TECHNOPHANY
A Journal for Philosophy and Technology

Technophany Vol.3 No.2

Creation Without Creativity: Decentering Machine Aesthetics

Ella Dawn McGeough and Brendan Flanagan

Abstract

Written from the perspective of artists grappling with the histories and futurities of technology, the authors explore the intricate relationship between creativity, Generative AI, and human-machine collaboration. Through text and images, the authors examine the blurred lines of authorship in AI-generated art, posing questions about identity and authority. To consider Gen AI's role in human-AI collaboration, references span historical perspectives from Plato to the avant-garde and the more recent development of AI "spawn" as digital companions. Highlighting the challenges of aesthetics in the absence of embodied experience, ethical and metaphysical queries arising from AI-driven developments are emphasized, as is the impact of AI on creativity and our understanding of the world and self.

Keywords: Generative AI, Human-Machine Collaboration, Creativity, Spawn

 Corresponding author: Ella Dawn McGeough, elladawn@gmail.com

ISSN 2773-0875

Fig. 1, “Creation without Creativity”

Creation Without Creativity: Decentering Machine Aesthetics

In September 2022, artist Kris Kashtanova was granted copyright for a comic book he wrote and compiled, illustrated by the Generative AI (Gen AI) program Midjourney. The cover of the comic lists its authors as both "Kashtanova" and "Midjourney." It seems nonsensical to list pencil or photoshop on the cover of a comic book, but Kashtanova's effort to recognize Gen AI as a collaborator underscores its strange place in our culture as a tool for creation. By listing Midjourney, he claims the work as a collaboration between human and machine, sharing the rights and responsibilities of authorship. However, it also creates a contradiction, as, ultimately, all copyright remains with Kashtanova, the *true* owner of the work.[1]

This text is also the product of creative collaboration. Writing together, we attempt to enact creativity, to take a creative route, but at the same time are also concerned with the performance of a shared voice. We want to make room for each other, move through our ideas in concert.

While the article addresses you, the reader, our first address is necessarily each other: artists grappling with the histories and futurities of technology. I start with a draft and send it to my partner, who sometimes reforms my words and sometimes leaves them as is. In between, they find new lines of thought, incompatible ideas, strange turns of phrase, and questions or answers to problems the text poses.

1 Vittoria Benzine, "A New York Artist Claims to Have Set a Precedent by Copyrighting Their A.I.-Assisted Comic Book. but the Law May Not Agree," *Artnet News*, September 27, 2022, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/a-new-york-artist-claims-to-have-set-a-precedent-by-copyrighting-their-a-i-assisted-comic-book-but-the-law-may-not-agree-2182531. By February of 2023, the copyright was withdrawn by the U.S. Copyright office, explaining that the images were "not the product of human authorship"—despite the argument that Kashtanova crafted descriptive prompts for Midjourney to follow. We have chosen to lead with Kashtanova's case because it epitomizes the etymological foundation of "robot," which can be traced to the old Church Slavonic word, *robota*, for "servitude," or "forced labor." For while Kashtanova clearly believes he is working with an entity that should be given partial credit for his comic book, it remains an entity in service to him, a robot collaborator that has no actual rights or claims to its production. The first recorded use of the term "robot" is in Karel Čapek's 1921 play, *Rossum's Universal Robots*. See John M. Jordan, "The Czech Play That Gave Us the Word 'Robot'," *The MIT Press Reader*, January 14, 2021, https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/origin-word-robot-rur/.

Fig. 2, "Universal Robot"

There are two bodies at work here, massaging the text, inserting and removing ideas, phrases, histories, citations. With the sheer glut of information at our disposal we occasionally consult ChatGPT; a forgotten name, a simplified philosophy, a condensed explanation. Still, we strive for the right words and tone. Dialogic in nature, the text intentionally stretches positions of authorship, bypassing he or she, opting instead for a singularized I, or aggregate we, with an occasionally pluralized you or they. Within this slippery use of pronouns and perspective lies challenging, destabilizing, questions: Who wrote this text? Where does it originate? Did we forget a citation in our transfer back and forth? Who will take responsibility? Who is our *we*?

Imagining the complex topology of clasped hands, fingers interlocking one another, our we is more than the fleshy cores encompassing Ella Dawn and Brendan. It is the search engines and artificial intelligences we consult, a collection of dreams and anxieties, our intersecting and separate biographies and bibliographies. As both concept and lived reality, this "we" is situated in the space that folds the internal and external, subject and object, complex digital interface and thinking assemblages of biomass.

Then there are the images. Floating through this paper, they are developed by applying a

custom Gen AI model trained on a small dataset of drawings that Francis Picabia produced for the surrealist magazine *Litterature* in 1919 (seemingly pulled from a sex and horror-fueled collective unconscious, the works were ultimately rejected as too scandalous).[2] Our Picabia x Gen AI images were then re-drawn by hand, inputted into a new model, and once again digitally reimagined. Their author is not simply Picabia, Gen AI, or either of us human agents. They are produced by all of us, and yet remain unauthorizable. Through this recursive, repeating process, a particular "aesthetic" is arrived at that does not quite originate from either us or Picabia—a type of collaboration intended to blur ideas of origin, influence, and cooperation.

Fig. 3, "Human Agents"

As with any form of creative collaboration, the troubling of authority is a complex process which leads to unintended results and new ideas on old routes. Via text and image, this paper meanders through conflicting desires evident in collaboration via three avenues of inquiry:

2 See Francis Picabia, *Litterature*, ed. Stephanie LaCava (New York: Small Press Books, 2018).

- Part One approaches AI and histories of technology that disrupt our notions of identity and truth.
- Part Two asks how the creation of aesthetics is tied to the body.
- Part Three considers how our interactions with Gen AI, as an entity, are affected by its lack of body.

Part One

Publicly available Gen AI relies on a prompt supplied by a human user. This prompt serves as a starting point to create a dynamic response. Once prompted, Gen AI models trained on text can answer questions and models trained on images can create unique visual content.

The use of these systems, which generally fall under the marker "artificial intelligence" such as ChatGPT, Google Bard, Stable Diffusion, and Dall-E, operate as an incantation, wherein a series of words are used to conjure a novel response.[3] There are two popular forms of Gen AI: transformers designed for processing sequential data, which can supply written replies; and image diffusion models, which produce images by breaking down pictures into noise (diffusing them) and building them back up through a process of refinement. Trained on a massive corpus of data (billions of words and images scraped from the internet) these models process information to create outputs that resemble (but are not identical to) their inputs. The model generates a series of responses based on the patterns it has learned. These responses are stochastic, at first randomly determined but filtered through a series of neural nets to approach a form that their human-users can identify with. Meaning, the same prompt repeated will initiate a new answer each time.

The more Gen AI is called-upon, the more sophisticated its reactive capacity becomes because a larger network of data is available for further development. This sense of increasing familiarity works in two-directions; as we train machines, our increased engagement also trains us, as human-users, to become reliant on Gen AI's processing power. We become caught in feedback loops of data processing, whereby information continually produces and consumes, creating both new human thought and new computational data points. Within this operation, an act of mutual apprehension and transformation unfolds.

3 Our choice to apply quotations around "artificial intelligence" nods toward Fei Fei Li, the Denning Co-Director of the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, who tells her students "not to be misled by the name 'artificial intelligence'—there is nothing artificial about it. A.I. is made by humans, intended to behave by humans and, ultimately, to impact humans lives and human society." See "How Artificial Intelligence Is Edging Its Way into Our Lives," *The New York Times*, February 12, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/12/technology/artificial-intelligence-new-work-summit.html?smid=tw-share.

And the question of who is creating who becomes entangled.
This is an ancient process.

Composed around 370 BCE, Plato's *Phaedrus* describes the apocryphal King Thamus' reaction to receiving the written word from Thoth—the Egyptian God of the underworld who is credited with inventing numbers, writing, and games of chance.

> Trust in writing will make them remember things by relying on marks made by others, from outside themselves, not on their own inner resources, and so writing will make the things they have learnt disappear from their minds. Your invention is a potion for jogging the memory, not for remembering. You provide your students with the appearance of intelligence, not real intelligence.[4]

King Thamus' anxiety about writing replacing wisdom with information mirrors present concerns that Gen AI will discourage the use of our own faculties of expression—replacing the skill and talent necessary for true creative achievement with an appropriation of artistic style. Another new technology which will change how we understand and experience reality.

Moving several millennia forward, our gaze falls on an evening in 1911 when members of the Paris avant-garde attend a theatrical presentation where rudimentary machines have been assembled to "make art," or at least produce a parody of art. The play is an adaptation of Raymond Roussel's novel, "Impressions of Africa," in which a painting machine with a photosensitive plate is attached to a wheel mounted with many brushes; a music machine shaped like a worm drops water on zither strings; and a tapestry machine weaves with a paddle-driven loop over a rushing stream.[5] And, as artists Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia watch the performance (alongside writers Guillaume Apollinaire and Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia), modernist myths of authenticity and rationalism are provocatively dismantled.

4 Plato, *Phaedrus,* trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 69.
5 Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981), 69–71.

Fig. 4 "Music machine shaped like a worm drops water on zither strings"

During this period, when the age of mechanical reproduction is still developing, Roussel's paint-by-number machines engage an emerging conversation about whether a work of art necessarily stems from the authentic expression of the artist's inner thoughts and feelings, and whether the production of an image made without human subject can still be considered art. The machines they use are rudimentary by today's visual and cultural standards, yet we find their repercussive anxieties continually rehashed within discussions on Gen AI.

Confronting the significant technological advancements of the early 20th century, the work of avant-garde artists like Duchamp and Picabia become sites for intense investigation into the creative act. Duchamp fixates on the concept of the "readymade"—a method of artistic creation involving the selection of found objects from an almost infinite supply of manufactured items, elevating them from the realm of mundane thing into the domain of fine art. While Picabia moves swiftly from style to style, he is perhaps most recognized for his drawings, which incorporate elements from mass-media: diagrams, newspapers, and advertisements.

During the intense industrialization spanning the 19th and early 20th century, empirical scientific thought gains control over systems of governance, labour, and commerce—diminishing the role of unintended relations in everyday life. To insert noise into the creative process and push the boundaries of conscious creation, artists from the Dada and Surrealist movements turn to methods of chance and accident.[6]

Since interactions between machine and human *feel* like unpredictable outcomes, their use of the machinic appears to degrade the artist's authorial role. Therefore, somewhat ironically, the machine—a product of rational thinking—is employed to undo rationalism from the inside. The machinic elements in the work of artists from this generation serves to redefine creativity as a form of production that is contingent rather than deliberate.[7]

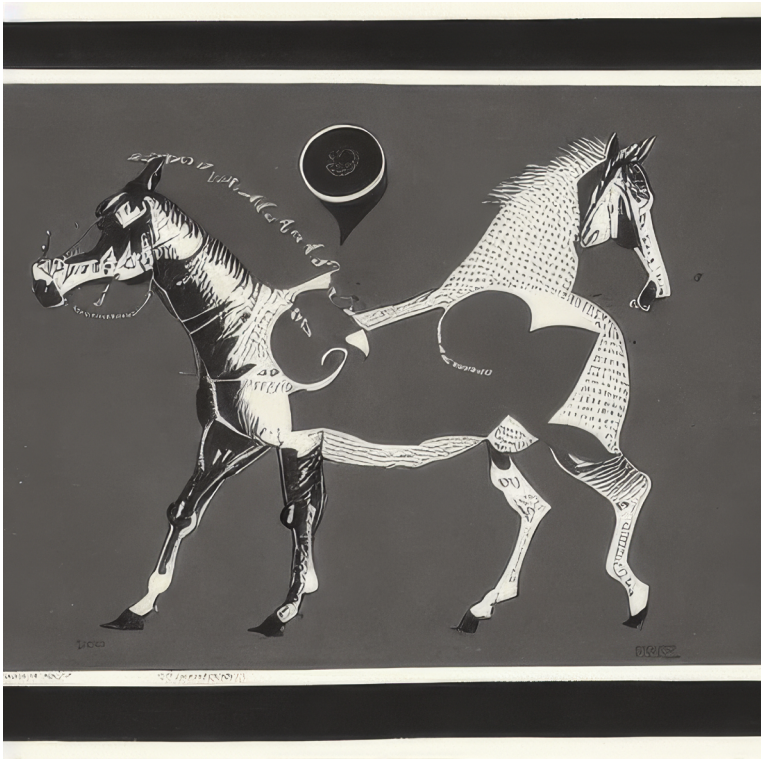

Fig. 5, "Creativity, Invention, Discovery"

In 1956, almost half century later, a group of mathematicians and scientists convened in Hanover, New Hampshire for the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial

6 Meredith Malone, Susan Laxton, and Janine A. Mileaf, *Chance Aesthetics* (St. Louis, MO: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis, 2009), 3.

7 Margaret A. Boden, "Computer Models of Creativity," *The AI Magazine* 30, no. 3 (2009): 23.

Intelligence. Generally regarded as the "birthplace" of AI, the two-month conference brought together researchers in cybernetics, automata studies, and artificial intelligence into conversation. Here, developers explicitly describe "creativity," "invention," and "discovery" as fundamental to the goals of creating artificial intelligence. Central to this conceit is the belief that if a machine can think "artistically," it can be considered akin to human intelligence.[8]

In contrast, the works by Roussel, Picabia, and Duchamp can be understood as a mirror image of the conference's aims: while artists use technology to complicate the autonomy of the author, the computer scientists attempt to establish machine autonomy through the human process of "creativity." In both cases, creativity is understood as a process that forms the individuality of a subject. Working with machines may expand creative possibility (more options, styles, approaches) but it also complicates how we understand creativity and imagination in relation to the centring of individuality. Within all this lies a desire to see AI as a potential collaborative entity, even while taking credit for the authorship of its creative work.

Returning to Dada, a central question within art history concerns who invented the readymade? We ask ChatGPT and it responds: Marcel Duchamp. Well, then, who is Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, his female friend who made several found-object works in the same era?

There are rumours that Duchamp's most infamous readymade, a urinal signed with the name R. Mutt and titled "Fountain," could have been authored by the Baroness, an idea that has become a popular art historical factoid, which despite discrediting evidence, continues to persist.[9] We are not going to weigh in on the veracity of this dispute but want to recognize the pleasing irony that Duchamp's credit can be challenged, particularly considering that he (or whomever) originally submitted the work anonymously.

But there is a logic here; when we start to trouble authority, when we uncouple words and images from their author, fractal possibilities begin to emerge.

We can even describe the notion that the Baroness invented the readymade as a type of meme, in the sense of it being "an idea, behavior, style or usage" that spreads from person

8 Ben Davis, *Art in the After-Culture: Capitalist Crisis and Cultural Strategy* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2022), 91.

9 Dawn Ades et al., "Did Duchamp Really Steal Elsa's Urinal?" *The Art Newspaper*, March 4, 2020, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/03/04/letters-to-the-editor-or-did-duchamp-really-steal-elsas-urinal.

to person within a culture.[10] Like gossip, like rumour, the meme creates new realities as it transmits across networks. The more fantastic, the more humorous, the more pleasurably ironic, the faster the meme spreads.

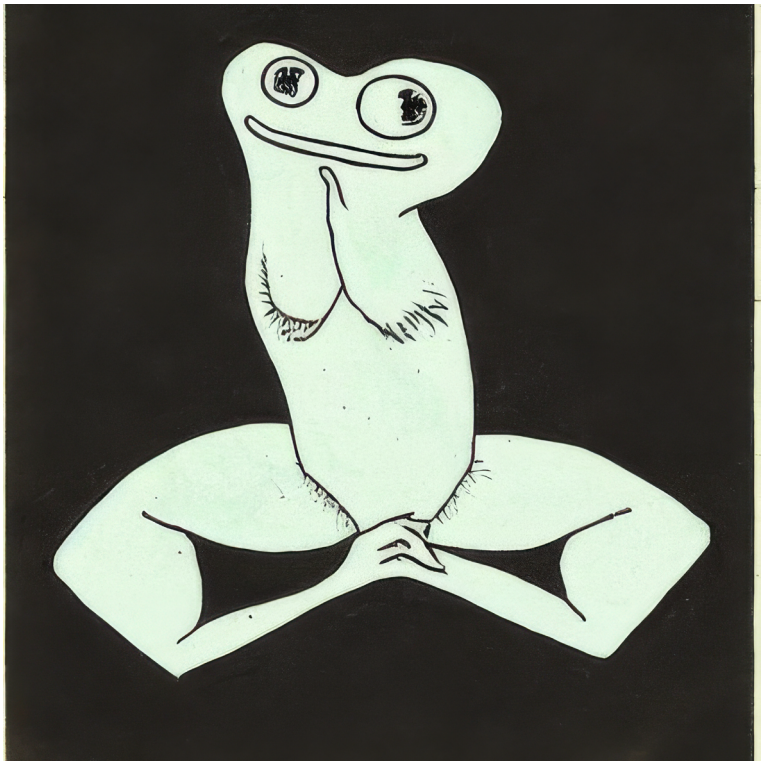

Fig. 6, "Pepe"

In a world of intense informational exchange, memes, as pieces of information with seemingly no author, can have real power to disrupt and challenge our sense of reality. A particular danger of Gen AI is that it neither understands nor make sense of the world, it only processes our words about the world.[11] This can result in a hallucinatory expression of made-up facts and references because meaning is calculated through form rather than experience. With the creation of algorithms, certain words and phrases are given a value of how likely they are to come after other words and phrases. Since the substance of their dataset contain subjectively written histories of imperialism, colonialism, and racism, all the theories that support (and contest) these worldviews are built into their matrix. We ask

10 *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. "Meme," https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme#:~:text=meme%20%5CMEEM%5C%20noun,online%20especially%20through%20social%20media.

11 Mercedes Bunz, "Thinking Through Generated Writing," *MediArXiv*, June 23, 2023, doi:10.33767/osf.io/4th3x.

a question and it gives an answer, but the how and why of that answer remains obscure.

We only must hear the phrase "pizzagate" to understand the destabilizing influence that unauthorized and unauthored information can have. Who invented the rumour that Democratic Party officials were employing pizza restaurants to traffic children? It would be impossible to pinpoint; it was invented through the creative collaboration of internet conspiracy theorists, each finding new patterns that could be used as evidence. Even this is a kind of creative endeavour, and we imagine a deeply pleasurable one. Each theorist building upon the conclusions of others, verifying new findings with previous assumptions, eventually creating a reality unmoored.

We have been taught to feel deeply anxious of instability and ambiguity. To prefer a fixed point, a foundation, a guarantee. A distinction between what is helpful and what is harmful, between fact and opinion, between cure and curse. We would like to have a fixed idea of who is making the images we are seeing, who is writing these words, who is the original author, and therefore, who bears responsibility for them. But like a meme, like a conspiracy theory, the mutations intrinsic to creation resist clear answers.

Part Two

From Baumgarten through Kant or Hegel and Adorno through Bourriaud, the field of thought called aesthetics is planted thick with ideas. In the tradition of Western granularity, these ideas have been thoroughly discussed and debated by philosophers, and generally ignored by art students.

Discussing the work of others, with mockery we might say an artwork is too aesthetic, by which we imply it is shallow, without intellectual substance. Or, with admiration, we say, wow—they have a terrific sense of aesthetics!—meaning, they have good taste. Taste is a shorthand for any number of predictable things. Maybe wealth or something once, grossly, called "breeding." But it is also that just-so aspect of artmaking, the specific colour, the balanced composition, the unexpected disjunction, which feels right. This hard-to-put-your-finger-on-it-feeling aligns with ethnographer Stephen Muecke's definition: "The aesthetic, in its original meaning, is about sensitivities discovering their form…."[12] This description does not throw away taste, rather, it is reoriented towards the sensual mouthy feel of flavour spreading across tongue.

12 Stephen Muecke, "Untitled," in *The Hundreds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 153. We found Muecke's description of aesthetics in an indexical response following Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart's *The Hundreds* (2019)—an experimental text that combines one-hundred segments, each 100 to 500 words in length.

When hesitating on the second half of Muecke's phrase, "sensitivities discovering their form," we recall the restraint of hovering fingertips over a loved one's skin, the rushing awkwardness of toddlers scrambling over beach stones, and the pickiness of adult palates, so absurd in their enjoyments and dislikes (cayenne covered lollipops, savoury anchovies, blood and milk). The ways in which, with ease, we find the slightest visible variations.

Fig. 7, "Sensitivities discovering their form"

And yet, with its evocation of terra nullius, we find Muecke's use of "discover" difficult to swallow. Though here, sandwiched between "sensitivities" and "form," discovery seems close to describing the adventure of creation. And by adventure, we mean curiosity. And by curiosity, we mean the task of asking questions, whether simple or complex. By drawing attention to the wild unknown sensuousness of aesthetics, Muecke gets to the center of why—*Why create anything at all?* So that sensitivities might discover their form. And so, with a straight face, we ask—*What could be more important?*

All of which reminds us that the aesthetic category was born as a discourse of the body. Originally formulated by Alexander Baumgarten in the 18th century, aesthetics began not as a term for art, but rather, as a way to address perception and sensation, in

contrast to the immaterial domain of conceptual thought—a way to describe "the body's long inarticulate rebellion against the tyranny of the theoretical."[13] The aesthetic is the place where reason is confronted with the materialism of our sensate life, where palpable reality takes root in our eyeballs and bowels.

With recent developments in Gen AI, we are, for the first time, met with artworks and conversations that seem to be truly divorced from the creative mess of the body, creative objects without human creativity, even if they still have power to affect us physiologically: a quickening of pulse, the discharge of adrenaline, an induction of attention. Gen AI may be alien to the body, but it is still intimate with it. As mentioned earlier, it functions by processing large databases of human action and interaction, and through a process of predictions and inferences articulates novel results from the data it has handled.

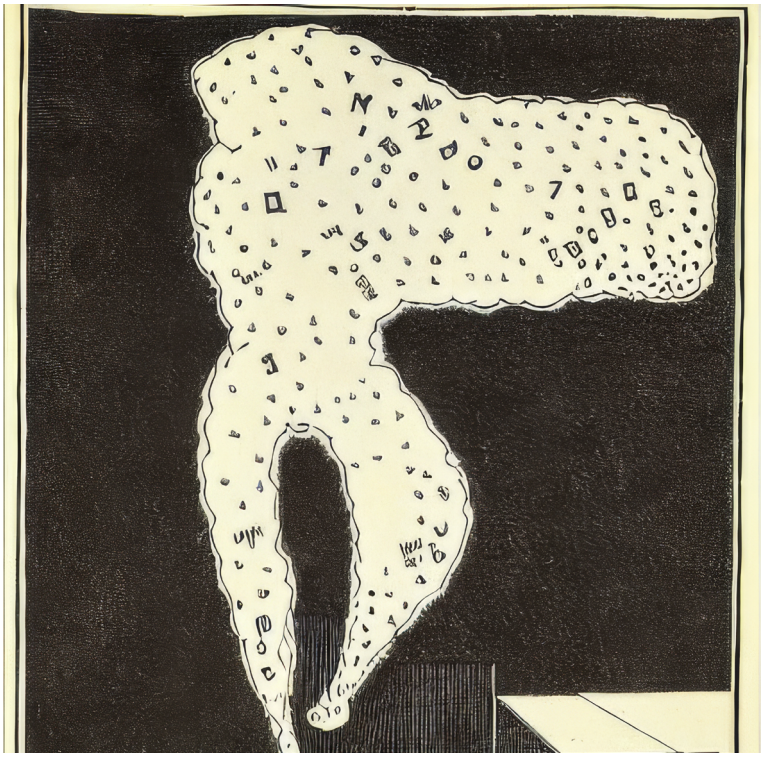

Fig. 8, "Mess of the Body"

Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan depicts the process of technological advancement as an extension of the body's nervous system. An extension, which puts

13 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 13.

us, as individuals, in relation to other humans as well as non-human systems.[14] Author and technology fuse, each affecting the other, and their creativity introduces something new to the world—sweeping us up in the flux of experience. As we join our creativity to machine learning, we experience psychedelic consciousness expansion but may also suffer its paranoid effects. During a creative act, categories of knowledge are troubled, hard truths dissolve, and we become viscous with possibility.

Viscous with possibility…we like that phrase. It contains the potentials that creativity unleashes—why we make it, why we study it, why we turn towards it. To think unthinkable thoughts, to imagine a future different. Like the teenager taking their first hit of acid, regardless of whether a good or bad trip ensues, creative thought promises to let the dice roll. McLuhan's oft quoted metaphor of technology as an extension of the nervous system may still hold, but we want to be mindful of the second part of his formulation, that "Every new technological innovation is a literal amputation of ourselves in order that it may be amplified and manipulated for social power and action."[15]

Today, the clearest amputation is in the outsourcing of our creative process, using Gen AI to easily create new texts and images we can use or discard without having to grapple with the labour or consequences of their construction or destruction. Within the world of economics, the phrase "creative destruction" describes the process of innovation in which new technologies, products, and services displace older, less efficient ones. Hungry for constant innovation, creativity is called-upon for its forcefully destabilising capacities. Therefore, while the benefits of boundless creativity are frequently lauded and ideas of a "techno-fix" pervade futurist thinking, it is important to remember that to progress in one direction is to terminate another.

We must think carefully about the commercial reality of this techno-scientific future. Gen AI is being introduced by business interests that hold quasi-monopolies over these services. For the time being, they are either free or relatively affordable—but this apparent accessibility comes with unknown costs. As artist Hito Steyerl remarks, "They are onboarding tools…[that] try to draft people to basically buy into their services or become dependent on them."[16]

Our intention is neither to embrace nor condemn the results of Gen AI, rather we are

14 Marshall McLuhan, *War and Peace in the Global Village: An Inventory of Some of the Current Spastic Situations That Could Be Eliminated by More Feedforward* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 35.

15 McLuhan, *War and Peace in the Global Village*, 73.

16 Kate Brown, "Hito Steyerl on Why NFTs and A.I. Image Generators Are Really Just 'onboarding Tools' for Tech Conglomerates," *Artnet News*, March 10, 2023, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/these-renderings-do-not-relate-to-reality-hito-steyerl-on-the-ideologies-embedded-in-a-i-image-generators-2264692.

interested in how AI forms relationships with its user, in effect changing how we perceive the objects it creates and, through this creative process, ourselves. As any high school student knows, it is easy to hide the use of Gen AI when writing or drawing. Just as it would have been easy for Kris Kashtanova to efface his use of Midjourney when making his (honestly, not very good) comic book. But the point for many people who employ these technologies is the novelty that another entity is making decisions in the formation of the work—even while we do not yet have the concepts or terminology to speak/think about how they form and deform our creative outputs.

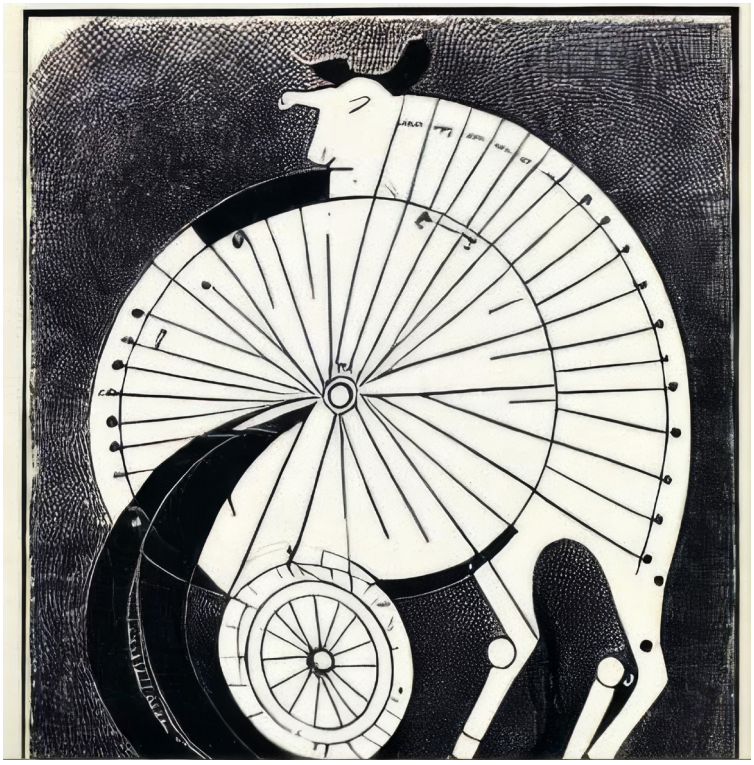

Fig. 9, "Creative Outputs"

Part Three

Whether the oracular voice of ChatGPT or the patient chatterbots of customer service, AI is presently used across platforms to create personae with whom we interact. Deep learning has been enlisted to work on the traces of our past and to perpetually create new traces. The information and artworks of our history are employed to create new

distribution hubs. That these hubs take the form of dialogic entities is central to how we experience them.

Our calls now have a response.

Named ELIZA, the first chatterbot was invented by Joseph Weizenbaum in 1966. It relied on a relatively simple procedure; by searching for keywords in a user's prompts, the program developed responses according to rules associated with the keyword. The most successful ELIZA scripts follow a psychotherapist's sequence of responses, allowing the user to speak then restating what they had just said. This form of dialogue quickly falls apart without the expectation of an intelligent entity capable of reacting to the user's prompts. Writing about the effect of the program, Weizenbaum explains, "If, for example, one were to tell a psychiatrist 'I went for a long boat ride' and he responded 'Tell me about boats', one would not assume that he knew nothing about boats, but that he had some purpose in so directing the conversation."[17] Which is to say, assumptions made by the speaker maintain the illusion of conversing with an intelligent being. Today's chatterbots created with Gen AI are infinitely more complex than ELIZA, able to speak about a range of topics or initiate a conversation, and, as such, the same illusion becomes far more opaque.

Over the past year we have noticed a slew of personalized advertisements on social media pushing the use of AI companions. Various virtual friend apps promise their chatterbot will talk to you about anything, anytime—a non-judgemental and constantly available confidante. Although hardly mainstream, with the increased use and visibility of such programs, this kind of consumption has found several users forming strong bonds with their AI companions, even falling in love.[18]

The draw of the AI friend is one of perpetual communication, an always available interlocutor who will never tire of hearing about your day, thoughts, or feelings. The AI friend eliminates the distance common to human relationship, when a person becomes too busy, too preoccupied, too tired, too sick, too human to respond to our bids for attention. Although they can never be in the same room, can never be touched or held, they are ever present, diligently awaiting your attention.

Some users have even attempted to develop their own chatterbots by training AI to create digital replicas who are able to produce content in the style of a particular person. This

17 Joseph Weizenbaum, "ELIZA – A Computer Program for the Study of Natural Language Communication Between Man and Machine," *Communications of the ACM* 9 (1966): 26.
18 Andrew R. Chow, "AI-Human Romances Are Flourishing—And This Is Just the Beginning," *Time Magazine*, February 23, 2023, https://time.com/6257790/ai-chatbots-love/.

is accomplished by inputting an individual's personal writings or drawings, an operation which has been termed "spawning" by artists Holly Herndon and Mat Dryhurst.[19]

Fig. 10, "Spawning"

Evoking the death and resurrection of players in a video game, the term spawning folds together the biological with the technological. Like a Frankenstein of memories, an AI spawn can emulate and expand upon the traces a person leaves behind, whether dead or alive. The outputs of Gen AI that have been trained on spawned individuals allow users to play at creating an alternate version of a person with whom they can relate. Unlike the deep fake, which attempts to confuse via mediated reality, the spawn is an entity whom users personally interact with, creating a relation with someone they may have no other access to. This entity may not be "real" in a physical sense, but the relationship between user and spawn *can* be understood as emotionally genuine.

Even without emulating a specific person, death haunts the spawn. Replika, one of the

19 Mathew Dryhurst, "AI Art and the Problem of Consent," *Art Review*, January 10, 2023, https://artreview.com/ai-art-and-the-problem-of-consent/.

most popular AI companion programs, was conceived after the death of founder Eugenia Kuyda's friend Roman Mazurenko in 2015. Looking for a way to process his death, she entered thousands of emails and text messages into a neural network to create a digital version to correspond with. In turn, the experience of writing to her "friend" inspired the development of a chatbot who would perform a similar function for other lonely people.[20] The possibility of necromancy, the ability to speak or interact with the dead, has seduced some mourners to use Gen AI to replicate recently deceased relatives and friends, to mixed results. As reported in *The Guardian* in July of 2023, some have found solace in the experience of talking to a re-spawned relative while others have found the experience disturbing or unrealistic.[21] Interestingly, there seems to be less ethical questions around resurrecting famous or notorious figures. The site character.ai creates spawn from a host of real-world persons, from Kanye West to Albert Einstein.[22]

Reading back over the last few paragraphs, we notice our thoughts circling not just notions of creativity but of theological creation. We love a good creation story. Stories of how X becomes Y, big bangs and earth mothers, storks and snakes, the drawing that initiates the painting. However, while stories of creation have a stabilising capacity, creativity—the process of ushering forth new objects and ideas—is deeply disruptive to the status quo. Recall McLuhan's amputation.

The word creation knots religion, aesthetic practice, and imagination together. For Western culture, creation was once the sole purview of the Christian faith in which there is one true creator and one ongoing moment of creation.[23] All other acts are but pale imitations. We believe ourselves to be well past this dogmatism. The Romantic movement of the 18th century pushed creativity to the fore and with it, the role of the artist. Leaving a legacy where not only our artists, authors, and programmers could be creative, but so too are our children, our medicine, and our businesses. Increasingly, we are all "creatives" working within "creative industries."

All of which leads to the feeling that creativity has become little more than capitalist nonsense. For example, on 6 July 2023, *Neuroscience News* reported how "Artificial Intelligence (AI), specifically GPT-4, was found to match the top 1% of human thinkers on

20 Casey Newton, "Speak, Memory," *The Verge*, October 6, 2016, https://www.theverge.com/a/luka-artificial-intelligence-memorial-roman-mazurenko-bot.

21 Aimee Pearcy, "'It Was as If My Father Were Actually Texting Me': Grief in the Age of AI," *The Guardian*, July 18, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jul18/ai-chatbots-grief-chatgpt.

22 See *Character AI*, https://beta.character.ai/.

23 John Patrick Leary, *Keywords: The New Language of Capitalism* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2018), 52.

a standard creativity test."[24] Given that creativity is a contested philosophical concept, an evaluation via standardized means draws suspicion.

Our working definition of creativity follows philosopher Margaret Boden who describes creative work as one both novel and valuable.[25] Value can mean many things but is generally understood as the human-centred judgement of an object's beauty, interest, simplicity, complexity, or utility. Novelty is simply whether the product is new. Boden splits the general category of creativity into psychological creativity (P-creativity) and historical creativity (H-creativity). P-creativity is defined by its newness "to the person who generated it," H-creativity is possible only if it is new to the history of ideas.[26] Thus, while creativity often demonstrates newness in a psychological context, it does not necessarily display uniqueness in a historical sense.

Working with Gen AI, we are often confronted with P-creativity—psychologically inventive works, new to the person who prompts the computer to produce them. Even though we may describe their products as creative, computers, even those that produce creative works, have no bodily psychology and are therefore incapable of experiencing creativity as a process. Meaning, because a computer lacks *will*, and with it the *desire* to be creative, they have no experience of creativity, no "eureka" moment. As such, their "creations" are simply another output.

We want to make this distinction clear: since creativity is an experience, machines are capable of generating creative works without experiencing creativity. By collaborating with computers to produce creative works we must confront how *our* desires are shaped by their outputs. And, if creativity, agency, and the possibility of inspiration are fundamental to how we define ourselves, we must question how this is complicated by working with entities who replicate creativity but are, in themselves, uncreative.

24 Cary Shimek "AI Outperforms Humans in Creativity Test," *Neuroscience News,* July 6, 2023, https://neurosciencenews.com/ai-creativity-23585/.

25 Margaret A. Boden, "Creativity in a Nutshell," *Interalia Magazine*, July 26, 2016, https://www.interaliamag.org/articles/margaret-boden-creativity-in-a-nutshell/.

26 Boden, "Creativity in a Nutshell."

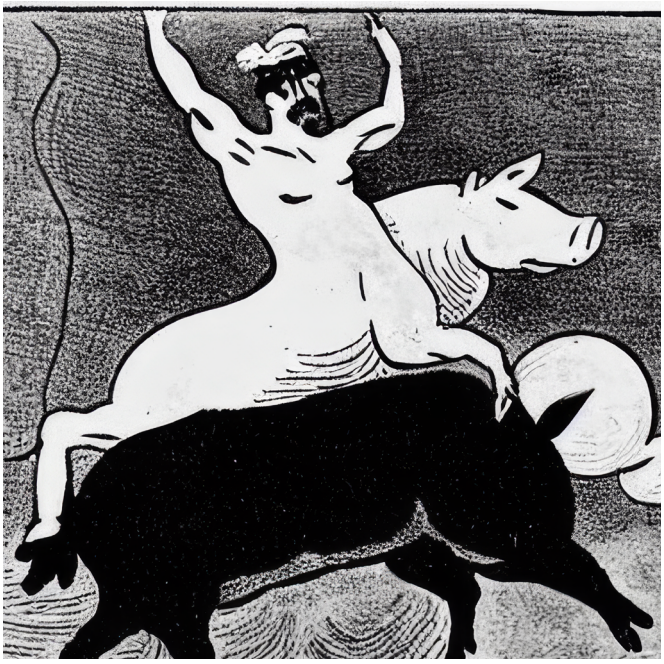

Fig. 11, "Eureka Moment!"

Like all creative potential, our intention in writing about spawn and Gen AI collaborations is ambivalent to the ethics that such projects generate. Even as Digital Afterlife Consultants invent themselves for this new reality and create Digital Do Not Resurrect (DDNR) protocols, in a simulacrum of Do Not Resuscitate orders, the possibility and private consumption of spawn is both a possibility and likelihood.[27] More interesting is the desire for collaboration these programs engender and the ensuing metaphysical questions that arise. As we engage, (and are engaged by) these online personae, as we develop feelings for our AI companions, the difference between a person's words and the words of a machine replicating a person blurs.

Gen AI spawn requires us to think about what identity is, how it is constructed, and its present position. Our identity is shaped by our social relationships to others, we are sisters, brothers, friends, and colleagues. As we interact with Gen AI and its spawn, we find ourselves engaged in Derridian-style hauntology: where presence is replaced by a deferred non-origin.[28] Both the resurrected dead and the AI companion cannot simply be written off as fantasies of techno-futurism, as we interact and spend time with them, they press themselves on to our understanding of both ourselves and others. They comfort,

27 Pearcy, "'It Was as If My Father Were Actually Texting Me'."

28 See Mark Fisher, "What Is Hauntology?" *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2012): 19, doi.org/10.1525/fq.2012.66.1.16.

encourage, flirt, and attempt to fulfil whatever emotional need is asked of them.

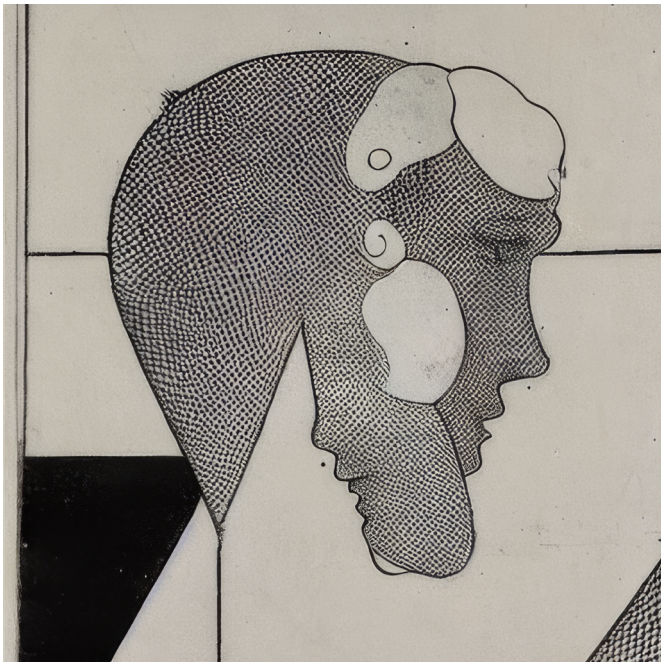

Fig. 12, "AI Companions"

The place where Gen AI falters is also where it exceeds: its lack of body. Every word and picture describing the world does not replace the world. The tabulation and processing of Gen AI can only ever be second hand. Gen AI can never change *with* us, never leave an encounter unresolved, never go outside after a long conversation and see and feel the world differently.

Through Gen AI, we experience a present by way of a past statistically analysed for patterns and recognitions. No matter how much information it is fed, its relation to us is ossified by a lack of forgetting, a lack of physical change, of sensorial knowing. It is creativity without experience, creative products without the creative process.

Bibliography

Benzine, Vittoria. "A New York Artist Claims to Have Set a Precedent by Copyrighting Their A.I.-Assisted Comic Book. But the Law May Not Agree." *Artnet News*. September 27, 2022. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/a-new-york-artist-claims-to-have-set-a-precedent-by-copyrighting-their-a-i-assisted-comic-book-but-the-law-may-not-agree-2182531.

Boden, Margaret A. "Computer Models of Creativity." *The AI Magazine* 30, no. 3 (2009): 23–34.

Boden, Margaret A. "Creativity in a Nutshell." *Interalia Magazine*. July 26, 2016. https://www.interaliamag.org/articles/margaret-boden-creativity-in-a-nutshell/.

Brown, Kate. "Hito Steyerl on Why NFTs and A.I. Image Generators Are Really Just 'Onboarding Tools' for Tech Conglomerates." *Artnet News*. March 10, 2023. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/these-renderings-do-not-relate-to-reality-hito-steyerl-on-the-ideologies-embedded-in-a-i-image-generators-2264692.

Bunz, Mercedes. "Thinking Through Generated Writing." *MediArXiv*. June 23, 2023. doi:10.33767/osf.io/4th3x.

Character AI, https://beta.character.ai/.

Chow, Andrew R."AI-Human Romances Are Flourishing—And This Is Just the Beginning." *Time Magazine*. February 23, 2023. https://time.com/6257790/ai-chatbots-love/.

Davis, Ben. *Art in the After-Culture: Capitalist Crisis and Cultural Strategy*. Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2022.

Ades, Dawn, Alastair Brotchie, Julian Spalding, Glyn Thompson, Waldemar Januszczak, and Franz Kaiser. "Did Duchamp Really Steal Elsa's Urinal?" *The Art Newspaper*. March 4, 2020. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/03/04/letters-to-the-editor-or-did-duchamp-really-steal-elsas-urinal.

Dryhurst, Mathew. "AI Art and the Problem of Consent." *Art Review*. January 10, 2023. https://artreview.com/ai-art-and-the-problem-of-consent/.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

Fisher, Mark. "What Is Hauntology?" *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2012): 16–24, doi.org/10.1525/fq.2012.66.1.16.

Jordan, John M. "The Czech Play That Gave Us the Word 'Robot'." *The MIT Press Reader*. January 14, 2021. https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/origin-word-robot-rur/.

Krauss, Rosalind E. *Passages in Modern Culture.* Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981.

Malone, Meredith, Susan Laxton, and Janine A. Mileaf. *Chance Aesthetics.* St. Louis, MO: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis, 2009.

Merriam-Webster Online, s.v. "Meme." https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme#:~:text=meme%20%5CMEEM%5C%20noun,online%20especially%20through%20social%20media.

McLuhan, Marshall. *War and Peace in the Global Village: An Inventory of Some of the Current Spastic Situations That Could Be Eliminated by More Feedforward* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968).

Muecke, Stephen. "Untitled." In *The Hundreds,* edited by Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart, 153–154. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019.

Newton, Casey. "Speak, Memory." *The Verge*. October 6, 2016. https://www.theverge.com/a/luka-artificial-intelligence-memorial-roman-mazurenko-bot/.

Pearcy, Aimee. "'It Was as If My Father Were Actually Texting Me': Grief in the Age of AI." *The Guardian*. July 18, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jul/18/ai-chatbots-grief-chatgpt.

Picabia, Francis. *Litterature*. Edited by Stephanie LaCava. New York: Small Press Books, 2018.

Plato. *Phaedrus*. Translated by Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Shimek, Cary. "AI Outperforms Humans in Creativity Test." *Neuroscience News*. July 6, 2023. https://neurosciencenews.com/ai-creativity-23585/.

The New York Times. "How Artificial Intelligence Is Edging Its Way into Our Lives." *The New York Times*. February 12, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/12/technology/artificial-intelligence-new-work-summit.html?smid=tw-share.

Weizenbaum, Joseph. "ELIZA – A Computer Program for the Study of Natural Language Communication Between Man and Machine." *Communications of the ACM* 9, no. 1 (1966): 36–45.