

TECHNOLOGY AS A CULTURAL FORM: AN ATTEMPT AT RECONCILIATION

Abdullah Eren

***President, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
Chairman of the Board of Directors of the KÜME Foundation***

Attribution: Eren, A. (2026). Technology as a cultural form: An attempt at reconciliation. In H. Arslan, A. Taşdelen, E. Kuzucu Hıdır, & O. A. Çetin (Eds.), *Artificial intelligence and national technology reflections* (pp. 441–455). Turkish Academy of Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.53478/TUBA.978-625-6110-86-1.ch18>

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Abstract

This chapter argues that technology is not an external instrument added to culture, but one of the primary ways culture takes material form. From the industrial clock to contemporary artificial intelligence (AI), technical systems have reorganized how human beings experience time, space, memory, and authority. Rather than treating innovation as a neutral sequence of inventions, the study interprets modern technology as a historical process through which social norms and metaphysical assumptions are embedded into everyday life. The analysis traces a trajectory from mechanical time and mass media to networked digital culture. Each stage reveals how tools silently impose patterns of attention, responsiveness, and obligation. The transition to AI marks a qualitative shift where interpretation, prediction, and creative composition are increasingly delegated to algorithmic systems. Under these circumstances, knowledge becomes statistically inferred, time becomes prestructured through prediction, and cultural production moves from representation to simulation. Human agency risks being repositioned from originator to supervisor of machine-generated outputs. In response, the paper rejects both technological determinism and nostalgic retreat. It proposes a culturally rooted technological imagination that understands design as an ethical and historical act. By consciously embedding inherited values and collective memory into AI systems, societies can shape rather than merely adapt to technical change and ensure that innovation remains aligned with human judgment, responsibility, and meaning.

Keywords

Technology and Culture, Cultural Heritage, Algorithmic Culture, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Culture

Introduction

The way we define technology depends on how the word is used, but the 20th century is what really shaped our modern understanding. During that time, so many inventions appeared that technology became a specialized field, often leaving the big decisions to experts alone. This change made us treat technology as something separate from our social lives, causing us to overlook how much it actually influences our culture. In reality, tools are never neutral, every design comes with hidden rules about how we should behave. For example, a car's gas pedal is designed so that you must press it to move, which physically forces a specific behavior on the driver. Because of this, it is important to look past the machines themselves to see how they shape our daily experiences. Our goal should be to uncover these hidden influences and find a way to use modern technology without losing our human values and heritage.

The very definition of "technology" carries a wealth of connotative nuance. Deriving from the Greek *techne* and *logos*, the former concept has traditionally been understood as a general category of "deeds." However, the scope of *techne*, an activity predicated on a problem-solving structure, extends far beyond mere tooling, it encompasses the full spectrum of agency and action within our locus of habitation. Given that *techne* possesses a semantic depth far transcending the mere technical implement, we are compelled to ask how its definition might be expanded to encompass the full spectrum of human existence. Rather than reducing it to a tool, we must broaden the concept to account for the totality of our engagement with the world. This analysis shows why it is wrong to think that technology is neutral (Schatzberg, 2018) *Techne* must be understood not as an external addition to culture, but as its physical embodiment. It is the crystallization of societal norms into functional forms. Thus, an expanded definition of *techne* shows it as a carrier of meaning, a vessel that transports the history, logic, and aspirations of a people into the practical sphere of daily life.

A similar understanding can be found within every different cultural thought, where making and living have rarely been treated as separate domains. The master-apprentice relationship, framed knowledge as something embodied and transmitted through practice rather than abstract instruction. Tools used by a calligrapher or a stonemason did not merely serve functional ends; they shaped discipline, patience, and social bonds. Similar to technological artefacts, objects like houses, streets, and everyday instruments were bearers of history and identity rather than passive backdrops. Within this cultural lens, the challenge of artificial intelligence becomes especially sharp. Unlike traditional tools shaped slowly by communal practice, AI systems often emerge detached from local memory and moral context. The task, then,

is to understand artificial intelligence not as a neutral innovation, but as a new form of making that must be re anchored in human judgment, responsibility, and cultural continuity if it is to coexist with inherited ways of living.

1. A Trajectory of Cultural Forms

Even if the Industrial Age primarily demonstrated an external organization of labor, it established a precedent for how technology shapes the human approach to the world. This shaping of experience is intrinsic to all subsequent innovations, a point that finds a clear theoretical grounding in Marx' work, where machinery is shown to reorganize perception itself through disciplining of time, movement, and attention (Marx, 1867/1976). This process is so thorough that the technological form comes to appear as a natural condition of life rather than a historically produced one. This has remained the case ever since. Along with serving culture, technology produces cultural forms by structuring habits, expectations, and social obligations. A clear everyday example is the telephone, which gradually became a non-neglectible fact of daily life, almost inevitable in its presence (McLuhan, 1964/1994). In its early form, the telephone functioned as an instrument of auditory synchronicity which imposed a rigid normative protocol for distant speaking. The ringing bell operated as a command, an imperative, that demanded the prioritization of a distant voice over the immediate environment. To own a telephone was therefore to submit to a specific social order, one in which availability was fixed in space and time, and in which responsiveness became a moral expectation rather than a voluntary act.

In its early form, the telephone was understood as a way to be present at a distance. It was meant to carry not only words, but also the emotional tone of the speaker's voice. At the same time, this form of mediation involved a loss at the level of the senses. Because the interaction was disembodied, speakers no longer needed to prepare their physical appearance for the person on the other end of the line. Cultural memory, often preserved in films from the period, points to an interesting habit. Early telephone users frequently stood while speaking. This posture can be read as a bodily trace of earlier face-to-face communication, which required standing before one's interlocutor. That physical discipline appears to have been unconsciously transferred into the new auditory setting. These observations are not meant as a critique of the technology itself. Rather, they draw attention to a fundamental shift in how communication is organized. The telephone reshaped the bodily and spatial patterns of interaction, and this transformation deserves careful consideration.

This shift in everyday practice did not stop with the introduction of the telephone. Instead, it has continued to evolve as new interfaces and functions have appeared. Technology, then, does not produce a single, fixed outcome. It shapes an ongoing and changing relationship between individuals and society. This is especially clear in the

history of mobile phones. What began as a tool for conveying emotion through voice has moved far beyond that role. The assumptions built into the device have changed in fundamental ways. The smartphone has reversed traditional ideas of presence. It creates an expectation of constant reachability that blurs the line between public and private life, while at the same time weakening the norm of real-time voice conversation. Today, communication is increasingly expected to be delayed, brief, and text-based rather than immediate and spoken.

These instances serve to highlight the shifting normative landscape shaped by our tools. My aim is to remain neutral regarding the merits of this shift, focusing instead on revealing the cultural imperatives obscured within technology itself. Therefore, we must review the history of technology not as a sequence of inventions, but as a stream of cultural embeddedness. Also, only in this way can we observe societal and political transitions authentically.

Discussions of technological transformation often return to Lewis Mumford's analysis of the clock. Mumford argues that before the Industrial Age, the clock mainly served to mark the natural rhythms of the day and to organize social life in line with religious and cultural conceptions of time. With industrialization, however, the clock took on a fundamentally different role and became a key mechanism of mechanical time (Mumford, 1934). What matters in Mumford's account is not a physical alteration of the device, but a profound change in how it functioned and what it meant. Although the clock continued to measure the Earth's rotation, the nature of the time it produced had shifted. In the industrial era, time was broken into uniform units, detached from lived experience, and reorganized in the service of efficiency and productivity.

The cultural effects of this transformation were even more far-reaching. As Mumford observes, the division and optimization of time made it possible to turn nights into working hours, to extend factory discipline into the home, and to weaken religious and culturally structured temporal frameworks. Time no longer revolved around sacred calendars, shared rituals, or seasonal rhythms. Instead, it came to be organized according to the demands of productivity, speed, and rational calculation.

This transformation of time through the example of the clock also appears as a cultural motif in modern Turkish literature. From Yahya Kemal's reflections on the "eternal music of time," to Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's notion of the "clock" that structures the spirit of an era, many authors articulate the cultural and existential dimensions of this technological shift. Tanpınar's *The Time Regulation Institute* satirizes the imposition of Westernized temporal forms on society and presents an allegorical institution attempting to "adjust" traditional conceptions of time (Tanpınar, 2017). Together, these examples demonstrate that technological artifacts reshape not only our practices but also our cultural memory, perception, and lifeworld.

The traces of this transformation became more visible in the post-Industrial Age, particularly by the 1950s. With the emergence of television as a domestic technology, the influence of technology extended beyond production processes to include everyday entertainment, leisure, and cultural consumption. Raymond Williams argued that television was not merely a device but “a social form”¹ which reconfigured modes of interaction and experience (Williams, 1974). Consequently, technology increasingly became not an auxiliary component but an inseparable element of human activity. This deepened the cultural dimension of technological influence and produced enduring reorganizations in both individual experience and collective identity.

The introduction of television as a household medium initiated the massification of culture, standardizing time and synchronizing social experience. As Marshall McLuhan’s famous dictum “the medium is the message”² suggests, the form of media generates more profound transformations than the content it transmits (McLuhan, 2001, p. 7). Television thus created a new cultural synchrony in which vast populations were exposed to the same content at the same moment. Culture, for the first time on this scale, acquired an unprecedented degree of simultaneity, centralization, and rhythm.

By the 1980s, digital technologies and personal computers began to offer an alternative to the unidirectional flow of mass media by enabling interaction, customization, and user-directed engagement. Sherry Turkle’s notion of computers as a second self captures the emergence of new modes of subjectification, wherein individuals increasingly mapped their identities, relationships, and activities onto a digital interface (Turkle, 1984). For the first time, the human being became one who thinks with machines, forming identity experiences through computational environments.

From the mid-1990s onward, with the proliferation of the internet, social structures, communication practices, and cultural production underwent rapid transformation. This period, which Manuel Castells describes as the rise of the “network society”, introduced a world in which space and time became fluid; individuals could inhabit multiple digital locales simultaneously; and cultural production was no longer

¹ For a detailed analysis of the causal mechanisms of media, see Williams (1974), who scrutinizes the socio-technical conditions defining television. His exploration of how the medium transforms the world is particularly evident in his discussion of the relationship between technical innovation and social intent (pp. 1–25). This foundational study of “cultural form” provides a necessary precursor to understanding the contemporary transition from representation to simulation.

² This concept transcends its status as a mere aphorism; McLuhan (2001) dedicates an entire foundational chapter to explaining how the “scale or pace or pattern” of a new innovation, rather than its specific content, transforms human associations. For a full treatment of this thesis, see his discussion on the psychic and social consequences of the medium as a form (pp. 7–21).

dictated by centralized institutions but by the distributed logic of networks (Castells, 1996). Thus, the domestic media age that began in the 1950s evolved into a networked, interactive, and personalized digital culture by the early 2000s.

The most significant consequence of this transformation is that culture shifted from something passively consumed to something participatory, productive, and fundamentally speed-driven. In the 1950s television model, the viewer was passive, whereas in the internet culture of the 2000s, individuals became both consumers and producers. Time and experience were radically restructured. Speed, instant feedback, persistent online presence, the fragmentation of cultural memory, and the multiplication of lived experiences became defining features of this era.

The shift between these two media systems was not just about better technology. It fundamentally changed how we create meaning, how we pay attention, and how we see ourselves. In the old broadcast era, culture was not based on multiplicity. There were limited channels, fixed times, and a few powerful people in charge. Cultural products like movies or news were finished, stable. People simply watched or listened to something that was already completed. To be clear, these analyses are not intended to praise the periods in question. Rather, these distinctions are essential simply for understanding the fundamental differences between them

In the networked era, everything changed to multiplicity. Instead of waiting for a schedule, everything is immediate and always moving. The line between the person who makes the content and the person who watches it has disappeared. Cultural forms are no longer finished, they are constantly edited, shared, and changed through feedback. This change also altered our experience of time. We no longer consume media in separate moments (like watching a 7 PM news show). Instead, we live in a constant stream of updates and notifications. This requires us to be always *on* and always *available*.

Regarding space, we no longer need to be in the same room to interact. However, while we feel more free from geography, we are now controlled by algorithms. Digital platforms decide what we see and what is important. What looks like freedom is actually a new kind of power hidden in the software itself. Finally, our relationship with memory has changed. Mass media used to give us a shared story that stayed the same for a long time. Today's network culture is fragmented and personalized. Things are forgotten very quickly because everything moves so fast. Instead of remembering things together as a society, we now store our memories in searchable digital archives (Renan, 1882/1990).

The period from the 1950s to the 2000s represents a pivotal phase in which technological media reshaped the cultural regime. It served both as a laboratory for the transition from mass media to digital culture and as a preparatory stage for the

contemporary AI-driven transformation. Without understanding this transition, today's AI-centered cultural shifts cannot be adequately grasped. Since these roots are inherent and hidden in AI-centered cultural deeds.

2. The AI Threshold and the Inversion of Logos

The rise of AI marks a new stage in this historical trajectory. AI intervenes in capacities long understood as distinctly human such as thinking, judgment, and meaning-making. In this sense, the classical relationship between *techne* and *logos* is reversed. Humans continue to design and build tools, yet they increasingly delegate acts of reasoning, prediction, and interpretation to technical systems that mediate how the world is understood.

This constitutes a new level in the anthropological history of tools. Stone tools externalized muscular effort; writing externalized memory; the printing press externalized the circulation of speech; the computer externalized mathematical reasoning. AI, especially large language models, autonomous decision systems, and generative architectures, externalizes human capacities of interpretation, foresight, classification, and creative composition. This can be described as AI technologies becoming our mental extensions, functioning almost like cognitive organs (Clark & Chalmers, 1998)

AI therefore represents both a continuation and a break. It extends processes of exteriorization, yet it introduces a novel condition to it. For the first time, a technical system can operate at a scale and complexity that rivals human capacities, and can generate cultural artifacts, texts, images, strategies, narratives comparable to those produced by human agents. In this sense, while scholars still debate the theory, in practice, the ability to reason is no longer limited to human beings alone.

The AI era can be understood through three interrelated transformations that fundamentally reshape the human-technology relationship. First, artificial intelligence inaugurates a new type of epistemic mediation by changing the processes through which knowledge is produced and validated. Whereas earlier forms of knowing were filtered primarily through human perception and interpretation, AI systems generate meaning through large-scale statistical correlations (Janiesch et al., 2021). Knowledge becomes an outcome of algorithmic inference, and humans increasingly assume the role of supervisors or editors of machine-generated propositions, rather than their sole originators. This displacement of cognitive authority raises new questions about responsibility, authorship, and the very structure of understanding.

Second, AI introduces a new temporal logic that shifts us from mechanized time to predictive time (Kissinger et al., 2021). If industrial machines once regularized and accelerated the pace of human life, contemporary algorithms anticipate and pre-

structure the future through predictive models. Time becomes something forecasted rather than merely measured; individuals and institutions operate within algorithmically shaped horizons of expectation. While the clock disciplines the present, AI colonizes the future by pre-structuring expectations. The result is a lived experience in which decisions, risks, and opportunities are increasingly organized by probabilities computed at machine speed, embedding human life within a temporal field saturated by prediction.

Third, artificial intelligence transforms the cultural sphere by moving from representation to simulation. Earlier media technologies depicted or transmitted aspects of the world. Generative models now simulate, iterate, and recreate it (Kissinger et al., 2021). Cultural production becomes versioned, recombinable, and collaborative between humans and machines. This shift destabilizes traditional notions of originality, authenticity, and creative agency, as aesthetic forms and narratives can be produced autonomously by technical systems. Memory itself becomes externalized into data infrastructures capable of reorganizing and reanimating fragments of collective experience, thereby reshaping how meaning is produced and circulated.

Taken together, these developments indicate that AI does not merely extend human capacities but increasingly organizes the conditions under which experience, knowledge, and culture are constituted. It marks a decisive moment in the long history of *techne* and *logos*, introducing a world in which tools do not simply serve human intentions but actively participate in shaping them (Schatzberg, 2018).

3. How to React? Toward a Culturally Rooted Technological Imagination

Given the sheer scale and velocity of the transformations brought about by AI, societies often oscillate between three inadequate modes of response: denial, reaction, and surrender. Denial reflects a refusal to acknowledge the cultural and epistemic shifts introduced by AI, often rooted in nostalgia for a world where human judgment alone structured meaning. This stance mirrors earlier forms of technological romanticism that sought refuge in tradition without recognizing that tradition itself has always been mediated through tools, from the quill to the printing press. Reaction, by contrast, positions technology as a threat to be resisted or morally condemned. While such critiques often identify real dangers, they risk reducing technology to a mere adversary. They overlook the ways in which design, governance, and cultural framing can redirect its trajectory. Surrender, finally, bears a form of technological determinism that treats AI as an inevitable and autonomous force before which human agency dissolves. This logic mirrors a belief that computation is separate from political, cultural, and ethical deliberation. However this will not be the only and inescapable future.

All three postures share a common fault. They give up the possibility of shaping technology. Denial blinds, reaction paralyzes, surrender disempowers. What is needed is a fourth orientation, one that neither romanticizes the past nor exaggerates the future but approaches technology as a site of responsibility, design, and cultural project. This means recognizing that AI is a medium through which culture articulates its values, rhythms, and dreams. This kind of approach, at the very least, perpetuates an open-minded attitude and, at best, enables us to look to the future with confidence. This is a radical shift from polar thoughts of the previous generations that involve on one pole exalting, on the other pole neglecting.

This brings us to a deliberate act of allowing centuries-old heritage to resonate within contemporary technological forms. Such an approach begins with the acknowledgment that cultures have always embedded their code of belief, aesthetics, and ethics into their tools. Different traditions, for example, expressed their visions of order, harmony, and proportion through architecture, calligraphy, cosmology, and craft. Likewise, Western modernity infused the clock, the factory, and the bureaucratic machine with its own commitments to rationalization, efficiency, and calculability. All these tools, let's call them innovations, have brought their own embedded cultural frameworks to the places where they are adopted. Technical tools cannot be conceived as a mere mediation between human and nature (Simondon, 2017). So, why shy away from implementing our own cultural and heritage-based codes into the things we innovate and create? What is holding us back from whispering?

It first has to be admitted that bringing technology and culture together is not an easy task. To whisper heritage into technology today is not to return to an idealized past, rather to translate the spirit of a heritage into the logic of design. This requires high quality assimilation of both culture and technology. It means asking *What forms of attention, restraint, memory, and relationality should our tools cultivate?* Instead of allowing algorithms to flatten cultural difference into mere data patterns, it calls for embedding culturally situated ways of knowing into technical infrastructures.

To put it another way, technology must be subsumed under the broader umbrella of culture. There needs to be generalized ideas that can be instantiated for every single case. When a society encounters a new situation, these sorts of pillars help the society to respond genuinely and authentically. As it is known, our culture has its own pillars that have been used just like they are manuals which tells us the solution whenever a culture gets stuck. It is not culture that should be molded by technology, but rather culture that must internalize and integrate technical ensembles. Only through this integration can we illuminate the opaque zones that otherwise generate perpetual societal anxiety (Simondon, 2017). Instead of letting speed dictate value, it asks what forms of slowness or contemplation might be protected.

In this sense, *whispering heritage* is more than mere act of preservation. It is rather, transformation by way of preservation. These two opposing yet inclusive reflexes work together to define culture's trajectory through time.. It is the same with technology too. A way of ensuring that the long period of cultural heritage continues to speak through the technical forms of the present. It resists both the homogenizing tendencies of globalized technology and the fatalism of technological determinism by insisting that culture is not something technology replaces, it is something technology can carry. Through this lens, AI becomes a new medium through which the ethical and aesthetic sensibilities of diverse entities might be reimagined and renewed.

Ultimately, responding to AI demands neither fear nor submission but a reactivation of cultural imagination. That is the capacity to guide technology by the depth of our inherited wisdom. All this effort can only achieve concrete results by taking certain fundamentals into account. We must return to the core ideas that shape our view of the world and draw strength from them. Only in this way can technology become a tool that we control, that fulfils our demands, but does not control us.

So what should be done? Of course, there is no simple answer to this question. There never has been in history. However, there are certainly some points we need to remember. First of all, we must not forget that technology today seems to be undermining many human endeavours, from culture to the world of ideas, from art to craftsmanship. However, that is not entirely the case. Yes, it is possible to speak of a resolution in the world, but whatever takes time to establish will take roughly the same amount of time to resolve. So we must not despair.

Another issue is that technological development is now a reality. We need to properly understand this reality and answer the question of what technology means to us. Only then can we make the right technological advances in the right place. The question of what technology means to us is also closely linked to the question of why we exist in this world. If we want to build a world where we create beauty and walk towards the future, drawing motivation from our roots and our past, we must make a breakthrough that is in line with our purpose.

Thus, when producing technology, we must encourage ourselves to think about the effects of these outputs rather than the outputs themselves. Without disregarding the cultural heritage that technology embodies, we must always consider how to evaluate it and plan for a future in which we can make our own voices heard. This is possible with a deep understanding of the past, an effort to reveal the essence, and a vision that designs the future.

Conclusion

The trajectory from the industrial clock to the predictive algorithm reveals a singular truth that technology has never been a neutral vessel, but rather a “constitutive social form” that continuously reshapes our perception of time, presence, and agency. As we stand at the threshold of the AI era, where the “proletarianization of the life of the mind” (Stiegler, 2017, p. 21) threatens to outsource our very capacity for reasoning, memory and judgment, the question is no longer merely how to use these tools, but how to inhabit the world they are constructing. The passive consumption that defined the television era and the fragmented speed of the early internet must now give way to a more deliberate architectural stance.

Responding to this shift demands that we reject the paralysis of denial, reaction, and surrender. Instead, we must embrace another orientation. We should treat technology as a site of active cultural negotiation. This orientation acknowledges that if we do not embed our values into our technical systems, those systems will inevitably impose their own hidden rules of efficiency and acceleration upon us. The task, therefore, is to move from being mere supervisors of algorithmic outputs to becoming architects of their underlying logic.

This architecture requires the art of “whispering our heritage”, not as a turning back to nostalgia, but as a method of translating the spirit of a heritage into the design. Just as the industrial age embedded a specific conception of time into the clock, we must now consciously embed culturally situated ways of knowing into the infrastructure of AI. We must ask: How can an algorithm be designed to prioritize contemplation over speed? Instead of just predicting what comes next, how can data reflect the deeper meaning of time?

Ultimately, the goal is to shift our focus from the technical outputs themselves to the effects those outputs generate within the human lifeworld. By integrating cultural heritage into AI, we show that tradition is not a barrier to technological progress. Instead, culture acts as an essential foundation that ensures innovation remains aligned with human values. We argue that for technology to be truly advanced, it must be rooted in the historical and moral contexts of the society that creates it.

We must aim to design a future where machines do not merely perform a superficial simulation of our world. Instead, technology should embody the intellectual depth, historical weight, and resonance of our collective human wisdom. AI should function as a vessel for the knowledge and experiences we have gathered throughout history, rather than just a tool for processing data.

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About the Author

Abdullah EREN

Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency | [abdullaheren\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:abdullaheren@gmail.com)

Abdullah Eren was born in 1984 in İstanbul. He received his bachelor's degree in Department of Sociology from Boğaziçi University and his master's degree in Department of Diplomatic Studies from the University of London-Westminster. Having held various top-level positions in the private sector, Abdullah Eren later served as Chief Advisor to the President following his tenures as Deputy Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister and Advisor to the Prime Minister. Abdullah Eren was appointed the President of Turks Abroad and Related Communities following the Presidential Decree dated 27.10.2018. Throughout his term as the President of Turks Abroad and Related Communities, he led programs catering to the diaspora of Turkish citizens abroad reaching a population of 7 million, Turkic groups and related communities spread across a broad area spanning the Balkans, Central Asia, Middle East and North Africa embodying elements from the Ottoman legacy, and international students from all around the world who study in Türkiye. With an active presence in civil society activities as well, Eren is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Can Sağlığı Foundation and the Chairman of the Kültür ve Medeniyet Foundation. Abdullah Eren has been appointed the President of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency following the Presidential Decree dated 11.07.2025, he is proficient in English, is married with 2 children.

