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Digital Frontiers in Aesthetics: Applying Dewey's Insights to Generative AI

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The last few years have seen the emergence of 'artificially intelligent' systems en masse, which perform tasks which had previously only been possible by human intelligence. Arguably, the impact of 'AI 2.0' has been felt most prominently in the art world — artists have panicked as DALL-E, Midjourney, and other image generation algorithms manufacture pieces which previously required weeks of painstaking labor to create. This project seeks to develop a more critical framework for this novel mode of artistic creation and propose better ways of thinking about, using, and "becoming with" artificial intelligence in the domain of artistry. The first chapter delves into American philosopher John Dewey's theory of aesthetics with a close reading of Art as Experience. The second chapter examines critiques and contemporary challenges of Dewey's aesthetics, with particularly close attention paid to the dynamics of communication, intentionality of artists, and expression. The third chapter examines the concept of artistic AI, draws from post-humanist aesthetics to pose a decentered and relational framework of AI expression, and synthesizes these perspectives with a Deweyan lens. The final chapter advocates for 'tactical' deployments of AI art, and questions what truths and perceptions might be communicated when we create in tandem with machine intelligence.

Keywords

Aesthetics, Artificial Intelligence, John Dewey, Post-humanism

Disciplines

Aesthetics | Artificial Intelligence and Robotics | Philosophy

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Abstract

The last few years have seen the emergence of 'artificially intelligent' systems en masse, which perform tasks which had previously only been possible by human intelligence. Arguably, the impact of 'AI 2.0' has been felt most prominently in the art world — artists have panicked as DALL-E, Midjourney, and other image generation algorithms manufacture pieces which previously required weeks of painstaking labor to create. This project seeks to develop a more critical framework for this novel mode of artistic creation and propose better ways of thinking about, using, and "becoming with" artificial intelligence in the domain of artistry. The first chapter delves into American philosopher John Dewey's theory of aesthetics with a close reading of *Art as Experience*. The second chapter examines critiques and contemporary challenges of Dewey's aesthetics, with particularly close attention paid to the dynamics of communication, intentionality of artists, and expression. The third chapter examines the concept of artistic AI, draws from post-humanist aesthetics to pose a decentered and relational framework of AI expression, and synthesizes these perspectives with a Deweyan lens. The final chapter advocates for 'tactical' deployments of AI art, and questions what truths and perceptions might be communicated when we create in tandem with machine intelligence.

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Chapter One: Dewey's *Art as Experience*

What is art? Why do we humans derive so much value from it? Why do we surround ourselves with artistic artefacts, decorate our rooms with posters and paintings, spend our hard-earned money to attend theatres, museums, and opera houses, and soundtrack our lives with rich and varied music? *Art as Experience* lays forth John Dewey's pragmatic theory of aesthetics. While it did not resolve all the conundrums at the heart of artistry, Dewey's theory continues to contribute relevant insights centuries after his death. Dewey lies in a fascinating place within the history of aesthetic philosophy — like Anglo-Analytic philosophy in his deliberate use of terms, definitions, and qualifications of what constitutes art and aesthetic experience, but simultaneously purposeful in leaving his aesthetic theory open enough to foster multitudes of interpretations. A psychologist, naturalist, and pragmatist, Dewey's philosophy is shaped for education and actual implementation. Dewey is fundamentally concerned with building a world where aesthetic theories might serve as a tool to inspire artists to create and build a more aesthetically appealing world, and *Art as Experience* reflects those aspirations as it attempts to answer the most profound questions in art and aesthetics.

Theory of Experience

Perhaps a good starting place to understand *Art as Experience* is a thorough analysis of Dewey's psychological underpinnings. His first work was intellectually distant from aesthetics: a textbook merely titled *Psychology*. In stark contrast to the empirically constituted psychology of the modern world, Dewey's early psychology was primarily derivative of Hegelian notions of absolute idealism, wherein a rational mind organises and reflects on experience to form a consistent sense of perception. However, after reading William James' *Principles of Psychology*, Dewey was "cured of his early Hegelian idealism"

(Shusterman 2010, 28), and often spoke of *Principles* as the most influential book in his life. (Alexander 2016). In a commemorative essay on *Art as Experience*, Richard Shusterman meticulously traces the similarities in thought and writing between the two authors, providing particularly revealing analysis on the evolution of Dewey's unique philosophical paradigm. In opposition to Hegelian psychology, James recognised experience as a constant "stream," arguing that "Within each personal consciousness, thought is sensibly continuous…without breach, crack, or division"(32) Although we perceive there to be delineation and interruption in our cognition, James argues that "the transition between the thought of one object and the thought of another is no more a break in the thought than a joint in a bamboo is a break in the wood" (Shusterman 2010, 38), (James 231-234).

Dewey's rhetoric on the nature of experience in Art as Experience closely follows James in both style and content, arguing that experience is 'without seam and without unfilled blanks,' a 'continuous merging' with 'no holes, mechanical junctions, and dead centres.'(Dewey, 43) But even though Dewey's concept of experience is largely derivative of James', it grounds all experience in a pervasive naturalism characterised by "the interaction of the live creature and environing conditions involved in the very process of living" (Dewey, 35). Dewey similarly invokes imagery of a flowing river as an analogy to conscious experience, however, as opposed to James (whose goals are simply to justify the continuity of experience), Dewey further abstracts the concept of experience to distinguish *an* experience from the continuously felt flow of experience. "A river, as distinct from a pond, flows. But its flow gives a definiteness and interest to its successive portions greater than exist in the homogeneous portions of a pond. In *an* experience, flow is from something to something" (Dewey, 36).

To have *an* experience is to generate an internal demarcation of a specific series of moments within the constant flow of perception which stands out distinctly as a wholly consummated event in time. In an analogy of a flowing river, which represents the whole of perception, *an* experience may be the section between two waterfalls, where there is a distinct beginning and conclusion, but the greater experiential river continues to flow unperturbed. Dewey finds it crucial that *an* experience reaches a natural and satisfactory conclusion. Like a "problem receiving a solution," or "playing a game of chess," it must be "so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation" (Dewey, 35).

The Aesthetic Experience

It is this definition of "having an experience" that constitutes the foundational structure for Dewey's entire aesthetic theory. *An* experience is demarcated and recollected in a special frame of reference — not because of some arbitrary habituation of our minds, but because the experience contains some special aesthetic value. The satisfaction, fulfilment, or reconciliation we feel at the end of an experience is recognition of 'the esthetic.' Thus, '*an* experience' and 'esthetic experience,' are one and the same. Aesthetic experience is uniquely bounded by a tension between conflict and tranquillity, motion and rest, such that the experience itself requires movement and conflict. The moments of calm are crucial constraints on each side of an aesthetic experience, allowing for the reflection and contemplation necessary to produce a unifying effect. Importantly, a unified experience will likely have additional, interwoven moments of action and contemplation, which serve to mirror the multifaceted complexity of everyday existence.

Dewey explains further by hypothesising potential worlds in which aesthetic experiences could not possibly emerge, "The non-esthetic lies within two limits. At one pole

is the loose succession that does not begin at any particular place and that ends-in the sense of ceasing-at no particular place. At the other pole is arrest, constriction, proceeding from parts having only a mechanical connection with one another" (Dewey, 40). Neither a static world nor a world of constant flux could harbour aesthetic experience, it is only in the ebbs and flows of experience that it becomes possible to experience heightened emotion and feeling while in motion and then reify those experiences at a moment of rest and reflection. Without these momentary pauses, we could not possibly reconcile the chaos of our perception into parsible wholes. Similarly, a static, motionless reality would afford us nothing interesting to dissect and consider.

An astute logical conclusion of this theory is that a perfect, completed world completely prevents the acquirement of aesthetic fulfilment: "We envisage with pleasure Nirvana and a uniform heavenly bliss only because they are projected upon the background of our present world of stress and conflict" (Dewey, 18). It is deeply ironic, that both Heaven and Nirvana — of which so much art has been dedicated to — would be unable to foster any aesthetic experiences for anyone occupying that world. In these hypothetical modes of existence, art would be no more meaningful than any other object.

For, as Dewey argues, the function of art is simply to generate and accentuate aesthetic experience. Despite the simplicity of the definition, Dewey's anchoring of "art" in "aesthetic experience" offers remarkable explanatory efficacy for the theory. Humanity's obsession with art may seem irrational at first, as though we evolved a shared delusion prompting us to find deep fulfilment in specific arrangements of colours, tones, and words. Art provides no obvious utility to our lives, beyond the fact that we find it fulfilling— but this tautological answer is altogether unsatisfactory — it fails to explicate the genesis of this fulfilment. Thus, many philosophers have relegated art to a wholly separate domain from all other human endeavours, imbuing it with an arcane, mystical quality, as though our

appreciation for artistic expressions is a result of divine intervention and meddling in the minds of humans rather than some intrinsic characteristic of the human condition. This notion is stated explicitly in the work of Christian theologians and philosophers, who argued that artistic expression reflects God's infinite creativity and a yearning to replicate the most beautiful, which is God (Houlgate). However, a similar notion exists in the extreme formalist perspective of "l'art pour l'art," or "art for art's sake," in which art is generated for no other purpose than to exist as art, and human appreciation of art is accidental, divinely inspired, or altogether unexplained (Peacocke).

The Museum Fallacy of Aesthetics

Dewey's aesthetic theory is, among other things, a direct response to this general type of esoteric theorising about aesthetics and art. It is tautological to argue that "art is fulfilling because it is," but it is quite familiar that certain experiences bring satisfaction. Art does not engage in something wholly unique in attributing meaning and satisfaction, it merely taps into our common proclivity to have aesthetic experiences. *Art as Experience's* opening chapter begins with a rejection of this hyper-formalist dualism, where art is siphoned away from all other human affairs: "By one of the ironic perversities that often attend the course of affairs, the existence of the works of art upon which formation of an aesthetic theory depends has become an obstruction to theory about them" (Dewey, 1). It is not merely their physical existence which Dewey is discussing here, but the fact that "the classics" are housed in museums and galleries, endlessly discussed as the epitome of artistic ingenuity and creativity. Dewey argues that using these works as empirical evidence from which to structure an aesthetic theory falsely isolates them as artefacts that encompass art in themselves, when it is

only in their interaction with observers and appreciators that they generate aesthetic experiences and thus are constituted as works of art.

Dewey dubs this tendency the "museum conception of art," and exhibits his naturalism yet again as he argues that to correctly understand art and its significance to society, one must view art as an integrated piece of daily life. To this end, Dewey calls on us to look at the role of art in primitive people's lives as an emergent aspect of living in conjunction with one another and nature:

> "Domestic utensils, furnishings of tent and house, rugs, mats, jars, pots, bows, spears, were wrought with such delighted care that today we hunt them out and give them places of honor in our art museums. Yet in their own time and place, such things were enhancements of the processes of everyday life. Instead of being elevated to a niche apart, they belonged to display of prowess, the manifestation of group and clan membership, worship of gods, feasting and fasting, fighting, hunting, and all the rhythmic crises that punctuate the stream of living" (Dewey, 7).

The notion of "l'art pour art" is absurd when placed in perspective with the earliest examples of art in human history. Art has been an instrument of human civilisation for millennia to accentuate and reify the development of aesthetic experiences for human beings living in societies so that they might find greater fulfilment. Shusterman articulately communicates this viewpoint in "Why Dewey Now?" as he elucidates Dewey's concept of the purpose of art, emphasising that "art's special function and value lie not in any specialized part" but in "enhancing our immediate experience which invigorates and vitalizes us, thus aiding our achievement of whatever further ends we pursue" (Shusterman 1989, 62). But a major question remains — if the purpose of art is to provide an aesthetic experience (and thereby meaning) to its consumers, who dictates the content of art and the values which are held to be

meaningful? In other words, what role does the artist play in the scheme of art as an experiential phenomenon?

Theory of Expression

While Dewey highlights the significance of a complete, consummated end in his initial explication of an aesthetic experience, he begins his discussion of artistic expression by defining the beginning of an act of expression as "an impulsion." As distinct from an "impulse," Dewey defines an impulsion to be "a movement outward and forward to which special impulses are auxiliary" (Dewey, 58). It is the whole of a desire, and the cognitive inception of the first step to fulfil said desire. Only a creature who feels inner agitation, excitement, and is out of balance in some capacity will have the impulsion to restore balance through an act of expression. Dewey further clarifies what constitutes expression, making an important distinction between emotional discharge and aesthetic expression. While expression requires an emotional element, "to discharge is to get rid of, to dismiss; to express is to stay by, to carry forward in development, to work out to completion" (Dewey, 62). Dewey importantly recognises that any act of expression shares the inherent characteristics of an aesthetic experience, with its cohesive completion occurring in the form of an expressive object.

Thoughtful and careful expression of an emotion may be enough to constitute an aesthetic experience. However, to become artistic in nature, an expression need be wrought through a physical medium. Dewey has several different formulations to this end, but Thomas Alexander's discussion of expressionism and form in *Dewey's Philosophy of Art and Aesthetic Experience* succinctly paraphrases these points. "Expression is an interactive process in which the actual medium of the work—words, paint, stone—must come to embody and transmit a perceptual process of tensions, resistances, resolutions, structures,"

and "Form is rather how the art product organizes its energies to lead to an experience. It is how its various components work together toward the end of an experience" (Alexander, 66). Thus, the act of artistic expression is the moulding of a specific medium, where the guiding principles are one's own emotive desires and an intellectual understanding of the proper organization of form to evoke aesthetic experience in a beholder.

Moulding of a specific medium is reliant on a culmination of three qualities, technical ability to shape the medium, emotive impulsion, and the aspect of artistry which Dewey finds most essential for the generation of aesthetic artefacts, "a capacity to work a vague idea and emotion over into terms of some definite medium" (Dewey, 75). We are all stimulated by emotion, and some among us possess great technical skills to shape mediums of sound, colour, and parable. However, expressing a highly abstract emotion in words, paint, or music requires an exceptional knowledge of the evocative powers of that medium as well as an astounding personal attenuation to one's own emotions. Organising energies within an expressive object requires an incredible level of skill that transcends technical mastery alone.

However, the relationship between the expression of an aesthetic experience by an artist and an aesthetic experience achieved through engagement with an expressive object does not imply a shared and identical aesthetic experience between artist and beholder. Dewey precisely clarifies this relationship,

> "For to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent… The artist selected, simplified, clarified, abridged, and condensed according to his interest. The beholder must go through these operations according to his point of view and interest" (Dewey, 55).

Even though the beholder and artist must possess some continuity and overlap between their separate experiences with an expressive object, the details of the aesthetic experience will not

be identical, as these details are separately generated in each aesthetic experience according to the subject's values, preferences, and past experiences. The expressive object must be created as an intrinsically defined experiential object. For the author of an expressive object to attempt to consciously order the emotions of the beholder in a manner that is not self-contained, such that the "author, rather than the subject matter, is the arbiter" (Dewey, 68), is for Dewey, an inauthentic perversion of expression.

Art as Communication

On an individual level, the role of art has become clear. Expressing oneself artistically and actively engaging with artistic material both constitute aesthetic experiences through which one might gain fulfilment and satisfaction as a "live creature." But let us return to a discussion of the role of art on a societal scale; beyond vitalising individuals and thereby contributing to a more emotionally fulfilled civilisation, what sociological functions does art perform?

Dewey has several answers on this front; however, it may be most effective to conceptualise Dewey's discussion of art and civilisation through Shusterman's contemporary application of Deweyan aesthetic theory to rap music. Shusterman's piece, *The Fine Art of Rap*, is an essay responding to fine art critics who consider the genre to be firmly "in the underworld of aesthetic respectability" (Shusterman 1991, 613), as they argue its lyrics are crude, it is often spoken not sung, and its beats are stolen and sampled from other songs rather than performed originally. Throughout the piece, Shusterman discusses rap as a form of postmodern aesthetic expression, but he particularly dismisses the notion that sampling from other works of art is indicative of a flaw in the genre of rap. Instead, Shusterman sees sample-chopping and remixing as the ultimate expression of a Deweyan theory of art, as it

"implies that an artwork's integrity as an object should never outweigh the possibilities for continuing creation through the use of that object. Its aesthetic thus suggests the Deweyan message that art is more essentially process than finished product" (Shusterman 1991, 618). The attempt to discredit rap due to the use of samples is simply a new form of the familiar "esoteric conception of art," which fallaciously finds art to be pure and dualistically separated from all other modes of experience. Rather than leave these old works of art in a "museum," rappers' remix and reuse aspects of older songs to facilitate new, unique aesthetic experiences.

This pattern exemplifies what Dewey finds the main purpose of art on a societal scale to be. Art provides an enduring, constant experience of a culture that transcends any knowledge that could be gathered on said culture, and thus, it is the most powerful form of communication between cultures that are systemically, geographically, or temporally disconnected. Our concepts of ancient cultures are constituted within our minds almost entirely by engagement with artistic artefacts which were analysed over the millennia, as Dewey argues, "For all but the antiquarian, ancient Egypt is its monuments, temples and literature" (Dewey, 334). Rap's recycling of old music in interesting, innovative ways takes this one step further. Not only are producers of rap music forming aesthetic experiences by which they can identify with and understand older cultures as they listen to old music, but they also have a separate and novel aesthetic experience as they manufacture new expressive objects with input from the old. Thus, an organization of energies is formed, flowing from old, obscure songs through contemporary artists, and out to millions to be engaged with and consumed aesthetically.

Shusterman's piece on rap music is even more poignant when taken in conjunction with Dewey's optimism that works of art and aesthetic experiences can be used to bridge gaps between peoples and cultures, and altogether build a more vibrant, diverse world.

Dewey states an uncontroversial opinion that the separation of peoples based on race, sect, and socioeconomic status is the cause of all social disunity. Similarly to how the transcendental power of art allows us to identify with ancient cultures, art allows us to break down these barriers, as "it is a matter of communication and participation in values of life by means of the imagination, and works of art are the most intimate and energetic means of aiding individuals to share in the arts of living" (Dewey, 336). Communicating with art from a wholly separate —or even hostile — culture is not easily done, it requires great intellectual and emotional engagement, but once that bridge is imaginatively and empathetically crossed, "Art is a more universal mode of language than is the speech that exists in a multitude of mutually unintelligible forms" (Dewey, 335). Thus, rap music, which is ridiculed by some as a low-life perversion of art, is just one example of utilising artistic expression for its highest, most aesthetically motivated purpose: allowing intimate communication and experiential identification with a racial identity that has been systemically isolated from the rest of civilisation.

Chapter Two: Dissecting Dewey's Aesthetics

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey provides an incredibly versatile notion of art's role in the individual's acquisition of purpose and fulfilment, while simultaneously advancing an argument regarding art's fundamental purpose as a tool of civilisational cohesion and cultural engagement. At the core of Dewey's aesthetic theory, and accountable for the versatility that enables it to conform to the varied forms and structures of the arts, is the concept of 'aesthetic experience.' Using this concept, which was described and unfolded in depth last chapter, Dewey can paint an iterative picture of the creative process in full, from the genesis of emotion within an artist, to the creation of aesthetic artefacts, to the enjoyment of said artefacts by the general public, all the while grappling with the central philosophical question: 'Why do humans participate in the creation and consumption of art?'

And yet, the question posed in this paper is of a different character entirely. Rather than interrogating the human production of art, we will seek to understand the dynamics of art as manufactured by machines — can it aesthetically engage human perceivers, express complex ideologies, and perspectives, and most importantly, foster rich interstitial communication? To effectively apply Deweyan insights to address questions of this nature, one must first engage with the challenges posed by aestheticians in the last century. Of course, Dewey had many direct critics, contemporary and otherwise: those of the analytical tradition who decried his theory as a "hodgepodge of conflicting methods and undisciplined speculations"(Isenberg, 128), and peers of the pragmatist movement such as Stephen Pepper

who lauded A*rt as Experience* as "one of the four or five great books on aesthetics"(Pepper, 389), but simultaneously lamented its lapses into 'organicist rhetoric' and its failure to advance a wholly pragmatic discussion of aesthetic valuation. These critiques merit attention and discussion, however the locus of philosophical inquiry for evaluating AI-generated art should be situated firmly in the fundamental dynamics of expression and communication, and thus, our critiques of Dewey should be similarly oriented, seeking to extrude those insights which are most pertinent and valuable.

The Dynamics of Artistic Communication

Dewey exalts communication in art as its highest purpose, its raison dêtre: art is the "most universal and freest form of communication"(Dewey 270), and yet his explication of the dynamics of expression leaves much to be desired, requiring further extraction and development. Scott Stroud performs just such an extraction, providing a Deweyan analysis of art as "evocative communication" which offers an excellent, though flawed model of the mechanics of artistic communication. Stroud begins with a discussion of empirical scientific communication, which seeks a definite, precise meaning wherein "the qualitative immediacy of experience is transformed into publicly accessible symbol systems (such as spoken or written language), which then allows for purposeful reflection on the meaning (for example, consequences and relationships) implied by the object in its environment."(Stroud, 10) In this sense, scientific journals, equations, and studies "serve as reflective means in communication to direct one to experience, but do not immediately create such an experience in the person reading the scientific report"(Stroud 13). Much of routine, day-to-day communication is scientific in nature, providing invaluable directives and shared understandings, but which inevitably fail to capture the whole of an experience. Stroud astutely points to the opening phrases of the *Tao Te Ching* as an exemplar of the limitations of scientific communication:

"As for the Way [Tao], the Way that can be spoken of is not the constant Way" (Stroud, 12), because any scientifically oriented discussion of the *Tao* fails to exhaust its meaning, fails to capture it in its entirely.

On the contrary, artistic communication seeks to generate experiences without intrinsically limiting the scope or quality of the experience, by evoking rather than pointing towards an experience. Whereas scientific communication merely provides descriptive signposts, art transcends this limitation, becoming the focal point of an aesthetic experience and enabling the acquisition of a qualitative experience with a shared essential character to its subject matter. Stroud paraphrases Dewey, writing, "the art object has the power of evoking such a powerful experience because in this total interaction process and product, instrument and end are fully integrated," that is, by focusing one's attention on an artwork, one generates an experience with that artwork which is itself reflective of its designed subject matter, emotional character, or cultural ethos. However, in opposition to Stroud's thesis, Dewey is unwilling to accept even this explanatory dualism, arguing that "If the artist desires to communicate a special message, he thereby tends to limit the expressiveness of his work to others -whether he wishes to communicate a moral lesson or a sense of his own cleverness" (Dewey, 104). Thus, aesthetic and scientific lie on opposite sides upon a continuum between the narrow and concretely defined and the multiplicitously expressive and fluid, but the scientific may have an expressive aesthetic quality and artworks may be overly rigid and uninteresting. This conception serves as a necessary reminder that the boundaries of art are inherently subject to individual and collective discernment.

Stroud is successful in providing a succinct explanation of these dynamics, and yet I argue he unnecessarily limits his argument by conceding that not all art is communicative, and only examining the most obvious communicative model of art which sees an artist evoke a particular experience for a single individual. Indeed, Stroud even argues that "if

communication seems to imply anything as necessary to its common practice, it would have to be the notion of intention" (Stroud, 7). On the contrary, I believe Dewey provides convincing grounds to believe that communication is not only possible to achieve through artwork, but that artwork necessarily communicates, whether its artist intends it or not: "Every art communicates because it expresses. It enables us to share vividly and deeply in meanings to which we have been dumb, or for which we had but the ear that permits what is said to pass through in transit to overt action" (Dewey, 244) This may seem counterintuitive, as there are plenty of expressive works which seem to communicate nothing concrete or meaningful. Certainly, it may be argued that some works of art are more communicative of a specific idea or communicate a more profound meaning, but even the most abstract, non-representative art is communicative of a particular experience. The Dadaist poetry of Tristan Tzara is powerfully expressive, and yet deliberately incoherent and lacking in tangible meaning, thus serving as the best possible counterexample to the thesis of communicative art.

In the translated poem *Bilan*, Tzara writes, "the bloody revenge of the liberated two step…cocaine slowly gnaws at the walls for its pleasure…satanic horoscope dilates under vigor" (Pelsue). This disjointed progression provides no social commentary or ethical insight, and yet it is fundamentally communicative because each line was selected by Tzara as he aesthetically grappled with his creation. Although the product expresses a certain chaos and randomness, Tzara deliberately chose specific combinations of words, phrases, and fonts. Perhaps it was meticulously planned and calculated, or perhaps it was produced through an emotive stream of consciousness, but in either case, its particular expressive nature is the unique product of the mind of Tristan Tzara. In the act of aesthetically reading a Tzara poem, we necessarily enter a "community of experience" (Dewey, 334), where the complex thoughts, interactions, and experiences of Tzara overlap and intertwine with our own stream of consciousness.

Intentional Fallacy

Monroe Beardsley's *The Intentional Fallacy* (Wimsatt 1946) provides a fascinating challenge to conceptualisations such as Stroud's, in which an artist's intentions in manufacturing an artwork are both revealing and necessary aspects of the artwork itself. Beardsley's thesis asserts that aesthetic criticism is to be limited to an artwork itself, such that an artist is no more an authority on the meaning of their production than any critic or perceiver: "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of art" (Beardsley, 468). If accepted absolutely, this thesis appears to absolutely invalidate any possibility of communication from artist to perceiver — if we cannot comment on the way an artist shaped a specific narrative, it seems impossible to engage with said narrative as a communicative expression. A similar critique appears in Alan Tormey's *Art and Expression: A Critique* (Tormey 1971), which explicitly targets Dewey's theory as an example of a flawed expression theory. While the two critiques diverge in purpose and terminology — Beardsley is fundamentally concerned with preserving the clarity of aesthetic criticism and Tormey is questioning the epistemological embodiment of emotion within a physical medium — they converge on a shared skepticism of the direct translation of an artist's frame of mind into the perceived meaning of their work. While Tormey denounces the assumption that an artist's emotional state necessarily determines the expressive qualities of their artwork, Beardsley challenges the notion that understanding an artist's intentions is paramount to interpreting their work.

The Intentional Fallacy is, as previously stated, primarily an exercise in promoting the clarity of artistic criticism, but whether we accept intentionalism as a fallacy or not has legitimate implications for the communicative, evocative capabilities of art. Beardsley's argument, while it contains additional nuances and examples, essentially rests on two axioms:

Firstly, "Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it work…a poem can be only through its meaning — since its medium is words —yet it *is,* simply *is*, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant"(Beardsley, 469). And secondly, "One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do?…If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem" (469). The crux of Beardsley's argument rests upon these two points, such that interrogations into an artist's mental state when crafting an artwork necessarily end in a realm of private idiosyncrasy, which is to prefer private, imagined meanings over explicit public ones. Thus, Beardsley declares that 'proper' art criticism is an examination of a work itself, excluding psychological and biographical histories and past artworks.

Reconciling Dewey with the Intentional Fallacy

Dewey never had the chance to explicitly defend his aesthetic theory against such criticism, thus it becomes necessary to extract an argument to contend with the intentional fallacy, as James Manns has done in *Intentionalism in John Dewey's Aesthetics* (Manns 1987). Firstly, it is clear that Dewey strives to maintain that aspects of artwork reveal relevant insights into an artist, the corollary of which suggests that an artist is relevant to the consumption of their artwork. This vein of argumentation is so clear that Beardsley's remarks almost seem directed at Dewey: "It would be convenient if the passwords of the intentional school, 'sincerity,' 'fidelity,' 'spontaneity,' … could be equated with terms of analysis such as 'integrity,' 'relevance,' 'unity'…if expression always meant aesthetic communication. But it is not so" (Beardsley, 476). After all, Dewey makes the claim: "If one examines into the reason why certain works of art offend us, one is likely to find that the cause is that there is

no personally felt emotion guiding the selecting and assembling of the materials presented"
(Dewey, 110).

However, as Manns similarly argues, Dewey is not stating that valuations of
authenticity based on biographical or external factors are pertinent when it comes to art
criticism, rather Dewey believes sincerity (or a lack of it) may be revealed through internal
engagement with an artwork. For Dewey "the material expressed {in an artwork} cannot be
private; that is the state of the madhouse" (Dewey, 22). Thus, substance, form, the depth of
characters, the complexity of music, each can reveal aspects of the artist themselves, and a
perceiver may feel an overwhelming lack of sincerity emanating from an artwork. While
Manns considers this a fair solution to the intentional fallacy, the anti-intentionalists would
likely argue that such an attribution to the artist remains mere speculation and still has no
place in art criticism, even if divulged through the artwork itself. However, recalling the
framework of evocative communication, any engagement with art is constitutive of an
aesthetic experience, and if the critic feels their evoked experience lacks in depth or has been
insincerely forced upon them, their critique of the artist is a genuine expression of their own
manifest experience, which should not be subject to prescriptive limitations. If the critic is
aware of certain aspects of the artist's character or artistic inclinations, these judgements
necessarily colour their own experience while engaging with the artwork, such that deliberate
exclusion of them is to inauthentically engage with the subject matter.

Several examples of a similar character come to mind when examining the critical
value of art which is necessarily tinged with a specific subject matter and a specific intention
of the artist. Warren Zevon's *The Wind* (Zevon 2003), Johnny Cash's *American IV* (Cash
2002), or J Dilla's *Donuts* (Dilla 2006) have a distinct aesthetic character when viewed in the
critical isolation from their artists, as Beardsley preaches. However, when one realises that
each of these musicians were dying as they created these albums, the qualitative listening

experience is inevitably and profoundly altered. *Last Donut of the Night* was produced with a stack of records and an MPC-3000 as J Dilla lay dying in a hospital. It was one last gift to the hip-hop community which he had dedicated his life to. When combined with these insights, the art itself it takes on a wholly new experiential quality. *Keep Me in Your Heart* evolves from a well-composed melody to a dying man's wish for his family to remember him. *Hurt* is not just a sombre rendition of a Nine Inch Nails song; it provides a profound insight into a broken man's experience as he reconciles with the mistakes of his life. Even if these projected perceptions prove to be false — if they inaccurately represent the true intention or authentic message of the artist — if we believe them to be true, they profoundly alter the character of the artwork themselves.

Even if one is thoroughly convinced by the intentional fallacy as it pertains to attributions of sincerity or authenticity in artistic criticism, that does not necessitate a death of aesthetic communication as Beardsley suggests. Deweyan scholar Michael Mitias writes, "We experience the artist in his work: the work reveals the artist, not as a particular individual but as an artist"(Mitias 52). Regardless of whether it is appropriate to include such revelations in an objective evaluation of art, or whether an artist intends to express a particular message in their artwork, they necessarily aesthetically communicate in a manner which reveals intimate aspects of their inner state. In each stylistic choice, each stroke of the brush, each stanza or camera setting, an artist decides based on a personally felt aesthetic experience. As an orator gives a speech, they don't merely communicate with the symbolic meaning of their spoken words; their tone, expression, posture, and genuflections all impact the interpreted meaning of their speech. Artwork is of the same character, such that intentions may be expressed, leading to an evoked experience of an engineered character, but the evoked experience is similarly affected by all aspects of the artist — whether these

unintentional meanings allow a consciously experienced depth of understanding into the artist or not is irrelevant, in either case there is rich aesthetic discourse occurring.

Any artist engaged in the act of creation necessarily communicates an aspect of themselves in their productions, as their decisions, emotions, impulses, and tendencies are the source of each unique aspect of the creation. Thus, artworks remain an essential vehicle of collective empathy and the distribution of abstract ideas, meanings, and values.

Expression Theory

Tormey characterises the fundamental beliefs of the expression theory as twofold: "(1) that an artist, in creating a work of art, is invariably engaged in expressing something; and (2) that the expressive qualities of the artwork are the direct consequence of this act of expression" (Tormey, 98). Tormey disagrees on both points, arguing that an attempt to define art in terms of the act that generated it invariably fails. While Dickie's previous argument contested the causal connection between an aesthetic artefact and the resulting aesthetic experience from interacting with said artefact, Tormey contests the "assumption of a necessary link between the qualities of the artwork and certain states of the artist" (Tormey, 104).

Tormey structures his argument by first critically engaging with Dewey's theory of expression, depicting it logically as the "(E-T)," and then contending with this logical representation of the theory. Tormey notes Dewey's argument that "Expression as personal act and as objective result are *organically connected* with each other [italics added]"(Tormey, 102, Dewey, 82), and interprets this as implying a necessary and causal relation, such that an "expressive quality" such as "sadness" or "longing"(Tormey 103) in an artwork can only be found as the corollary of a previously felt emotional state of the artist. The (E-T) proceeds as follows:

"(E-T): If art object O has expressive quality Q, then there was a prior activity C of

the artist A such that in doing C, A expressed his F for X by imparting Q to O (where

F is a feeling state and Q is the qualitative analogue of F)."

Tormey argues that the logical flaw with this notion is encompassed in a strange implication

of falsifiability, such that the expressive qualities of a work of art are falsifiable based on the

testimony of the artist. For example, a piece that is perceived and popularly characterised as

sad would lose the expressive quality of *sadness,* were the artist to testify that they were not,

in fact, expressing *sadness* through their piece. The statement "'That's a sad piece of music'

is not countered by objections such as, 'No, he wasn't'" (Tormey, 105). In his eventual

proposal for an alternative theory of art, rather than considering a prior act of expression as

necessary to create "expressive qualities" in an artwork, Tormey argues art should be seen as

"ambiguously self-expressive objects."

While thought-provoking, Tormey's argument ultimately represents a flawed reading

of Dewey and a lazy generalisation about "expression theorists." In fact, despite his analytical

gymnastics, Tormey arrives at a conception of art with deep similarities to Dewey. In

Dewey's Theory of Expression, Michael Mitias elucidates this point, explicitly renouncing

Tormey's analytical argument and lamenting that "Tormey has not paid sufficient attention to

Dewey's analysis of the dynamics of the expressive act, of how this act takes place" (Mitias,

47). According to Mitias, in what I deem a logically sound line of reasoning, Tormey's

mistakes are essentially twofold, he adopts a simple, overly simplistic notion of expression

and fails to understand Dewey's central thesis of artworks as potentialities rather than

concretely realised artefacts.

Tormey repeatedly characterises *expression* as the "imparting" of a definite emotion

or expressive quality into a medium. However, the *organic connection* Dewey writes of as an

expressive act should not be understood as the embodying of a physical medium with a

specific emotion, e.g *sadness,* rather the artist undergoes an iterative process, experiencing a particular emotion, and allowing it to guide the creation of an aesthetic artefact. As Mitias writes, "Emotion is *arche* of the creative process; it is the stuff out of which the work qua art is fashioned" (Mitias, 48). Emotion is not *embodied* in an aesthetic object, rather through repeated interaction with a medium, an artist expresses themselves in a complex, multifaceted manner, allowing their emotional response to objective features of reality to guide the creative process. Furthermore, Dewey writes, "It is absurd to ask what an artist 'really' meant by his product: he himself would find different meanings in it at different days and hours and in different stages of his own development." (Dewey, 108), thus, the charge that the "expressiveness" of an artwork is falsifiable based on the expression of the artist is necessarily false. According to Dewey's theory of expression, a work of art is always ambiguous, a *potential* aesthetic experience that is dependent upon an artist or aesthetic perceiver to manufacture aesthetic meaning from its physical composition.

Communication Through Art Criticism

Ultimately, it is this *potentiality* for imparting aesthetic experiences which allows Dewey's theory a pluralistic character, allowing for simultaneous variety in individual interpretation and direct, unbroken communication between artist and perceiver. Because each artwork, although physically finalized by an artist, remains ambiguous and undetermined for its perceivers, there cannot be one correct interpretation of expressiveness or intention. Beardsley is correct in arguing that "Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle" (Beardsley 487), there is no absolute interpretation for an artwork — diverse, complex interpretations are supplied by aesthetic perceivers, with no absolute supremacy allotted to the artist's own supplied interpretation or intention, or that of a lauded, respectable critic. The evidence for the acceptance of one critical narrative over another must

be firmly oriented in one's own experience with an artwork, such that there can be no generation of an absolute hierarchy among multiple interpretations.

But the role of the critic itself is a communicative one. While often such communication is scientific in nature, exploring the evidence at hand for insights rather than electing to evoke new experiences, the role of the critic is to "place art front and center in the public's consciousness, enable active participation" (Hildebrand, 227), and creatively generate narratives which serve to enrich, expand, or exalt artwork. Dewey himself held that "The function of criticism is the re-education of perception of works of art: it is auxiliary in the process, a difficult process of learning to hear and see… the individual who has a large and quickened experience is the one who should make for himself his own appraisal."(Dewey, 324) Thus, when we consider the art critic, we do not solely focus on those most venerated, respected art critics, just as we do not limit our understanding of the artist to the Van Goghs, Da Vincis and Picassos. Art perception, criticism, and enjoyment is not oligarchical in nature, rather anyone who engages profoundly with artworks and finds themselves drawn to share their profound experience is occupying the role of the art critic, establishing a richer, broader, community of experience.

Thus, we return to Stroud's earlier interpretation of evocative communication in Deweyan aesthetics to level a secondary criticism. Stroud acknowledges that "communication is truly a social event" (Stroud, 10) rather than individualistic and one-directional. Unfortunately, however, he expresses artistic communication purely in a individualistic and one-directional manner, failing to acknowledge the wealth of communication offered through artistic criticism and collective perception. Communication of any form, aesthetic or scientific, does not occur individualistically or uni-directionally. Although it may simplify the dynamics of communication to think of it as such, communication is social and complex, the creation of a shared experience between discrete

individuals and peoples. Fundamentally, the evocative communication supplied by artwork is not the transmission of a specific message from artist to perceiver, rather it is the dissemination of a common experience between two or more people (Boas, 180). Thus, art does not merely offer a mouthpiece for an artist to evoke an experience of their choosing with art critics, fans, and enjoyers, rather, artworks themselves itself become a medium to stimulate further community of experience.

Chapter 3: Navigating Expression in AI-Generated Art

The discussions, arguments and analysis laid out in the last two chapters have depicted Dewey's aesthetics as an exploration of the nature of art and its inextricable linkage to what it means to be human. As Dewey explains, what we call *creativity* is truly an emergent and grounded phenomenon which simply emerges from the act of a human being interacting with their environment in a curious and productive manner. The *artwork* is a complex and multifaceted expression — a physically manifest artefact constructed with the fabric of an artist's impulses, emotions, and desire to create which in turn evoke powerful potential *aesthetic experiences* for those who engage with it. Through these mirrored acts of expression and evocative aesthetic experience we can foster irreducible streams of communication —while each individual brings their own biases, cultural artefacts, and previous experiences, through the work of art, these experiences overlap and combine in fundamentally new ways. By examining both targeted critiques of Dewey and general critiques of aesthetic theory, the outer edges of the terms *artwork, artist,* and *critic* have been necessarily blurred in recognition of their socially and collectively determined stature, such that an artist has no absolute authority on how to interpret or examine their productions, but an artist's stated intentions within a certain artwork necessarily become an aspect of a critic's felt aesthetic experience. In this manner, artist, critic, and everyday person become largely

artificial delineations within the collective experience of art, which are useful terms to discuss aesthetic subjects but must be understood in a fundamentally limited form.

These insights are the essential foundation upon which modern aesthetic theory must draw from as it attempts to reconcile with the ever-changing nature of contemporary art. Of course, Dewey's rhetoric holds inalienable merit just in its simple descriptive power, but I contend that the fundamental problem of modern aesthetics is singular: How ought we conceptualise 'AI-generated art?' This question is multidimensional, necessitating broader discussions of AI, property and ownership, power dynamics, ethics, and of course, aesthetics. Rather than speculating on the aesthetic capabilities of a future AGI (Artificial General Intelligence), broadly addressing the ethical concerns of art generation technology and its impact on human artists, or posing a normative argument on how such technology ought to be utilised, this chapter will instead attempt to provide a focused conversation on the present iterations of AI-generated art with an aesthetic focus. I will draw on contemporary literature and post-humanist aesthetics to comment on the current discourse surrounding AI generated art, evaluate the distinctions between human creation and AI generation, and synthesise these arguments with a Deweyan lens. This investigation aims to discuss appropriate framing of aesthetic objects produced by generative AI to establish a basis for a broader subsequent analysis of the way AI-generated art works upon our society, episteme, and power structures.

The Present Landscape of AI

For most of my life, "Artificial Intelligence" was a concept firmly relegated to science fiction. Artificially intelligent beings populated all forms of media as super-intelligent entities of human creation which had spontaneously developed sentience — the sympathetic robot assistant *Hal 9000* whose malfunctions drove him to kill his human masters, the nearly omnipotent adversarial entities in Dan Simmons' *Hyperion*, or the pool-cleaner turned

intergalactic artist of Love Death + Robots' *Zima Blue*. Then suddenly, AI was everywhere. Educators of all levels reeled as OpenAI's ChatGpt impersonated their students, often outperforming their best work. YouTube advertisements appeared for AI-powered tools promising increased productivity, professional photoshop capabilities, and even advertisement evaluation. Artists panicked as the AI-generated *Theatre d' Opera Spatial* (Midjourney 2022) won an award in an art competition and the Obvious Collective's *Portrait of Edmond Bellamy* (Obvious Collective 2018) outcompeted artists in auction, selling for $432,000. For one firmly entrenched in typical news coverage and popular discourse, it would seem that technology had finally caught up to the limits of science fiction and no longer will Artificial Intelligence be a mere fantasy or vehicle for allegory.

However convincing such a narrative may be, it fails to find purchase. AI research is nearly as old as the myth of sentient robots and has proceeded in a relatively stable manner. Since the creation of rudimentary computers and the revolution in computer science in the 1950s, researchers have strived to manufacture the machine which embodies human-like cognition within an artificial construct. Operating without sufficient knowledge of the inner workings of the mind which they strove to emulate, the paradigm of AI research shifted to the production of "narrow AI" systems — algorithms which could perform specific complex tasks through brute-force computation rather than achieving versatile, human-like intelligence. The seeming explosion of "AI" onto the modern technosphere is not truly spontaneous, it is the culmination of decades of focused narrow AI research coupled with the awesome computational power promised by Moore's Law. And while researchers diverge greatly on their predictions, there is broad consensus that humans will not achieve anything near AGI for years to come. An oft quoted adage by Andrew Ng is that "worrying about overpopulation about AGI now is like worrying about overpopulation on Mars" (Ng 2016).

Quite obviously, there is a significant schism between the cultural and social perceptions invoked with the term AI, and its newfound colloquial shorthand as any advanced and useful technology. This discrepancy has led thinkers to rightly question whether these new narrow AI systems should be referred to by the mythologically charged term AI, necessarily invoked with scare quotes, or referred to only by their technical monikers. Thus, for clarity, I will borrow Martin Zeilinger's definition of artificial intelligence posed in *Tactical Entanglements* (Zeilinger 2021) as "any assemblage of technologies, operations, functions, and effects that can be meaningfully perceived as resulting from intelligent (including creative) behavior, or which can be identified in outputs that are the results of such behavior" (Zeilinger, 38). As Zeilinger notes, this definition is necessarily defined not by any intrinsic or objective standards but is subject only to human perception. Logically, this must be the case, as the very notion of intelligence is a concept of human creation which changes across human epochs and epistemes. The Turing Test, which was initially proposed as a definitive test of determining intelligence in a machine, has itself been met repeatedly, only for engineers to move its goalposts to a higher standard of cognition.

The definition of AI put forward by Zeilinger also includes technology which existed long before the current generation of seemingly intelligent machines. Yet this quality is more feature than bug, it aids in refuting the notion that a techno-revolution like never seen before has suddenly occurred overnight. But regardless of how we classify these extraordinarily powerful algorithmic systems, they have already begun to work on our world. To quote Joanna Zylinska, a prominent writer exploring the philosophy of media and digital art, "*something is already happening*…a confluence of technical and cultural changes, industry claims, popular anxieties, moral panics and creative interventions across different media and platforms" (Zylinska, 35) which demand our attention.

Image Generators

As I will make the case for in the following chapter, far too often, discussions of AI-Generated art are confined to the specific case of image generators without sufficient acknowledgement of the depth of the field and its wide-spanning instantiations across mediums and artistic disciplines. This deeply uncharitable and narrow-minded approach results in blind spots, overlooked nuances, and formations of skewed judgments. Nonetheless, image generation serves as the simplest and most accessible iteration of aesthetic artefact production through applied machine learning processes. As the art of painting remains the formative case study for establishing aesthetic theory, image generators serve as an effective case study for aesthetically framing discourse about AI more generally.

The widespread platforms of DALL-E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion are the most obvious examples of generative AI image generators, which seemingly generate the any whims of human fancy in image form in seconds, requiring only a text or image prompt. However, the underlying architecture reveals a fundamentally different relation. The collaboratively written paper, *AI Art and its Impacts on Artists* presents a useful conceptual definition for "Generative AI" as "machine learning products that feature models whose output spaces overlap in part or in full with their input spaces during training" (Jiang, 364). Note that this new definition is not being proposed as an alternative to Zeilinger's, rather it clarifies a particular subset of AI and effectively models its generative architecture. Machine learning algorithms are modelled as neural networks, a hypothesised representation of neuronal structure in the human brain. By training these empty neural networks on massive multimedia dataset, they begin to navigate within "latent space," a multidimensional representation of compressed data such that each point in space is representative of a distinct amalgamation of visual features (Tiu). With each distinct object, image, or phrase supplied to

the dataset, it generates new variables to distinguish between each artefact and expands in dimension.

Machine learning driven image generators typically rely on GAN (Generative Adversarial Networks), which utilise two distinct machine learning models posed in opposition. One model is responsible only for generation, while the other has access to a massive labelled dataset containing both images and language and provides feedback to the generative model on the accuracy of its outputs in the form of a mathematic approximation of accuracy entitled a "loss function" (Pere 2020). Initially, generator functions simply produce random amalgamations of pixels, but after many iterations of creation, mathematical evaluation, and feedback, the generative function generates a latent space aligned with human labels and images, thus gaining the ability to match text inputs to corresponding image outputs with a high degree of technical brilliance and accuracy (Gupta 2023).

While there are many who criticise the outputs of these models as bland, devoid of life, uninteresting or even uncanny, it is beyond reproach that particularly sophisticated GAN-variant machine learning models can produce aesthetic artefacts which fundamentally align with our collective notions of what artworks look like.

Arguably, most of these outright dismissals of AI art are driven by a pervasive anthropocentric bias which is unwilling to accept a machine's approximation of human creativity. This is evidenced in studies such as Mazzone and Elgameel (Mazzone 2019), and the Neukom Institute Turing Test competitions which test how human subjects respond to productions by both human artists and generative models, and repeatedly conclude that algorithmic art is fundamentally recognised within the same domain as that of human origin In the case of the AICAN art of Mazzone and Elgameel, which utilises a novel GAN iteration that not only replicates patterns within the art domain but employs a third discriminatory algorithm to maximise stylistic ambiguity, found that respondents even described the

generated productions as "'intentional', 'having visual structure', 'inspiring', and 'communicative'" (Mazzone 5). Further studies such as Horton et al (Horton 2023) and Millet et al (Millet 2023) expand upon the pervasive authority of human exceptionalism as it pertains to art evaluation. The studies both provided human subjects with identical artworks which were purported to be of either human-origin or algorithmic origin and discovered results which "consistently reveal a pervasive bias against AI-made artworks…because it is perceived as less creative and subsequently induces less awe" (Millet 1).

The Paradox of Locating Expression

No doubt, these systems are highly remarkable in their engineered intricacy and their exceptionally efficient production of artefacts of an aesthetic character. Indeed, the results of the AICAN study illustrate that these productions are more than capable of generating *aesthetic experiences*, Dewey's qualifying characteristic for the realm of art. And yet, these systems simultaneously exhibit none of Dewey's characteristic qualities of expression. Dewey writes, "Expression as a personal act and as objective result are organically connected with each other" (Dewey, 82). Thus, a paradox has emerged in that these algorithms only satisfy one side of the artistic process, producing artefacts which must be viewed as art, while seemingly only appropriating the creative, expressive qualities which allow humans to generate such artefacts.

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey makes clear that an act of expression can only arrive in the natural course of being human and interacting with a dynamic reality — we feel frustration, joy, fury, and triumph. Expression is the act of allowing that emotion to guide us in the creation of an artefact which might somehow communicate our inner agitation out from within. In contrast, the impetus for creation for the machine is merely a requirement to satisfy

its engineered purpose. Not only is this analogical *impulsion* externally thrust upon the algorithm, its lacks any emotive quality. As impulsion becomes expression along Dewey's axis of novel artmaking, the differences become even more stark. Where a human artist is wholly engaged in an aesthetic experience of their own as they reflect and reorganise their medium of creation, the machine feels no inner movement, no clarification and procedural development of emotion, it only moulds artefacts from some preconceived notions about what artefact is desired of it.

Clearly, image generators cannot be said to be engaging in an act of expression in any meaningful or recognisable way. Problematically, the discourse on generative AI often begins and ends with this realisation, arguing that image generators do not express, therefore cannot be seen as artists, and their productions cannot be considered art. AI Art *and its Impacts on Artists* is a pertinent example, in which Deweyan aesthetician Jonathan Flowers applies this precise rhetoric to Image Generators, quoting Dewey: "Mere perfection in execution, judged in its own terms in isolation, can probably be attained better by a machine than by human art. By itself, it is at most technique. . . To be truly artistic, a work must also be esthetic—that is, framed for enjoyed receptive perception" (Dewey, 54), thus "art is a uniquely human activity, as opposed from something that can be done by an artefact" (Jiang, 365), and therefore the artefacts which they generate are "[a]t best…aesthetic"(Jiang, 365).

Aesthetic evaluations of image generators which rigidly apply Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, Aristotle's Poetics, or other humanist aesthetic paradigms invariably arrive at such a conclusion, ignoring the obvious contradiction that these productions will necessarily be viewed through an artistic lens and aesthetically appreciated (Winter 2024, Kelly 2019).. Prescriptively limiting the domain of art to stipulate that its origin is human in nature is a futile and naive endeavour. Not only does it pervert and bureaucratise the practice of art in that all humans are required to repeatedly investigate the origins of an artefact before

deciding if it provides them with an aesthetic experience or not, it lands the field of art precisely into the straw manned version of Deweyan aesthetics provided by Tormey and Beardsley's criticisms. Truthfully it expands this critera, such that prior knowledge of the circumstances of creation are not only required for critiquing an artwork's emotional value, substance, or expressiveness, they are required to even assess whether it is art or not. The incessant questions of authorship Foucault laments in *What is an Author*: "'Who is the real author?' 'Have we proof of his authenticity and originality?' 'What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language?'" (Foucault 16) would become the entire substance of art criticism.

The Human-Machine Interface

An alternative framework must be found, one which is not rooted in a narrative which perpetuates an adversarial relation between human and machine, but which instead demonstrates a willingness to depart from traditional aesthetic paradigms and curiously investigate this novel mode of artistic creation. It is precisely for this reason that Zylinska poses that "'can computers be creative?'…may not be *the best question* to ask about ai-driven art" (12), because it forces the locus of AI-art discussion into a dualism between anthropomorphisation of the machine or denial of the art-value of its outputs. Both Zylinska and Zeilinger provide alternative interpretations of the circumstances of AI generation, which don't rely on a commitment to genuine human-like creativity occurring inside its computational blackboxes, and subsequently divert the conversation into a more productive sphere. Zylinska writes that "New AI is therefore first and foremost a sophisticated agent of pattern recognition" (25). Algorithms are trained on massive datasets of artworks, they recognise patterns, variables, points of convergence and divergence within the medium of art, and therefore are able to replicate the process of artmaking without expressing in a human

sense. Zeilinger writes that the artistic productions of GANs "constitute copies without originals" (Zeilinger 159), essentially manufacturing new items from the entire body of artistic material within their training data. Even the AICAN system, which employs a third algorithm to produce "creative effects" by maximising differences in style from established artworks, is still defined by its ability to recognise patterns in the training data, it merely diverges from in accordance with yet another pattern.

Thus, all current AI-driven art is necessarily bounded by the acts of human expression which make up its training data, and it circumvents the human mode of expression by a highly sophisticated extraction of the art-quality from these original sources of expression. Yet, it is not just the art in its training data which allows AI artefacts to have artistic value, human intervention exists at every stage in the development of these algorithms and in the curation of their outputs, necessarily entailing a certain level of human expression. In fact, the whole of the dynamics of Generative AI creation necessitate an ordering to the comprehension of human cognition. While the machine treats artworks in a fundamentally different way, reducing them to a certain position in a multidimensional coordinate space, it produces artefacts which are recognisable to us as artworks specifically because its variable matching protocols align it and enable it to recognise patterns within human behaviour, cognition, and creativity, or as Zylinska poetically remarks, "AI dreams up the human outside the human, anticipating both our desires and their fulfilment"(71). Underlying its vast data-based computation, which occurs on levels fundamentally beyond the scope of human cognition, are thousands of micro-expressions and embedded acts of human agency.

Framing AI as a Tool

These acts of creative agency are most obvious on the level of the individual directly engaging with the post-training AI system. This individual designs specific prompts based

upon their aesthetic sensibilities, and engages with a pre-defined system to produce an aesthetic artefact resembling the one already fuzzily conceptualised within their mind. It is tempting therefore to merely recognise this individual as an artist in themselves who subjugates and employs the developed AI system as a tool to manifest their creative impulsions. This narrative abounds in both technophobic and technophilic circles as artists decry the fact that their technical skill has been outsourced to an unfeeling machine and tech CEOs like Sam Altman of OpenAI write that in the age of AI, "anyone can create amazing art" and therefore the "skill that will matter will be imagination" (Altman 2022). The notion that AI is simply another tool for inventive and imaginative application by human artists comes closer to accurately framing these dynamics than that which ascribed dominating creative agency to the algorithm, but it problematically situates AI systems as wholly objective and mechanical.

The human element often obscured within the machine's underlying infrastructure is obviously represented within the process of designing and executing code to achieve an architecture which can autonomously interface with data. The GAN infrastructure was "invented" by computer scientist Ian Goodfellow in 2014, but necessarily draws on decades of scientific research by AI researchers. Computer science, while framed objectively like other engineering fields, necessarily relies on debugging and testing of code — in the case of GAN architecture, whether or not an output is deemed successful is intrinsically tied to a collectively and individually defined notion of what art is. Similarly, the compilation of massive data sets relies on a process of web-scraping, in which artefacts of all variety are appropriated from internet sources and compiled into databases, and of course, all content on the internet has an origin which is human in nature. Furthermore, to actually utilise these datasets for training purposes, they must be painstakingly labelled — a task for which tech companies like ImageNet hired tens of thousands of click-for-hire workers off of Amazon's

MTurk platform (Zylinska 2020) Putting aside the clear ethical concerns about this mass subjection to menial labour without significant compensation, the fact that AI is posed as an objective body despite its source information stemming from the decision making of thousands of complex, biased humans poses a clear issue in the framing of these systems, and our ability to consider them a mute and objective tool for human domination.

Even in the hypothesised situation in which a human artist takes a much more central role, further exerting their creative agency by specifying a particular dataset for training, altering, or even writing the machine learning program from scratch, and painstakingly curating outputs and modifying the system to produce desired results, this role is fundamentally different than conventional notions of the artist figure as a unified figure of absolute creative authority. Although image generating algorithms are ordered by humans and order their outputs for human understanding and use, they exert their own creative agency in applying a cognitive interface which is non-human in its methodology, thus producing highly unpredictable artefacts. That is to say, the algorithm is expressing something, an interwoven web of relations, variations, and ideas which are both human and computational in nature, but which utterly fails to be captured by anthropocentric definitions of creativity and expression in humanist aesthetic theory. As a result of these relations, the individual artist figure who was so mythologized in enlightenment and rennaissance ideals has been forced into an ever-smaller box, reduced to engineer, curator, and prompter.

Agential Assemblages

While these interrogations have seemingly revealed a very bleak future for the artist, and thus the end of art as we know it, I will contend that it is not the human artist whose fate is sealed, but the rigidly defined myth attributed to their creative abilities. The search for an individual agent whose genius-level creativity alone can account for the creation of art is

foiled by generative AI, it only exhibits fragmented elements of expression and relational interchanges of creativity, and yet, AI seems capable of generating truly creative and unique outputs which can provide art, which is not only recognisable, but can serve as a profound space for aesthetic reflection and communication. Thus, by virtue of their intrinsic creative dynamics, AI art projects "problematize the humanist vision of the singular, unified human agent; of the spirited (genius?) individual as sole originator of creative expression" (Zeilinger, 14).

A new paradox emerges, such that the incompatibility of humanist aesthetic rhetoric to adequately describe human-machine collaborative artmaking begs the question of whether the creative genius figure ever truly existed. Zeilinger considers an alternative framework to these highly anthropocentric aesthetic frameworks, instead arguing that AI- art emerges from "post-humanist agential assemblages," rather than any singular, defined entity, whose contents are "speculative systems of decentered, relational, and contingent subject positions" (Zeilinger 30). Unfortunately, Zeilinger seeks to limit this critical framework by arguing that not all examples of AI art can be constituted as agential assemblages, but I fundamentally disagree on this point, instead arguing that not-only can all AI-generated art be understood as a complex dialogical interplay between discrete creative entities, rather every aesthetic artefact ever created relied on such a process. Furthermore, I find the kernels of this rhetoric in Dewey's aesthetics and his grounding of expression, art, and aesthetic experience as an emergent process occurring naturally from a live creature in its relation to nature and argue that these two frameworks are deeply compatible.

While the subsequent chapter will seek to apply this notion of agential assemblages more broadly in relation to AI, perform case studies of individual AI-driven artworks, and speculate on the impacts of AI-driven artwork and the ramifications of culturally and politically adopting this post-humanist aesthetic framework, I want to demonstrate that pre-

AI art proceeded in a fundamentally relational and embedded manner as well. A pertinent example is performance art, including museum installations, animation studios, theatre, ballet, or Hollywood films. Each of these art forms is typically collaborative in nature. There may be an overarching vision in the form of a director, scriptwriter, or executive producer, but in each case actors and animators each exert their own creative agencies, expressing themselves in their performance. A singular, unified artist figure cannot possibly be recognised, the production is only possible through a distributed coalition of creative agency. But even Van Gogh, the mythologized solitary painter figure, cannot possibly be conceived as exerting absolute creative authority, his expression was limited and defined by the producers of his paints, the designers who manufactured canvasses, and most obviously, the totality of creative agency which resulted in the paintings he was inspired by and moved by. Inspiration and imitation are well-accepted notions in creative disciplines, but what is inspiration but a relational interaction with other creative entities. How else would creative paradigms and artistic movements form but from a relation between creative agents?

Although Dewey did not utilise the term agential assemblage to define the artist figure, the project of the post-humanist aesthetic philosopher is fundamentally aligned with the one Dewey championed: a reliance on empirical evaluation of artistic dynamics which necessarily evolves as art does, a demystifying of the artistic paradigm and rejection of dualistic esotericism, and a celebration of art as a communicative vehicle. Dewey's dynamics of expression obviously differ from those exhibited by our interactions with algorithmic interfaces, but Dewey existed in an era where humans seemed to be the sole entities capable of generating artistic creations. In establishing the framework of a post-humanist aesthetics, Zylinska writes:

"A post-humanist art history would see instead all art works, from cave paintings through to the works of so-called Great Masters and contemporary experiments with

all kinds of technologies, as having been produced by human artists in an assembly

with a plethora of nonhuman agents: drives, impulses, viruses, drugs, various organic

and nonorganic substances and devices, as well as all sorts of networks – from

mycelium through to the Internet. (Zylinska, 55)

These words may as well have come directly from Dewey. Was it not Dewey that recognised

that art proceeds precisely in the interstice of relations with a creative individual and their

environment? That environment which is an entanglement of human elements, culture, and

technology? That individual which are themselves a complex embodiment of values and

experiences?

Chapter 4: Artistic Communication With AI

We have successfully arrived at a framework which accounts for the complex

computational art-making process utilised by generative AI systems while maintaining

compatibility with Dewey's evaluation of aesthetic experience. Rather than automatically

denying the art-value of AI-art based on its origin, anthropormphising these novel algorithms

as capable of human creative prowess, or situating AI as just another tool for the application

of mystical creative geniuses, we instead adopted a post-humanist framework, finding that

AI-art is more accurately depicted as an interlocking web of creative impulses and actions of

both human and non-human origin. This framework closely aligns with Dewey's notions of

art as an experiential and relational phenomenon, forcing us to reconcile with the argument

that the entire artistic process has always occurred in a decentred fashion by agential

assemblages rather than by explicit beings with absolute creative authority.

But accepting the human artist as an agential assemblage is far easier on a theoretical

basis than in a reality in which the economic viability of an artist is premised on recognition

of their authorship and their complete ownership of their creative products. What will occur

as AI systems continue to problematize the romantic interpretation of the artist, thereby

challenging the systems of intellectual property and radical individualism which are particularly prevalent in Western civilisation?

And what, if anything, does AI-art communicate and express? If we maintain that Generative AI produced artefacts can have artistic value, then, according to Dewey, they necessarily communicate. But whether these systems will communicate valuable insights which assist humanity in building a open cultural commons, dismantling power structures, and enhancing democracy, or whether they will catastrophically dismantle communication networks and plunge societies into increased isolation and chaos remains an open question.

In this chapter, I will argue that the communicative value of Generative AI creations ultimately depends upon the narratives which we collaboratively create with machine intelligence and the kind of discourse we develop to frame their creations. The project of the last chapter was not merely an exercise in correctly labelling Generative AI art according to human terms; the frameworks we collectively develop to tell stories about and with AI are functional determinants of the world we build with these machine intelligences. As I argued in the last chapter, the underlying mechanism of Generative AI intrinsically problematises the myth of the creative genius and its concretisation in the logic of intellectual property. However, it does not always present itself as such. Often, such art strategically conceals its internal dynamics and "glamorizes narrow or polarized concepts of creativity," rather than "advocating for heterogeneous or conjugated actualization of the expressive agency," (Grba, 12) which I argue is its most authentic mode of being. These sentiments echo a primary thesis of Zylinska's: "one of the most creative – and most needed – ways in which artists can use AI is by telling better stories about AI, while also imagining better ways of living with AI" (Zylinska, 31).

The Death of the Human Artist

The prevailing narrative of AI generated art is one driven by fear. I have touched on some of these fears already, such as the notion of AI as an existential threat to humanity often perpetuated in science fiction settings. However, unlike these distant concerns, the perceived threat to the human artist is much more readily visible in the current instantiation of AI. The visual artist Steven Zapata, who has become well known for his video essay entitled *The End of Art: An Argument Against Image AIs,* aptly summarises : "These AI systems are going to continue to challenge us not just in the realm of art but in all walks of life they will make their presence known in both digital and physical space and they will appropriate all types of creative and mundane work typically relegated to humans" (Zapata 2022). For the visual artist whose economic wellbeing is premised on the ability to manufacture meaningful physical artefacts, this fear is understandable. Pieces which previously required weeks of painstaking emotional, intellectual, and physical labour to create now seemingly appear in seconds from the aether. Viewed through an anthropocentric lens in which AI and human are pitted against one another by economic forces, the human artist is simply incapable of competing; they are hopelessly outmatched in efficiency by the faster, more variable, more malleable machine.

Thus, the crux of the argument levelled by Zapata and other humanist advocates is that the human artist possesses essential qualities which the machine artist lacks. If we consider the Image Generator to be a pattern recognition algorithm whose essential function is to generate new copies, variations, and appropriations of established artworks, there does seem to be a palpable difference between the mode of creativity utilised to manufacture these artefacts. The machine lacks Dewey's qualities of human expression. Even when we view the system as an agential assemblage, there seems to be a difference between the two systems which hinges upon the human artist's conscious experience. The Image-Generator generates in accordance with its directives, its trained protocols, and derived axioms for artmaking.

Alternatively, the human artist engages in an iterative mode of creation which is essentially premised on repeated experiences with their artwork and an actual embodied experience in the same reality we collectively inhabit. The human artist perceives, and aesthetically experiences their own creations. If the human artist is completely excluded from the loop, "if we, as humanity, rely solely on AI-generated works to provide us with the media we consume, the words we read, the art we see, we would be heading towards an ouroboros where nothing new is truly created, a stale perpetuation of the past." (Jiang, 368). Zylinska argues to a similar effect, arguing that the novelty of art produced by many AI systems essentially amounts to a cycle of random variations, a gradual detachment from the human experience into a realm of pure spectacle.

However, the death of the artist narrative extends this to an extreme stance, thereby establishing a false dichotomy between recognising AI art as art and committing to a world in which humans are universally replaced by machines, where all our media becomes detached and derivative. We must recognise these limitations of the algorithm per se as a poignant warning against anthropomorphising these algorithms with romantic notions of human artistry, but it is often employed to generally reinforce anthropocentric fears of AI and disenfranchise all artworks created in conjunction with Generative AI. It is for this reason that I protest the Image Generator's role as the subject of aesthetic classification for the whole of Generative art, it is akin to the flaws of the aestheticians who saw the museum as the natural foundation of aesthetic theory. Artworks cannot be reduced to mute aesthetic artefacts. They are the whole of the experience interacting with the art and the situational framing of the artefact. Whether we marvel at, are appalled by, or feel a vague uncanniness when we use DALL-E, this experience cannot be reduced to the images it generates, rather our aesthetic experiences are dually grounded in these images and the knowledge that a machine dominated these acts of creative expression.

But DALL-E is simply one application of Generative Algorithms, an algorithm designed to produce any whim of the creative human. By focusing on the inability of the Image Generator itself to feel, reflect, or experience, one fails to recognise two essential truths: Firstly, even in this mute and unfeeling arrangement, the algorithm itself still communicates. Just as the human artist cannot help but communicate their internal biases, personality, and cultural biases, the machine communicates relics of its engineered structure, human labelling processes, and contents of its dataset as it participates in creative acts. Secondly, this dogmatic critique precludes human intervention from steering, hacking, and altering AI to create artworks which aesthetically explore the very problem of AI and humanity's collective future. Flatly rejecting AI-generated art will not safeguard artists or sustain meaningful expression. However, 'tactically' engaging with AI in collaborative expression, exploring its biases, and artistically challenging flaws in its developments has true potential to galvanise change.

Tacticality in Art

The notion of tactical agency is one proposed by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (de Certeau 1988) and adopted by Martin Zeilinger in his critical analysis of Generative AI. de Certeau describes tactics as "the art of the weak" (de Certeau 38), a style of action which relies upon open-ended resistance from a place of subjugation. Tactics "must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law…. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow" (36). The other mode of action for de Certeau is strategy, the mode of action utilised by possesses both "will and power" (35), i.e. governments, corporations, and large institutions. It is a planned execution which operates by "viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space" (37). A brief review of art history reveals a legacy of both tactical and strategic deployments of media as a crystallisation of

power along these vectors of communication. Philosophers have long noted these power relations within artworks, from Theodor Adorno's critique of the "Culture Industry" as a mode of authoritarianism (Adorno 2020), to Michel Foucault's celebration of aesthetic representations of madness in *Madness and Civilisation* (Foucault 1961). Martin Zeilinger translates this general framework to one specifically tailored for the landscape of Generative AI, arguing that "Tactical AI, in this sense, is likely to resist strategic approaches that blackbox knowledge, restrict access, or reinforce narrow conceptualizations of agency" (Zeilinger, 51). Tactical AI art is embedded within the system. It employs a contemporary hacker ethos to reengineer AI-driven art to challenge rather than dazzle, to resist rather than succumb, to critique rather than object.

The death of the artist narrative is an embodiment of the strategic mode of action when deployed in opposition to a dominant power structure. It correctly notes AI's limitations in poignantly communicating human narratives and rightly fears the replacement of artists. But it stringently applies the logic of humanist creativity and intellectual property to these algorithms themselves, attempting to disenfranchise AI-driven artworks rather than question the power architectures which position humans and AI in an oppositional, existential struggle. It seeks to realise this goal without the power to enforce it, it is incapable of deconstructing the monolith of techno-corporations, governments, and legal doctrines which seek to profit immensely from the automation of bothersome artists. Thus, for all its good intentions and alarmist rhetoric, it amounts to a nihilistic mourning of art. However, if we are to believe Dewey, the artist is not merely an art-making machine, their intrinsic value is as a communicator. An artist as a protestor is simply one voice, sucked into an "objectifiable space" which is easily dominated. The artist as an artist is a far more worthy adversary, they are a voice capable of speaking to and mobilising the masses and harnessing the power of evocative communication to problematize the deployment of AI from within.

Before examining several case studies of such Tactical AI art, it is critical to identify an epistemological blind spot which occurs when AI-driven artworks are quantified as non-communicative artefacts. If AI art were non-communicative, it would be ineffective and unconcerning for artists. It would not even resemble artwork. Communication is not merely incident in art, rather we look to art to see our daily struggles reflected in pages, lyrics, notes, and canvasses. AI artwork functions as art because it is able to appropriate this interpersonal communication. It can "dream up the human outside the human, anticipating both our desires and their fulfilment" (Zylinska 71). Generative AI is not concerning because it manufactures dull art, but spectacular art which dazzles us into complacency, reinforces biases, and becomes a strategic propaganda tool to consolidate power in the hands of a select few. In *Life 3.0* (Tegmark 2017), Max Tegmark dreams up just such an existence, in which a powerful tech company can mass produce theatrical masterpieces with a powerful AI. This not only generates the group exorbitant profits, but it serves as a vehicle to subtly craft social perceptions with strategic messaging. Yuval Harari highlights this concern as well, arguing that AI systems will not merely be invoked to exploit human "attention" — as in the case of social media — but to exploit human "intimacy" in the service of those who own and operate the technology (Harari 2023). One might argue that it is the deployment of AI in service of strategic goals to manipulate, indoctrinate, and coerce a population which is its most concerning affectation — precisely because AI-art communicates.

But what exactly AI communicates is malleable, it is conditioned by its internal structure, training data, and the way it is framed. Tactical AI art concerns itself with forcing AI to open itself up; to reveal its internal structure and biases explicitly and evocatively as it generates media. I will examine tactical deployment of AI art along three primary axes of resistance: Art which problematises anthropocentric modes of creation, authorship, and ownership, art which critically disrupts the 'view from nowhere' perspective of AI (Haraway

1988) and art which employs AI to turn a lens back upon ourselves and view our reflected humanity.

Authorship and Ownership

A core argument of this thesis is that AI's creative dynamics intrinsically disrupt anthropocentric notions of creativity and art — AI-art is the very embodiment of relational aesthetics, a kind of assembly of creative entities. However, the challenged anthropocentric frameworks don't exist in isolation, they are concretised in the logic of Intellectual Property (IP); in its framework which identifies creative agency as authorship and authorship as ownership. Furthermore, this relation is recursive, such that our everyday interactions with the radical individualism ingrained in the legal and economic infrastructure of the artworks make it more difficult to consider artistry as a distributed and relational process and subsequently view AI beyond an anthropocentric dualism.

The central logic of IP stands on the notion that "intangible creations of the human intellect" (Thomas Reuters Practical Law) are the de-facto property of the creative individual or body whose mind produced this novelty. On a theoretical basis, IP is justified by both Hegelian or Lockean arguments, which stipulate that an individual intrinsically owns themselves or their labor, and thus, an individual's unique thoughts, ideas, and manifest creations must be recognised by the law as their property. The utilitarian perspective alternatively posits that IP laws provide a necessary regulatory body to ensure that creative projects are economically viable — that an artist might be recognised and financially rewarded for the fruits of their labor, and that plagiarism, theft of ideas, and appropriation of work might be criminalised and swiftly dealt with (Moore 2022). Regardless of whether intellectual property laws have ever actually promoted intellectual freedom and invigorated the arts, they are inapplicable to an artistic landscape which includes Generative AI. On a

theoretical level, Artificial Intelligence disturbs the very concept of singularised authorship which Hegel and Locke draw from — AI authorship is fundamentally problematic to the constitution of a "privileged moment of individualisation" (Foucault 1982, 1). On a practical level, ownership cannot be uniformly granted to any one constituent in the process of creating a novel artwork.

Martin Zeilinger identifies Adam Basanta's *All We'd Ever Need is Another One* as the embodiment of tactical resistance to conventional IP logic. *All We'd Ever Need is Another One* is an "art factory;" an art installation where two scanners are placed in opposition and continuously scan the light reflecting off one another. A deep learning program trained on a large database of contemporary artworks examines these scans and characterises their art quality. If a scan achieves an 83% match with an existing, published artwork, it is autonomously posted online or printed for display in the exhibition. The entire setup is situated to preclude human intervention, relying only upon itself for the mode of creation. Basanta writes that it operates as a "golem-like assemblage, continuously and mindlessly self-producing without regard for human spectators"(Basanta 2018).

Who does this art belong to? The apparatus appears to operate autonomously, it publishes artworks that are 83% established art, and in a certain manner, this autonomous arrangement is creating original art. But the machine itself cannot "own" artwork, as the logic of IP is a domain of strictly human expression, and the very concept of ownership is utterly meaningless for an unthinking, unfeeling art-factory. Alternatively, several artists filed lawsuits on the basis that these '83% artworks' were in fact appropriations of their artwork, and thus, illegal, and plagiaristic images, which truly belonged to them. But the images generated by this golem-like assemblage don't appear by human standards to be a copy, oftentimes they differ in remarkable fashion, such that they would never be considered a copyright infringement if they were not titled by their similarity to an established artwork.

Perhaps Basanta may be characterised as the rightful owner, as the author of the installation itself. But Basanta himself is merely a creator of creation. He may be credited with manufacturing the setup, but Basanta himself did not create these new images, nor did he steal them — each image was freely available online. Neither could Basanta be 'inspired' by these images in any meaningful way because he never interacted with them personally.

There exists no clean solution. i.e, the golem-like assemblage constructed by Basanta explicitly extends the challenge posed by AI to anthropocentric creativity to a critique of anthropocentric ownership. The tacticality of the artwork lies not in the "original pieces" created by the machine, or in any meaningful changes to its generative structure, but in its framing architecture — its deliberate denial of artistic intervention and its titling procedure — which necessitates a confrontation with agent-ownership paradigms. In contrast, the infamous *Portrait of Edmond de Bellamy* and *Théâtre D'opéra Spatial* lack this tactical element. The first example's authorship was framed as 'No one,' whereas in the second example, the author claimed absolute ownership of the artwork. These examples are pertinent, as *Portrait of Edmond de Bellamy* sold for at auction for $400,000, while *Théâtre D'opéra Spatial* won critical acclaim at the Colorado State Fair. The problem of ownership runs just as deeply through these artworks as *All We'd Ever Need is Another One,* but they are obfuscated behind profit-based claims of ownership. *Portrait of Edmond de Bellamy* is the artist's fears realised, the creation of an 'authorless work' whose unique value is embedded in its lack of proprietary ownership, even though the Obvious Collective who designed the algorithm and prompts profited immensely.

When confronted with such work, the anthropocentric model of IP fails along with the entire economic structure of the arts, and human artistry fundamentally loses its economic viability. The question becomes… how do we devise a post-humanist legal and economic system which recognises art as arising from assemblies of creative agencies rather than

isolated individuals? How do we resituate communication in the economic structure of the art world, such that artists are perceived by their cultural, insightful contributions rather than as manufacturers of novelty? I will not attempt to pose answers to these questions here, but these insightful questions are the natural fruits of Basanta's tactical approach to AI. Basanta does not employ AI simply as a content generation tool, rather he critically reappropriates it as a tool of resistance against a dominant power system, exploiting the inherent contradiction between AI infrastructure and the "problematic proprietization of mental labor" (Grba, 23).

Subjective AI

In the last two chapters of this thesis, I have repeatedly argued that the characterisation of algorithms as objective, non-human intelligences is just as problematic as the anthropomorphisation of these algorithms. They are neither human-like in their creative endeavours, nor are they unbiased and objective. The use of MTurk workers to label massive datasets for the training of AI models is a prime example: a concealed shadow of biases, prejudice, and subjectivity which inevitably manifests in the model's outputs. This framed universal objectivity allows tech companies to surreptitiously convey subjective prejudices while absolving themselves of responsibility. Yarden Katz writes that it is these "fictions about knowledge and human thoughts that help AI function as a technology of power," by falsely presenting a machine unmarred by socio-political divides. In this section, I contend that creating art in conjunction with AI infrastructure is perhaps the best way to unearth these biases and divulge the blackboxing of AI infrastructure, thereby weakening the power systems which utilise it as an arbiter of fact and frame it as bias-free. Art creation necessitates communication, thus, let us force AI to communicate its inner architecture by playfully engaging it in creative action.

Trevor Paglen's oft-cited *ImageNetRoulette* (Paglen 2009) exemplifies an artistic deconstruction of the myth of objective AI. Paglen's project is an interactive art exhibit aimed at revealing the stereotyping and assumptions inherent in the algorithmic gaze of computer vision technology. *ImageNetRoulette,* though it has since been deactivated, was a freely accessible website allowing users to upload human images — either themselves, friends, celebrities, etc. Paglen trained an open-source deep learning program off the "person categories" of the ImageNet database to identify and evaluate these uploaded images and return a series of attributes and assumptions about their human contents. However, the attributes supplied by the program were not objective evaluations but objectifying. "Racist, misogynistic, cruel, and simply absurd categorizations" (Paglen 2009) did not seem to emerge as quirks of the classification procedure, but as a repeated, emphasised component. Paglen's stated purpose was "provocation," which was certainly realised as users found their seemingly innocuous images classified with humorous oddities like "pilot," "barmaid," and "judge advocate," or overt slurs like "slut," "slant-eye gook," and "slovenly woman." (Paglen 2009, Wong 2019, and

ImageNetRoulette produced jarring, uncanny results for many of its users. Importantly, it is the tactical framing of this art exhibit which made it such a potent investigation into encoded AI bias. *ImageNetRoulette* was initially perceived by most of its users as a "viral selfie app," precisely it works within a society in which such apps proliferate as quirky moments of novelty. The failures of these facial recognition apps to adequately perceive and function on black, minority, and underrepresented populations is well documented (Small 2023, Meyer 2016). The inability to use snapchat filters as well as white counterparts presents as a fairly insignificant harm, but the success of Paglen's work is that it serves a dual purpose as an analogue of facial recognition technology which already sees contemporary applications in policing, finance, and surveillance (Noiret 2022, Briefcam,

Qiang 2019) These functions are marketed as inanimate actions by algorithms, in a precise reversal of the rhetoric which anthropomorphises AI as capable of 'creativity,' even though development of these parallel functions is premised on the same architecture and research, and perpetrated by the same corporations, organisations, and authorities. *ImageNetRoulette* subverts these conversations by explicitly demonstrating encoded bias in the technology itself irregardless of application. It forces the viewer to view themselves as the algorithm views them; it makes AI classifications of people…visible to the people being classified," and in so doing explicitly demonstrates that human society has become hopelessly interwoven into the fabric of the machine which hopes to classify human society.

Paglen deactivated *ImageNetRoulette* in 2019, arguing that its point had been made and any further use would serve only to reinforce those problematic biases he hoped to unveil. In a sense, the work was a resounding success, as many software designers turned away from ImageNet towards other "more representative" datasets. But *ImageNetRoulette* also proves the necessary limitations of tactical engagement. ImageNet persists in its many instantiations across the AI landscape, and fragments of prejudiced assumptions work their way into technologies of power. Additionally, the exhibit's commentary clearly exceeds a critique of ImageNet itself. It questions whether humans can or should be unproblematically classified by AI, asks whether a true representative dataset could ever be manufactured, and strikes at the heart of the 'view from nowhere' perception. As Zylinska writes, "A deeper problem lies in the very idea of organising the world according to supposedly representative data sets and having decisions made on their basis, in advance and supposedly objectively" (Zylinska, 91). Yet Paglen's provocation was largely rewritten by strategic forces, contained and reduced to a simple condemnation of the ImageNet database itself. The power of tacticality is not in each of these isolated critiques, but in their relentlessness and repetition. *ImageNetRoulette* is just one emblematic example in a artistic paradigm which seeks to

continually question AI's purported objectivity in all of its forms, but it is not, and cannot, be the last.

A Human Becoming with AI

The two modes of tacticality in AI art discussed previously were structured as resistances to corresponding strategic applications of AI technology to subjugate, divide, and oppress. In this third section, I want to contend that AI technology might be utilised as an asset to tactical approaches more generally — a catalyst that radically restructures the way we think about ourselves. AI is a human creation. Birthed from our artifice it is laden with our biases and culture. But it is also something *other.* It is a new kind of intelligence that sees, organises, and comprehends human behaviour in a manner that is inaccessible to even the most neurodivergent geniuses and the furthest social outcasts. In our engagements with this new intelligence, we will inevitably learn about ourselves through its reflected gaze. AI holds up a mirror with which to perceive ourselves. As Paglen's work demonstrates, it is a mirror which is intrinsically blurred by its humanistic influences, but its lens is transformational nonetheless. When AI assists in the creation of art — the great vehicle of empathy, that process of communication with the capacity to transcend gulfs and barriers of experience — might we be offered a chance to view from beyond ourselves, not just on an individual basis, but as a diverse, complex, collective?

Refik Anadol is a media artist who utilizes machine-learning techniques to create immersive aesthetic murals. Anadol's ongoing collection, *Machine Hallucinations,* is centred around *unsupervised* as opposed to *supervised* machine learning. Rather than utilising artificial intelligence to realise a deliberately concocted image or scene, Anadol seeks to explore the hallucinatory states of the machine — to experience the 'mental states' of a machine trained on a particular dataset. *Unsupervised,* an instantiation of the project, takes

the entire library of the MOMA as its training set (Anadol 2022). It visualises and explores

the vast latent space within the myriad of potent expression and meaning, and realises it as a

morphing, warping, hallucinatory scene projected onto a high-resolution screen. The

algorithm is still bound by the same limitations discussed earlier as a 'copy machine,' but

Anadol seeks to apply it not to anthropomorphise and extol its artistry, but to memorialise its

source material as an exploration of the substance of modern art itself. Thus, as he applies

this technique to modern art, architecture, and MRI scans, he is simultaneously interrogating

larger questions than the substance of AI itself and seeking to build a kind of collective

consciousness, a forced reconciliation with our reality.

In an interview with the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Anadol poignantly

remarks: "Memories are our most important data," and asks, "How can we encrypt memories

in the form of art?" (Anadol 2024). We live with data, we create data, we encrypt and

manipulate data within our minds. We may be irreducible to data-based classifications, but

the collective database of humankind, if authentically represented, is a vast space of emotion,

expression, and attempts at communication and empathy. Anadol's art does not provide an

objective criterion of human existence, it does not assert that AI can become the arbiter of

truth in such a world, it merely forces us to view another perspective of human existence

through the lens of a data-based processor. What insights might we glean from this

perspective that might problematize the prejudices and narrowly forged narratives that are so

ingrained in our episteme that we cannot possibly see them?

Basanta, Paglen, and Anadol are simply three examples of artists deploying AI

tactically to interrogate and resituate the "process of human becoming (with) AI" (Zylinska,

134). These collective actions are vital for human reconciliation with our own creation in the

coming decades, but tactical AI art must continue as long as humans and AI share this

universe. If the day comes when Artificial Intelligence reaches its zenith and acquires that

long-sought, true conscious experience, we will need to communicate with it. To view it as it views us, to empathise with it, and to partner with it to open up profound new experiences. Art must be that vehicle of communication. Perhaps one day, human beings will cease to exist. We might be destroyed by our own creations, bomb ourselves into oblivion, or render our planet uninhabitable, and our only signature left in the universe will be autonomous AI systems. It will be the greatest tragedy if they cannot make art, appreciate art, and harness its spectacle, beauty, and evocation to communicate with one another.

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