SPECIALIZED COLLOQUIUM/April 17, 2026

Protected Works, Unprotected Meaning? Art, AI, and the Limits of Copyright
Bartók's Source Ethics in the Age of AI

Gábor Soós, PhD
AI Innovation Strategic Advisor, Ministry of Culture and Innovation, Hungary
Cultural diplomat and university lecturer; former Secretary-General of the Hungarian National Commission for UNESCO

Abstract
The rise of generative AI has intensified fundamental questions at the intersection of art, new technologies, and copyright. While copyright remains the primary legal framework for protecting works, authorship, and certain economic interests, it does not fully address the broader cultural and normative concerns raised by AI systems trained on, and operating through, vast bodies of artistic and cultural material. In particular, the existing framework is less capable of accounting for forms of value that are not easily reducible to protected expression alone: style, contextual meaning, cultural memory, communal significance, and the integrity of interpretive environments. This talk argues that contemporary copyright debates should therefore be situated within a wider inquiry into legitimacy, responsibility, and cultural governance. Drawing on Béla Bartók's ethos of "pure source," it proposes an alternative normative orientation: one in which artistic and cultural materials are approached not merely as legally available inputs, but as sources embedded in human contexts of meaning, transmission, and responsibility. From this perspective, the key question is not only what the law permits, but what a culturally legitimate human–machine relationship should require. Copyright remains indispensable, but in the age of AI it must be supplemented by a richer account of source ethics, contextual integrity, and human measure.