, preferían un planteamiento constructivo o, según una terminología posterior, un planteamiento construcccionista. Es decir, sabrían cómo alcanzar aquellos objetivos construyendo sistemas que los lograran y aprendiendo del proceso. Estos son básicamente los rasgos de una “cultura del diseño” (Serra 1992), tal como podría aceptar Herbert Simon, uno de los más destacados asistentes a los encuentros de Dartmouth (Simon 1961).

Aquel encuentro dio lugar a muchas actividades y rápidamente empezaron a producirse gran número de éxitos iniciales. A finales de los ochenta y principios de los noventa, el ámbito más prometedor de la IA era el de sistemas expertos. Estos se convirtieron en sistemas de conocimiento, y dieron lugar a una disciplina totalmente nueva: la ingeniería del conocimiento. Los sistemas expertos eran básicamente sistemas de razonamiento que utilizaban una representación del conocimiento acumulado por expertos humanos altamente cualificados. Aquel conocimiento se limitaba a una práctica específica y estaba relacionado con la ejecución de una tarea inteligente: diagnóstico, planificación o diseño, por ejemplo. Los sistemas expertos despertaron un gran interés en el mundo empresarial, desde el sector de seguros hasta el sector aeroespacial, y se invirtieron grandes sumas de dinero en su construcción y mantenimiento. Pero aquellos sistemas adolecían de fragilidad y rigidez. Tenían enormes dificultades por aprender nuevas cosas. Por consiguiente, no eran capaces de adaptarse con suficiente rapidez a cambios en el entorno, y a veces fracasaban estrepitosamente. El campo de la inteligencia artificial estaba en el punto de mira (Lighthill 1973). Cortaron los fondos destinados a investigación y las distintas soluciones prácticas y métodos que se estaban ideando se consideraron ajenos a la realidad y conceptualmente divergentes. Aquella ciencia se estaba desmoronando. Se replantearon a fondo sus premisas y objetivos iniciales. Algunos se preguntaron si razonar era necesario para actuar de manera inteligente o si el razonamiento necesitaba una representación simbólica (Brooks 1991). ¿La lógica era realmente necesaria para razonar y pensar o la mera imitación de la conectividad de tejidos neuronales sería suficiente para realizar tareas inteligentes? Y por cierto, ¿qué era una tarea inteligente? ¿Cuál era el concepto común entre, digamos, el procesamiento del lenguaje natural y la robótica? ¿Había alguno?

La inteligencia artificial tardó un tiempo en reorientarse. La creación de un concepto común que definiera el objeto de su interés fue determinante en su lento renacer. El concepto de agente reorganizó los intereses y los objetivos de sus distintas subdivisiones (Russell y Norvig 2003). La inteligencia artificial consistía básicamente en construir agentes inteligentes que resolvieran problemas solos o conjuntamente. Para lograrlo, los agentes tenían objetivos y aplicaban todos sus conocimientos o los conocimientos que pudieran obtener del entorno en el que operaban. Los agentes tenían “agencia”.

Esta agencia se interpretaba principalmente de dos maneras. Una era una capacidad supeditada a otro agente, que podía ser un agente humano. Es decir, un agente inteligente actuaba por cuenta de otro agente (posiblemente humano). Para lograrlo tenía una amplia gama de maneras alternativas de alcanzar sus objetivos por cuenta de este otro agente (es decir, los objetivos del primer agente eran una traducción de los objetivos del segundo agente). Según una definición más fuerte, agencia indicaba la autonomía de un agente por perseguir sus propios objetivos. Los agentes podían “cobrar vida” cuando se diera una cierta configuración del entorno,

un estado determinado que los llevara a actuar. Harían lo que pudieran (incluso aprender) para lograr aquel objetivo en aquella configuración del mundo. Los agentes podían ser totalmente de software o totalmente de hardware, pero mayoritariamente eran una mezcla de ambos. Los sistemas multiagentes eran expansiones colectivas de inteligencia del paradigma del agente (Russell 2003). En cualquier caso, en la IA moderna un agente es un tipo especial de agente racional (Simon 1961) que actúa en un entorno y persigue sus objetivos. El agente conoce el estado del entorno gracias a sensores y actúa en dicho entorno utilizando efectores. La acción es el resultado de la decisión a la que se llega movilizand o el conjunto de creencias del agente que relacionan la información conocida del entorno con el conocimiento. En algunas definiciones de agentes inteligentes, los deseos representan la situación o situaciones que el agente querría lograr para llegar a sus objetivos. Las intenciones representan el estado deliberativo del agente, lo que el agente ha decidido hacer.

El concepto del agente aclaraba la situación de cada subdisciplina de la IA porque se situaba en función de la visión que tenía de sí mismo. Por consiguiente, se podía interpretar la robótica como la creación de agentes de hardware que deberían interactuar físicamente con un entorno físico. De manera análoga, se podía crear un agente de software que actuaría en un entorno virtual. La disciplina había encontrado finalmente una manera común de representar y comparar los distintos tipos de sistemas de IA: la calidad de su agencia.

Agentes, datos y aprendizaje

Uno de los principales cambios que se han producido en la construcción de sistemas que utilizan agentes inteligentes desde esta refundación de la inteligencia artificial es la importancia que han adquirido los métodos de aprendizaje automático. Los sistemas inteligentes son cada vez más el resultado de un proceso que empieza con datos que parecen ser relevantes para una determinada tarea. Los datos se utilizan como materia prima para un sistema de aprendizaje automático que extrae conocimiento que se puede aplicar. Por ejemplo, los sistemas de aprendizaje automático pueden ayudar a identificar patrones relevantes en el ámbito de una aplicación. Con un algoritmo de aprendizaje automático se crea un modelo que, cuando posteriormente se crea el sistema, le permite decidir si una determinada secuencia de información es representativa o no de un determinado patrón. Esa es la base de los sistemas de clasificación que se utilizan habitualmente en muchas aplicaciones, subsistemas y sistemas propiamente dichos. Por ejemplo, para identificar caras, clasificar situaciones, objetos, personas, etc. En general, los métodos de aprendizaje automático se pueden dividir a grandes rasgos en métodos que proporcionan un criterio para agrupar cosas en ámbitos desconocidos, métodos para clasificar objetos en ámbitos en los que conocemos cuáles son las principales clases y, por último, métodos que ayudan a un agente a aprender por sí mismo cómo mejorar su rendimiento, es decir, hacer mejor una determinada tarea. Estos tres tipos de aprendizaje suelen denominarse aprendizaje no supervisado, aprendizaje supervisado y aprendizaje por refuerzo (Alpaydin 2017). Existen otros métodos que no encajan tan bien en esta clasificación, como el aprendizaje por analogía, el aprendizaje metafórico y el aprendizaje transferible. Otro sistema de clasificación del aprendizaje automático dividiría los métodos de aprendizaje automático en analítico-descriptivos o generativos. Es decir, métodos que ayudan a crear un modelo para comprender un ámbito y extraer reglas de decisión para la posterior creación del sistema inteligente basado en dicho modelo o métodos que aprenden de los datos y crean nuevas cosas como las redes generativas antagónicas (GAN, por sus siglas en inglés) (Goodfellow et al. 2014).

Hagamos un alto en el camino para ver un ejemplo que explique brevemente las principales diferencias entre los anteriores sistemas de IA (basados en el conocimiento o basados en expertos) y los nuevos sistemas de aprendizaje automático (basados en el Big Data y en el reconocimiento de patrones). Imaginemos que queremos desarrollar un sistema que sea capaz de reconocer un perro en una imagen. Los anteriores sistemas se entrenarían para reconocer las características de un perro (forma básica, orejas, ojos, piel, nariz, etc.) que se habrían definido de alguna manera con anterioridad. Podríamos decir, por ejemplo, que un perro tiene entre cero y cuatro patas. Tiene entre cero y dos orejas, que pueden ser pequeñas o grandes. Pero en realidad todo eso nunca funcionó. El mundo es simplemente demasiado complejo para describirlo por adelantado. Los nuevos sistemas funcionan al revés: entrenas al sistema no enseñándole cómo es un perro a través de abstracciones, sino proporcionándole millones de imágenes de perros codificadas en una serie de números. En el mejor de los casos,

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el sistema aprende cómo es un perro reconociendo patrones numéricos que contienen esas imágenes. Cuando le muestras al sistema una nueva imagen de un animal, el sistema puede determinar con un cierto grado de precisión si aquella imagen contiene un perro o no. Es importante tener en cuenta que los sistemas de aprendizaje automático actuales, incluso si son capaces de identificar a un perro, en realidad nunca tienen una comprensión semántica de lo que es un perro.

En este mosaico de métodos y técnicas, los modelos basados en redes neuronales han cosechado cada vez más éxitos en los últimos quince años y su aplicación se ha generalizado. Son la base de los llamados métodos de Deep Learning (Goodfellow et al. 2017).

En la actualidad la mayoría de sistemas de IA que se están desarrollando usan profusamente las técnicas de aprendizaje automático. Es decir, los actuales agentes de IA tienden a ser agentes que aprenden con más posibilidades de tener autonomía que los anteriores sistemas de IA ya que el aprendizaje automático puede ponerse en funcionamiento siempre que los agentes decidan que necesitan adaptarse mejor a nuevas situaciones. Para construirlos, hacen falta volúmenes de datos mayores, más extensos y más diversos.

Eso no significa que en todo el proceso de crear estos agentes inteligentes no haya elementos humanos (no totalmente autónomos). Más bien, si queremos que un sistema reconozca autónomamente a perros necesitamos que los humanos le digan al sistema: esto es un perro. También necesitamos mucho conocimiento para utilizar el método de aprendizaje automático adecuado para un determinado ámbito de aplicación, para probar los modelos resultantes y para ajustarlos antes de poner en funcionamiento al agente inteligente en su entorno operativo.

### 3 LA IA EN EL DISEÑO

El hecho de que cada vez más sistemas incluyan algún tipo de agente inteligente en su construcción ha abierto una amplia gama de intersecciones entre objetivos, tareas y métodos de diseño y la inteligencia artificial. A continuación destacamos algunas de las áreas en las que se aplica la IA al diseño.

Los materiales se pueden considerar algo pasivo y un dato conocido o, por el contrario, algo que se puede diseñar para que exponga un determinado conjunto de propiedades; potencialmente, los materiales se pueden considerar algo que puede lograr que dichas propiedades evolucionen con el paso del tiempo como respuesta a un entorno. El uso de la inteligencia artificial parece especialmente indicado para analizar el amplio espectro de las maneras de combinar la materia existente o de modificar los materiales existentes. Buscar diferentes combinaciones y operaciones para modificar elementos individuales o sus combinaciones es característico de una concepción muy antigua de la IA, que concibe el comportamiento inteligente como el análisis inteligente de un espacio de búsqueda realizado utilizando la heurística (Russell y Norvig 2003). Encontramos parte de esta visión de la aplicación de la IA en la creación de nuevos materiales ya en los años 80.

Más recientemente, también encontramos el uso de la “segunda ola” de sistemas de inteligencia artificial en la creación de nuevos materiales. A saber, el típico ciclo de recopilación de datos, aplicación de aprendizaje automático, prueba de un modelo y aplicación del mismo a la tarea que nos ocupa. En este caso, se utilizan depósitos de procesos y propiedades de materiales para dar con un conjunto de combinaciones y procedimientos que permitan obtener el rendimiento deseado de un sustrato material que puede ser un compuesto o un cambio más fundamental como, por ejemplo, la presión, la respuesta termal o la elasticidad. A un nivel distinto, se pueden analizar y generar otras propiedades de materiales utilizando métodos de IA como la textura de una superficie y también para incluir programabilidad en los mismos materiales (Ion et al. 2017).

La IA se está utilizando en el diseño de productos ampliando sus procedimientos a nivel del producto. Por ejemplo, la obra de Troy Nachtigall estudia la conexión entre los datos y las materialidades (Nachtigall et al. 2019). Utilizando datos sobre materiales, propiedades, comportamiento del usuario y otras fuentes, se utiliza un sistema que aprende de la interconexión de todos ellos para obtener un producto ultrapersonalizado. Los modelos que se siguen en el ámbito del diseño también podrían ser el material de un sistema de aprendizaje (Tucker 2016).

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