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AI: When a Robot Writes a Play (AI: Když Robot Píše Hru)

Project author: Tomáš Studeník, sScript: Artificial Intelligence

THEaiTRE

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January 2021 saw the première of Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R.* and the coining of the word 'Robot'. To mark the centenary of that event, Tomáš Studeník came up with the idea that, instead of a man writing about robots a robot, should write about humans. The first concept was that it should be about Čapek, but that got widened and, of course, it is not physically written robotically but created by a computer program, an artificial intelligence.

The concept was developed by computer scientists at Prague's Charles University, led by computer linguist Rudolf Rosa, working with director Daniel Hrbek and his colleagues at the Svanda Theatre. Dramaturge David Kostas selected scenes from the computer output and turned its English into Czech that they then had to stage. They've claimed it as the first play written by an artificial intelligence, which is arguable. In 2016, there was the computer written musical [Beyond the Fence at London's Arts Theatre](#) and there may have been something before that.

The Czech Centre in London arranged for the première transmission of *AI* to be simultaneously available with English captions and freely available. Sadly, there was a technical hitch and the signal was lost a little way in, but the technicians of Svandovo divadlo very quickly made another version available on a different channel and that can be seen for the next few days.

The result is intriguing. Apparently, the computer program is fine producing dialogue but not very good at plot or group conversation so this is a sequence of duologues. It was given a situation and a first line and carried on from there but, without any human prompting, introduced references to pressure on hospitals and the US President. Where did they come from?

This intelligence claims to have been a clown, but even sporting a red nose it is not very good at jokes but, when it comes to sex, there are some surprises and, though computers you would not expect to have emotions, this intelligence seems to be learning. Love, life and death: they are all here and at times you may wonder which is the more natural: the humans or the glazed-eyed robot figure whose linkages sometimes seem to follow an absurdist logic and seems at its most sensually real when it dispenses with a physical body. Individual casting isn't identified but Jacob Erfteimeijer, Denisa Barešová, Petr Buchta, Andrea Buršová, Marek Fríka and Tomáš Petrík give their roles a style that matches the content.

On this evidence, it will be a long time before a computer can replace Shakespeare or Pinter but at less than an hour long it is an experiment worth catching. It's followed by a lengthy discussion about its creation for which there is a voice-over translation. This play is only part of a two-year research programme. Who knows what may follow?

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)