

AI Rituals: A Performative-Communicative Reconceptualisation of Creativity and Meaning-Making in the Age of Generative AI

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Abstract

This paper examines how generative artificial intelligence reshapes creativity and meaning-making, proposing a shift from individual authorship centred on the human mind toward collective, hybrid, and ritual forms of creation. Drawing on performative, process, communicative, and feminist-posthumanist perspectives, it argues that AI-driven creativity constitutes an “AI ritual”: a socio-technical process and performance where meaning emerges through interaction among humans, algorithms, and data. Rather than viewing creativity as a singular act rooted in human origin, mind, or agency, the paper conceptualises it as a communicative performance involving a range of heterogeneous actors: code, datasets, users, and audiences. Echoing Roland Barthes’ proclamation of the “Death of the Author,” it proclaims the “Death of the Creator,” reframing creativity as a dynamic, ritualised, and dialogical-collaborative process. Meaning is understood not predominantly by its origin but by its circulation and transformation within a communicative collective. After reimagining creativity in the AI age as a shared, posthuman, and performative process of co-production, (re-)performance, and co-becoming that is more like love than control, the paper then explores some implications for aesthetics, AI research, and politics of art.

Keywords: artificial intelligence (AI); meaning; creativity; posthumanism; performance; communication; process; becoming

1. Introduction

The rise of generative artificial intelligence (genAI), which enables the generation of text and other creative works with far less human involvement than earlier creative technological practices, has reignited long-standing debates about authorship, creativity, and meaning-making. Trained on large datasets of existing content, generative models such as GPT, Claude, Midjourney, DALL-E, Udio, and Suno can generate text, images, and music based on text prompts provided by the user. These works are often hard to distinguish from works created by humans not using this technology. What does this mean for authorship, creativity, and meaning? We seem to find ourselves in a “crisis” regarding traditional ideas about these concepts.¹ Can generative AI be genuinely creative? What is creativity anyway? Do we need different models of authorship and creativity, perhaps also different ethical and legal frameworks? And what does the rise of generative AI mean for knowledge creation,² education, and thinking?

Recent work in philosophy of technology has started to theorise these changes and questions. One emerging debate is about LLMs and authorship/writing. Whereas most authors recognize that traditional notions of authorship and writing are significantly challenged by the use of generative AI—these technologies are not just “stochastic parrots”³ since they do not simply copy existing works but generate new ones, and therefore cannot be dismissed as a kind of copy machines—they crucially disagree about how to conceptualize that change, putting more or less emphasis on human agency, and questioning the modern notion of authorship to a lesser or larger extent. For example, whereas Luciano Floridi has argued that literary production with AI, literary production, which he calls “distant writing,” still crucially involves humans as designers of narratives (who then use LLMs to generate text),⁴ Mark Coeckelbergh and David J. Gunkel have argued that writing with LLMs shows that the author was never sovereign when it comes to meaning and that meaning is (also) produced in the act of reading and through relations with other texts.⁵ In this view, LLMs thus further undermine the myth of the author as a solitary romantic genius. While this view does not necessarily deny that humans play a significant role in the process (the author of this paper certainly does not deny

1 Skoryk et al. “Machine Thinking and Human Imagination: New Horizons for Creativity in the Digital Age,” *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion* 7, no. SI1 (2025): 115-139, doi: 10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI1.156.

2 Paolo Granata, *Generative Knowledge: Think, Learn, Create with AI* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2025).

3 Emily M. Bender et al. “On the dangers of stochastic parrots: Can language models be too big?” *Proceedings of the 2021 Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, March 3–10, 2021 (FAccT ’21)*, doi: 10.1145/3442188.3445922.

4 Luciano Floridi, “Distant Writing: Literary Production in the Age of Artificial Intelligence,” *Minds and Machines* 35, no. 3 (2025): 1–26.

5 Mark Coeckelbergh and David J. Gunkel. *Communicative AI: A Critical Introduction to Large Language Models* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2025).

that), the latter view is not only inspired by poststructuralism but is also in line with traditions in philosophy of technology that emphasise the more-than-instrumental role of technology: technologies actively mediate human-world relations.⁶ It also moves in a more posthumanist direction, taking a further step in a history of thinking about writing that has emphasised how technologies and media crucially shape it, and implying what we may call the emancipation of the reader by undermining the author's exclusive authority in meaning-making through writing.⁷

However, this debate has just started, and more work is needed to further theorise creativity more generally (including also other creative practices apart from writing) and meaning-making in times of generative AI. The questions just mentioned confront authors, but also artists, composers, choreographers, architects, and so on; generative AI is pervasive across all creative sectors. A more fundamental reflection on the nature of creation and creativity is urgently needed. Is working with AI here just another kind of human-machine collaboration, or do we need to rethink creativity and creation—and within that the role of technologies? Answers to these questions may have practical consequences for how we deal with these technologies and with art and artists in society. So far, the debate has mainly focused on individual creators and minds and their relation to the technologies they use. Perhaps this is because questions concerning creativity and computing have so far been asked mainly by technical researchers. In any case, a more developed social and communicative approach to creativity is lacking.

This paper aims to help close these gaps by conceptualising how generative artificial intelligence transforms contemporary practices of creativity and meaning-making, reframing the human-machine relationship through a performative, communicative, and posthumanist lens. In response to, and further developing, the mentioned work on the implications of large language models for authorship and writing, the argument broadens the discussion to creativity and creation in general and moves beyond questions of authorship and individual agency toward what may be called *AI ritual*: hybrid socio-technical and communicative performances through which meaning, value, and creative legitimacy are continually re-enacted and do no longer solely depend on the individual origin but also and more importantly on their communicative and collective significance. Extending Coeckelbergh and Gunkel's argument about how writing with LLMs further instantiates the "Death of the Author," this paper proclaims the "Death of the Creator": a shift from origin-based and human-centred accounts of meaning-making and creativity to understanding the latter as distributed, hybrid, and communicative processes in which humans, algorithms, and datasets co-produce and co-perform meaning and artistic value.

6 See: Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

7 See, for example, N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002) and earlier McLuhan and others.

In this framework, creation is no longer a singular act of expression but a ritualised, communicative negotiation among heterogeneous actors: code, data, users, and audiences. By foregrounding the destination of meaning (its emergence, reception, circulation, re-communication, and transformation) over its origin, this paper reimagines meaning and creativity as emergent properties of a hybrid collective communicative process rather than a mere extension and expression of individual human genius. Instead of asking what AI “creates,” it asks how AI communicates: how meaning, value, and aesthetic experience emerge through interaction between humans, machines, and networks, and how this always takes place in the context of, and in interaction with, a cultural form of life. The paper thus invites a rethinking of aesthetic, technological, and political categories in the age of generative AI, where individual authorship and creativity dissolve into a broader creative process and performance, and where the creative act becomes a shared, iterative, and posthuman event, which legitimacy, authority, and value cannot be reduced to its origin but crucially co-depend on the active reception and re-performance by the communicative collective.

The paper’s structure mirrors its three, related conceptual performances: it will develop a (1) poststructuralist and feminist-posthumanist, (2) ritual-performative and process-philosophical, and (3) ritual-communicative understanding of creation and meaning-making with generative AI, which will also at the same time shed light on creation and meaning-making as such. The result is a synthesis of these three conceptual performances, centring on “AI rituals” as the main binding concept. The paper ends with a brief exploration of some aesthetic and political implications of this (re-) conceptualisation.

2. From Human Genius and Expression to Posthuman Process and Love

We find ourselves confronted with a “scandal”: for the first time in the history of human culture, a non-human artificial entity can generate texts, artworks, music, and so on. This can be seen as yet another blow to human anthropocentrism and exceptionalism after Copernicus, Darwin, Freud, and others who have “dethroned” the human. This time, AI innovation, not philosophy or the sciences as such, shows that we are no longer the only creators. After OpenAI presented its generative artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT in 2022 (with other models following in its wake, especially in the U.S. and in China), the creative world has experienced a Copernican shift: creatives now find themselves in an orbit around (generative) AI. It seems that this kind of AI “has” to be used, or at least creators and philosophers “have” to respond to this Copernican event. Will humans still be needed to write, to create art, to compose music? What is the new role of writers and artists, given this change? How can society deal with this crisis? How can we understand what is happening? And how new is this in the first place? Is it correct to say that we

are “no longer” the only creators or was creation always already something else than we imagined? What are creativity and creation anyway?

In modernity, we are used to thinking of creation as a creative act by a human or human-like figure who exercises their creative agency. Creation is the result of a unique, sovereign, authoritarian, and authoritative act of will, word, and imagination. What authorises the creation is this origin. This conception of creativity derives historically from the Genesis creation narrative, which has deeply structured Western conceptions of what it is to create. The creation is the result of the Word of God. God speaks, and the world comes into being. The creator stands apart from the creation, and creates something radically new, autonomous, and original. Renaissance humanism, Enlightenment, Romanticism, and (other) modern notions of artistic genius echo this theological inheritance. Even in secular thinking, the structure of the creation myth is retained: the divine creator is replaced by the creative individual. The artist, author, composer, choreographer, and so on is seen as an absolute originator who creates something totally new based on what they had in mind and imagined. Although the earlier theological idea that humans share in divine creative power is rejected, modern times still see the creative person as somehow transcending the ordinary. Human creativity is still seen as a quasi-sacred vocation, and artists and their works have retained a quasi-religious aura. While contemporary thinkers have challenged the Genesis model and its Romantic heirs in various ways (see below), it still shapes the common understanding of creativity today.

This becomes clear in many criticisms of generative AI. If the traditional conception of creativity is assumed, generative AI is highly problematic with regard to creativity, since it might seem that there is no longer a human (or human-like divine) origin. The text or artwork is generated by a machine and is therefore unauthorised. There is no genius to be found. Looking for a creative mind in the computer, one finds that nobody is at home: no consciousness, no thinking, no mind. One might still try to save the traditional model by arguing that the human prompter is the genius artist, the quasi-divine designer of the work who employs the technology to implement their concept (this way of thinking is operative in Floridi’s view mentioned previously). However, this only partly solves the problem, since it discounts the significance of the machine’s partly unpredictable and uncontrolled generation of the artwork. Whereas in the traditional conception the creator has full control over their expression, in this case that divine-like control is lacking and there is not even “expression,” at least not in the traditional sense. The human creator might have something in mind, might imagine something, utters creation words, seeks some degree of control over the result, and so on, but the outcome can never be reduced to a mere expression of the initial idea and intention. The traditional notion of creativity no longer applies. Generative AI then appears as a threat to human creativity, since it lacks the required properties for this kind of creative imagination and intention (it lacks

consciousness and mind). (Note that not everyone agrees about the latter, but I will not further discuss this here.) Generative AI, it is then said, lacks creativity: instead, we need humans who are genuinely creative.

However, a more relational, distributed, and emergent model of creativity is possible, one that deconstructs the human versus machine narrative (and indeed the older creator versus creation narrative) and makes better sense of what we do with generative AI.

Some of this work has already been done with regard to text and writing. Poststructuralist theorists, in particular Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, criticised the modern view of authorship and thereby undermined the theological logic that still undergirds it. In his famous essay “The Death of the Author,” Barthes argued that Western literary traditions mistakenly locate meaning in a sovereign subject.⁸ According to him, meaning can no longer be guaranteed by reference to an author; instead, it emerges through an interaction of texts, languages, and readers. Similarly, Foucault criticised what he called the “author function”: the author is not a transcendent source of meaning but a function of knowledge and power.⁹ The modern notion of the author as a sovereign origin who is and should be in control of meaning is thus historically situated. We can apply the same criticism to the artist and proclaim the Death of the Creator, including the Death of the Artist, the Author, the Choreographer, the Composer, the Architect, and so on? The meaning of an artwork cannot be reduced to its origin in an artist-originator, a genius who had something in mind. Creation is not just a matter of expression of an individual subject or mind. Meaning is always made through a relational process of meaning-making, of which the artist is but a part. Since they are only one part of the wider network that constitutes meaning-making, the artist has no absolute control over the work’s meaning. This is because meaning is always already related to other works (other texts, artworks, dance works, compositions, buildings, etc.), other ideas, a reception history, and ultimately to an entire culture. Neither the traditional idea of a creation *ex nihilo* nor the idea of an authorised and predictable path of meaning-making that would follow and accompany the creative work can be maintained.

Feminist and posthumanist thinking, for example from Luce Irigaray and Donna Haraway, also helps to further criticise the Genesis model of creativity. Instead of seeing creation as an act of mastery and control by a (male) authoritarian human subject, we can re-imagine creativity as a relational process of mutual becoming that includes both humans and non-humans, and that involves a co-creating, sharing, and participation in an already existing world instead of an origination *ex nihilo* by an individual master-designer. Humans as

8 Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image – Music – Text*, ed. and trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1978), 142–148.

9 Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” trans. J. V. Harari, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 101–120.

subjects emerge from this process, rather than being its absolute beginning. Creativity as mutual becoming is then more like what Irigaray understands by love,¹⁰ rather than control. It is not so much an imposition of will by a single creator but more like a meeting with an other in which we are—in her words—“surprised, touched, wonderstruck.”¹¹ It is more like a growing relationship of love than domination and mastery. Here the performative speech act of the creator-God, which is usually interpreted as an ordering (literally, bringing order in what previously was chaos, but also ordering as in “I want this to happen”) and as implying a kind of imperative from a divine Sovereign (“Let there be light”—Genesis 1:3), is replaced by what Irigaray calls a “speaking with” that involves an exchange, a dialogue—which includes listening and openness.¹²

Using this metaphor of love, we can thus replace the conception of creation as control and possession with one that involves a relational mode of becoming in which creativity emerges when the co-creators are open to what the human or non-human other has to say and produce, and are ready to be touched by whatever happens in the process of creation. Understood in this way, creativity requires a kind of relational receptivity. Creativity is then more about inviting and being open to what is present and becoming, rather than filling a void or ordering, conquering, and mastering chaos. And with Haraway, creativity also becomes more relational and posthuman in the sense that, with its cyborg metaphor, it has no problem with including other-than-human forms of agency.¹³ She would also endorse the view that the relation to technology and others need not be one of control and includes room for surprise.¹⁴

More fundamentally, perhaps, Haraway has criticised what she calls “the god trick”—the master Man that orders all differences. She argues that “we have mistaken that for creativity.”¹⁵ Instead, she proposes a more situated and relational view of knowing and creating. Her concept of *sympoiesis*—a concept that refers to making-with rather than the autopoiesis used in cybernetics, a making-with that is dynamic, responsive, situated, imperfect, and never done—offers a view of creation as co-becoming, where all beings participate in ongoing world-making, in “worlding-with” by earthlings rather than creation from an external, unsituated divine standpoint.¹⁶ Instead of an imposition of

10 Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (New York: Continuum, 2002).

11 Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, viii.

12 Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 7.

13 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

14 Dave Yan, “Posthuman Creativity,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 31, no. 2 (2024): 253–264, doi: 10.1177/10778004241231923.

15 Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1998): 587.

16 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 58.

form onto matter, an act of will and control and domination, creation is here understood as situated and relational co-creation. It is creation out of relation (creation *ex relatione* instead of *ex nihilo*) understood as a worlding-with.

Creating with generative AI, then, is a hybrid human/non-human process through which meaning emerges, in which surprising things can happen if one is open to them, things that are not reducible to what the human co-creator had in mind. It is not about individual control (“Does the technology do exactly what I want it to do? Is the result what I had in mind? Do I control the work?”) but more like love and making-with; it is a collaborative and participative process of meaning-making across human and nonhuman agents, which is unpredictable and in which and by which I can be touched by the new— which is now not understood as an expression of something that is in me but rather as something that is not just me, that is partly other, that surprises. This can in principle also happen in a process that involves technologies such as generative AI. The point is not who or what the singular origin is. The point is not who or what has a mind. The point is relational co-creation.

3. From Individual Creative Minds to Socio-technical Processes and Performances

Further influenced by work in STS and process philosophy (Whitehead, Bergson, Deleuze), one could also say that to create is a matter of co-performance and becoming. Inspired by Whitehead, Barker has helpfully argued that from a process philosophy angle, human-centric accounts of creativity dominant in the AI field must be criticised and replaced by an account of creativity where the production of new, surprising, and valuable objects is the result of a process conditioned by humans but also by technologies and, for instance, the political context.¹⁷ According to this view, creativity does not reside in a human mind or in the imitation of such a mind and its capabilities by computer science and AI research. An example of the latter is the influential work of Margaret Boden, which takes as its starting point for thinking about creativity everyday human abilities such as conceptual thinking, perception, and memory.¹⁸ For Boden and her colleagues in what has become the field of “computational creativity,” understanding creativity is about understanding these human abilities (and reproducing them in a computer). Following Whitehead, Barker sees human subjects not as the starting point of creativity but as the *result* of creative processes of *poiesis*. In this sense, creativity comes “before” the mind. It was always *already* more-than-human. Technologies such as AI are part of these processes and relations, potentially producing new forms of creativity and (so we may add) also shaping human minds. The individual human mind is not the beginning but the outcome.

17 Timothy Barker, “Artificial Creativity,” *Journal of Continental Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2024): 93–115.

18 Margaret Boden. *The Creative Mind* (London: Routledge, 2004).

Humans are part of the process too, but not as a single human mind: many human agents participate in the process. One could say that today we have artificial agents participating in these creative processes. And this is not only a matter of an active participation in “the cognitive process of imagination,” as Yuk Hui puts it;¹⁹ rather, the process of creative becoming itself goes beyond any human or artificial cognitive process. It was never a matter of minds or imagination alone in the first place. Based on Barker’s reading of Whitehead and keeping in mind Haraway (and perhaps Heidegger), one could say that creativity “worlds.” Or, in Barker’s own words and closer to the view I am unfolding and that is emerging here: “creativity is *performed*.”²⁰ There are creative acts, events, and performances; both humans and AI have roles in those, and the result is new worlds with new possibilities and affordances. Creativity resides in, and emerges from, these new relations between humans and non-humans, including relations to AI.

The question regarding creativity, then, is not so much whether AI can truly be creative, as Anna Longo and many others ask when they discuss “computational creativity.”²¹ This discussion presupposes that creativity resides in AI or in humans, or in both. Its thinking remains within the human/computer dichotomy and the related narrative of the battle between humans and machines—a narrative with a long history, including events such as chess competitions and, indeed, art competitions. Instead, creation must be reconceptualised as process and performance, with creativity depending on what happens in, and what emerges from, that process and performance. This approach thus pushes beyond the language of the *origins* of creativity and beyond seeing creativity as merely a cognitive process that happens in the human mind.

To develop this view of creativity, one could also use the language of “networks.” In STS and related fields, Bruno Latour has already shown that science is a matter of socio-technical networks rather than the work of individual geniuses; science and society are produced through performances involving both human and nonhuman actors (Latour calls those nonhuman actors “actants.”) Similarly, Andrew Pickering speaks of the “dance of agency”:²² he sees in science a dynamic, reciprocal interplay between human and non-human actors, where outcomes are co-produced and emergent: they are neither fully controlled nor fully predictable. Applied to creation and creativity, one could say that there is no single originator but that the creative act is distributed across networks of humans and non-humans. Both AI and humans who use the technology are part of an ongoing performative and relational process that includes algorithms, datasets, prompts, human users, and human audiences. A “dance of agency” unfolds among humans, generative

19 Yuk Hui “Imagination and the Infinite,” *Balkan Journal of Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2023): 7.

20 Barker, “Artificial Creativity.”

21 Anna Longo, “Introduction to Computational Creativity,” *Technophany* 3, no. 2 (2025): 1–3.

22 Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

AI, and other actors and actants. Creation using generative AI is a co-performance of heterogeneous actors: code, datasets, users, and audiences. Human ideas and intentions interact with digital code. There is a back-and-forth between humans, technologies, and context—with humans not always, and not necessarily, in the most active role. What Pickering writes about the dance of agency in science is applicable to using generative AI for art creation:

As active, intentional beings, scientists tentatively construct some new machine. They then adopt a passive role, monitoring the performance of the machine to see whatever capture of material agency it might effect. Symmetrically, this period of human passivity is the period in which material agency actively manifests itself. Does the machine perform as intended? ...Typically the answer is no, in which case the response is another reversal of roles: human agency is once more active...The dance of agency, seen asymmetrically from the human end, thus takes the form of a dialectic of resistance and accommodation.²³

Similarly, in creation with generative AI, there is first the active human prompting, followed by a passive human role of monitoring what the model does; then human agency becomes more active in its response (e.g. another prompt), after which the cycle repeats. This kind of creation usually involves many iterations. In art, however, the point is not necessarily whether the machine performs as intended. The artwork is not so much the realisation or application of a preconceived idea, but rather the result of that dance of agency, a process involving both humans and technology in which the technology also has an active role at times. This process can lead to surprising results that go beyond what the artist envisaged. In contrast to science, perhaps (although many cases of scientific discovery and invention have emerged precisely through such unintended results and surprises), in art this gap between human intention and result is often valued. Art creation is not necessarily a game of control.

If we view creative processes with AI through this process-performative lens, human users and generative models are not so much creators in the traditional sense as a kind of co-media through which meaning emerges. They are less “authors” or even “co-authors” than co-dancers or *interfaces of becoming*, where new creative forms emerge through iteration and interaction. In contemporary creative practice, generating texts, images, and music is less about authorship than about prompting, curation, feedback, and repetition—in other words, it consists of ritualised forms of co-creation. Indeed, one could talk about *AI rituals*: creativity is now re-conceptualised as a sequence of iterative gestures and performances in which meaning and aesthetic legitimacy are co-enacted and co-performed rather than

23 Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice*, 21–22.

merely produced and (afterwards) authorised.

This use of the concept of ritual aligns with anthropological directions that see rituals as performative. For example, Clifford Geertz sees rituals not just as expressions of religious beliefs but as performative acts; rituals *enact* those religions.²⁴ Perhaps one could say that, according to this view, the religions do not exist outside the ritual. Ritual is central to what religion is all about. Ronald L. Grimes broadens this definition of ritual to include secular and spontaneous rituals, further emphasising performance, as well as cultural change and creativity.²⁵ Rituals are a way of acting, and they can be adapted. Rituals are means of crafting meaning in dynamic contexts. Taking the meaning of ritual beyond religion, rituals can be seen as structured, symbolic, and often repetitive sets of performances through which individuals or communities express, enact, and reinforce meanings, values, or relationships—whether sacred or secular. By talking about *AI rituals*, I wish to emphasise that creation is iterative, performative, emergent, and entangled with a dynamic social and cultural hermeneutic environment. However, my use of ritual here goes beyond the symbolic and stresses the material, situated aspect of performance and enactment. AI rituals are what I have elsewhere called “technoperformances”:²⁶ meaning is produced in a social-performative and embodied way, and technologies such as generative AI are not merely ritual *tools* but play a hermeneutically active role: as performative media, they co-structure the performance, co-enact the ritual, and hence co-produce the meaning; or, rather, meaning *emerges* from these human/non-human co-performances and humans are not fully in control of the meanings that emerge from this co-creative performative process.

Combining the idea of socio-technical performances with the concept of ritual (or at least some aspects of it) thus once more reframes creation and creativity as an emergent and relational phenomenon, which does not only deconstruct the human versus computer narrative but also replaces the Genesis myth of divine origination with a conception of creativity as an ongoing performative negotiation between humans, technologies, and the (rest of the) world. Creation is a ritual in its iterative, performative, and culturally entangled aspects. Possibilities for meaning are continually produced and (re-)enacted in a dynamic interaction with the wider culture, which itself is always changing. Generative AI, then, is not a mere tool, but is part of these posthuman and socio-technological processes and rituals. Together with humans, it ritually co-performs existing cultural meanings and shapes possibilities for new meaning. (I say “possibilities” because, just as in other cases where humans play a larger role, there is no *guarantee* that new meanings

24 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

25 Ronald L. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990).

26 Mark Coeckelbergh, “Technoperformances: Using Metaphors from the Performance Arts for a Postphenomenology and Posthermeneutics of Technology Use,” *AI & Society* 35 (2020): 557–568.

arise.) The (quasi-)divine act of will, expression, and control is thereby replaced by human participation in a hybrid creative process, a process of relational becoming from which meaning emerges. Meaning is no longer only about what the creator (author, composer, artist, etc.) had in mind and wanted; what we may call (in analogy to “the author function”) “the creator function” is no longer operative. There are no Creators: only creators (with a small “c”). Thinking about creation after the Death of the Creator means acknowledging the role of the human creators in meaning-making—there are one or more humans involved, and these humans have ideas, intend things, do things, have their own unique experiences they bring, and so on—but re-defining that role in terms of participation, co-creation, and reception. Unauthorised, meaning is liberated from authoritarian control and co-created by humans and non-humans, who/which both participate in the creative process and also play a role in the reception of the outcome. The becoming of meaning and the meaning-subjects involved is then more akin to love than to the Genesis act of will and power. We moved from expression and control to emergence and relationality. As human creators, we know we do not have full control over the meaning that is generated, and—keeping in mind the lessons from the poststructuralists—we acknowledge that creators never had that control in the first place. (In that sense, the Creator was always already dead.) The outcome of the process—what emerges from it—may surprise us (or not), and we then respond to it. Creation is then an ongoing process that cannot be stopped or controlled by the human creator. Creation and creativity are more like the construction of thoughts Heinrich Von Kleist wrote about in “On the Gradual Construction of Thoughts During Speech”: according to him, thoughts gradually emerge during speech and dialogue. They are the product of a relational process, a ritualised performance. They also arise through the medium and performance of speech. Similarly, creative meaning arises in the process of creating and performing with media and technologies. Technologies like AI are now part of this process of performance and ritual. What matters, then, is not the origin but the destination: what emerges from the performance (and, as we will soon see, how this meaning is received and circulated). If we adopt this view, then the gradual construction of meaning and, indeed, thoughts—during interaction with generative AI—is possible.

4. From Individual Authority to Communicative and Collective Rituals

Another but related way to theorise creation, which helps to further bring out its social and collective dimension, is to define it as a *communicative* process. If we shift from expression to relation, and if creation is more other-directed, then this also implies that what matters, creatively, is not so much individual expression of what is in *my* head, but the establishment of communicative relations with *others* and the common, communicative creation of meaning. The question regarding creativity is then no longer primarily where meaning comes from, but where it goes: the destination of meaning.

This view aligns with reception aesthetics, which focuses on how audiences or readers interpret art and make meaning from it, rather than on the intention of the author or artist. Meaning is not fixed in the work but is created in interaction with the audience or reader. Meaning cannot be reduced to the creator or the creative work but circulates and is co-created by the audience and the reader. Moreover, as Hans R. Jauss has argued about literature,²⁷ interpretation is based on what he calls a “horizon of expectation” shaped by the culture and conventions of the time. Meaning-making, too, does not happen *ex nihilo* but always takes place within a cultural context. Creation and meaning-making by readers and audiences are always embedded in what we could call, in a Wittgensteinian sense, “creation games,” “meaning-making games,” and a “form of life.” I draw here on the *Philosophical Investigations*:²⁸ just as, according to Wittgenstein, language use is always embedded in language games and a form of life, creation and meaning-making in general are embedded in cultural structures and “grammars.” Combined with Jauss, I argue that the text or work of art never stands on its own but is interpreted within a horizon of expectations regarding genre, style, and knowledge of other works. There are specific music games, literary games, visual art games, and so on; expectations regarding the creative work are linked to these games. The meaning and legitimacy of creative works are thus never just a matter of individual origin and *authorization*; they crucially depend on collective iteration and (re-)performance, which is always partly based on the relevant games and traditions. Their performance, interpretation, and co-creation is related to, and responds to, existing creation games. Given the important role of the (collective) audience in creation and meaning-making, the question about meaning and legitimacy of a work of art is then no longer primarily about “what the artist wanted to say” or about reproduction of the authentic original (as in the work of Walter Benjamin, for example)²⁹—note again that generative AI does not copy or reproduce—but about re-performance and re-communication. This does not mean that nothing new can arise; but it *does* mean that there is no creation *ex nihilo* and that creation and the related meaning-making always have an important collective-cultural dimension.

Developing this leads us back to the notions of ritual and performance, but now in the form of a ritualistic and performative view of *communication*. With James W. Carey, we can distinguish between two views of communication: a transmission view and a ritual view.³⁰ According to the *transmission* view, which is the most common one, communication is a

27 Hans R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bathi. Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982.

28 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th rev. ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, 4th rev. ed, eds. P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

29 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

30 James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), 33.

process of transporting a message from sender to receiver through a medium. Typically, the sender and the receiver are human subjects. The medium is a technology. The aim is to ensure that the original message is transmitted to the receiver with minimal distortion and noise. What the sender had in mind should be reproduced in the mind of the receiver. Like in the Genesis model of creation, the aim is to uncover the original message and the thoughts of the original author (God or a human). Carey argues that it is also related to the desire to extend influence, control, and power over wider distances and greater populations.³¹ (In this sense it is related to nationalism, empire, and colonialism.) This model can also be found in early information theory and cryptography, which was situated in the 1940s (during and after the Second World War) and is usually seen as foundational for the digital age. Most prominently, the Shannon-Weaver model of communication, based on Claude Shannon's article "A Mathematical Theory of Communication," explains communication in terms of a source, a transmitter, a channel, a receiver, and a destination.³² The source (human messenger) produces the original message, which is translated into a signal by the transmitter and sent using a channel. The receiver then translates the signal back into the original message and makes it available to the destination (human receiver).

According to what Carey calls the *ritual* view of communication, however, communication is conceptualised very differently. What matters is not the transmission of information but social and cultural rituals: repetitive performances that shape and define a shared reality characteristic of a particular community. Whereas the transmission view is about control, the ritual view is about shaping and maintaining the common, the community. In Carey's own words: "a ritual view conceives communication as a process through which a shared culture is created, modified, and transformed."³³ Communication is then about sharing, participation, association, fellowship, commonness, communion, community.³⁴ It is not about transmitting messages but about maintaining the social bond. Its meaning is more akin to what happens in religious ritual: it is about drawing persons "together in fellowship and commonality."³⁵ Communication as ritual is not merely a means to the social and cultural; it constitutes them. It relates to what Wittgenstein called a form of life, yet it does not only reflect or represent a form of life; it also enacts it. Communication is a kind of action.³⁶ Influenced by John Dewey,³⁷ Carey understands society as existing in communication and claims that problems of communication are linked to problems of community.³⁸ (In particular, with Dewey, he is concerned about whether the West

31 Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 33.

32 Claude Shannon, "A Mathematical Theory of Communication," *Bell System Technical Journal* 27, no. 3 (1948): 379–423.

33 Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 33.

34 Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 15.

35 Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 33.

36 Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 64.

37 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 5.

38 Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 11, 26.

can realise the associative life in the form of a democratic social order.)³⁹ Given this active and enactive role of communication, cultural change is possible. A ritual view of communication and culture is thus not necessarily conservative. Carey believes that by changing our model of communication, we can also change our form of life; we can transform our reality.⁴⁰ Furthermore, according to Carey, technologies and media are not separate from culture but shape the worlds in which they operate, co-shape society and culture, co-shape our form of life:

Technology, the hardest of material artefacts, is thoroughly cultural from the outset: an expression and creation of the very outlooks and aspirations we pretend it merely demonstrates. ... media of communication are not merely instruments of will and purpose but definite forms of life: organisms, so to say, that reproduce in miniature the contradictions in our thought, action, and social relations.⁴¹

Technology thus not only plays an instrumental role in communication (e.g. as transmitter or receiver or supposedly neutral medium); instead, one could say that *society exists in technology* as much as it exists in communication, now defined as the shaping and maintenance of a shared social reality through ritual performances. Again, the destination of meaning is important here: the communicative destination is the main site of meaning. What matters is not so much the thoughts and intentions of an individual creator; what matters is what we share and do together. What matters is the collective performance. What matters is the ritual.

Contemporary electronic music, and, for instance, contemporary performances of classical music, illustrate this primacy of ritual: what matters to the meaning of these works is less the original composer and what they had in mind, and more the interpretation, the mixing, and the performance. Like classical music performances, electronic music events are rituals. Whereas the author or composer is gradually pushed to the background (though still seen in somewhat Romantic terms), the most important role falls to the performer and DJ—with DJs themselves becoming mainly performers. As technopriests and -priestesses of the technoperformance, they lead the ritual. Similarly, the conductor (and first violinist) leads the performance. The original composer (dead or alive) is less important, especially in electronic music. Yet while the ritual view is clearer in these cases, the creation of “original” music in other cases also has a strong posthumanist, relational, and ritual-performative aspect. Music—all music—was always already ritual and performative. It was also always already technologically mediated and linked to specific games and forms of life. Musicians use instruments in a way that goes beyond mere instrumentality (what

39 Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 63.

40 Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 64.

41 Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 7.

contemporary rock music is, for example, cannot be defined apart from the electric guitar), always draw on what is already there in the community (the specific musical tradition and its creation games, other performances, earlier genres by which the current genre is influenced, the form of life in which it is embedded—think about blues and soul as roots of rock music and how rock music is linked to the Western form of life), and contribute to the ritual maintenance and sometimes questioning of the culture (for instance rock culture is ritually maintained by means of performances and at the same time boundaries are pushed and shift). No musician creates *ex nihilo*; despite our Romantic desires and performances, there is no such thing as a musician-God. Musicians create *ex machina*, and their instruments are part of the performative and ritualistic process of creation and re-creation.

Another example where the role of technology, collaboration, and re-performative practice becomes very clear is meme creation and meme culture, where individual authority and origin matter less than sharing and re-posting as communicative performance. Few people care who created a specific meme circulated on digital social platforms. What matters is the meaning, which is always a meaning in relation to its context. Someone who does not know the context (e.g. a specific political context) will not understand the meme. Moreover, the meme does not remain the same; others (usually unknown meme-makers) adapt it, which in turn circulates it. What matters is the communicative gesture and the performance, and its reception by others. It is also a thoroughly technological practice: it not only uses apps but also only came into existence with the rise of digital social media.

Generative AI, then, is less a medium through which artists “author” their creations than a ritual technology that enables iterative performances that shape social and cultural reality and meaning. According to the ritual view of communication, it matters less who the author/creator is. As Foucault put it at the end of his essay: “What matter who’s speaking?” What matters is the social, communal, and collective meanings that are created (or not); what matters is the ritual performance as a maintenance and (sometimes) questioning of our shared world. What matters for creativity and art is the reception, not understood as the undistorted reception of an original message from an authorial origin, but the performative and ritualistic collective meaning-making by audience and readers. Artists and authors participate in this process and performance, and they have a specific role in the ritual and performance, but they do not dictate meaning and have no authoritarian control over it. What is important and interesting with regard to generative AI is not whether humans or non-humans (machines) have created a text or a work of art (the answer is that both have been involved in the process, that both play their specific roles in the technoperformances and rituals), but whether the ritual co-creations understood as iterative performative events and processes generate something (seen as “new” or “old”) that is of value and significance for the community and the collective, whether it contributes to creating and maintaining a shared reality and common good—indeed,

whether the ritual is a real ritual and *establishes* and maintains, and not merely represents, relations. It is not only the case that the meaning of what is produced with generative AI needs to be collectively negotiated *afterwards*; the creative process *itself* as mediated by generative AI is meaning-making and has *already* a collective-ritualistic character. Rituals of prompting, remixing, curating, and sharing are not things that happen after and in addition to a pre-existing human origination or expression, but themselves constitute a form of ritualistic posthuman creative process and performance in which both humans and non-humans play a role. What matters for creativity, then, is not so much the individual origin or individual subject but rather the outcome of human-machine co-creation for us, collectively: readers, spectators, audiences, communities, and societies. The Death of the Creator is the birth of a communicative form of collectivity, which is not so much a “thing” or super-agent (a Collective that has a similar kind of role and agency as the Author or Creator) but rather an ongoing process and space or in-between where meaning is co-created, circulated, and ritually (re-)performed.

5. Does Art have a Future? Some Implications for Aesthetics, AI Research, and Politics of Art

Does art have a future, given the existence of generative AI? If we stick to the old humanist and individualist view of creation (the Genesis model) and the transmission view of communication, generative AI threatens human privilege and can only be a potential distortion machine for human-human communication. Then the “really” creative work is seen as a privilege of the human; AI is in the way; it’s a jammer. If, however, we embrace a posthumanist, process, relational, performative, and ritual view of creation and communication, then AI can participate in these processes and rituals of creation without necessarily constituting a problem for creativity. Technologies and media have always been part of our creative and communicative rituals, and have shaped what we are today as humans, as creators, and as communities and societies. Seen from this perspective, art and creativity certainly have a future, potentially even a bright one, since new creative-communicative possibilities may be opened up.

For the project of artificial intelligence, this means that when it comes to creativity and creation, the focus should shift from the imitation of human cognitive abilities—let’s say, the design of artificial minds and imagination—to the design of creative-communicative processes, performances, and rituals that include both humans and machines. In this view, the goal of AI research does not concern the single human or artificial mind of individual entities and their capabilities, but what emerges from the broader process and ritual. For example, if one really wants to transcend current creativity and human creativity (let’s call it the project of *supercreativity* in analogy to the project of superintelligence) then the focus should not be on the development of a single powerful AI system as such but

on the development of broader processes, performances, and rituals that could lead to results that today's humans cannot even begin to imagine. We can learn from the previous pages that whether such a project is possible would depend on the shaping of the right kind of performative and communicative *conditions*, rather than on human minds or the architecture of artificial systems as such. Moreover, like current superintelligence projects and related ideas, which fail not only technically but also communicatively because they appear meaningless, supercreativity would only make sense if integrated with the forms of life we live and want.

For the ethics and politics of art, the view that emerged in this paper also has significant implications. Many of our institutions (art institutions such as art schools, museums and galleries, literary publishers, and music production companies, but also art markets and legal institutions such as copyright frameworks, etc.) are based on valuing and supporting individual genius, individual intellectual property rights, etc. But if creation and creativity are collective processes, performances, and rituals, and if cultural meaning is based on those collective rituals, then we need to re-think our institutions in ways that shift the emphasis to communication and ritual. For instance, we need to reflect on how to tie responsibility and rewards for art creation to communicative and performative outcomes and circulation rather than to origin (alone), while ensuring that individual human artists retain some responsibility and receive compensation for their participation in the processes and rituals of creation.

Moving toward a more relational and collective way of thinking about the ethics and politics of creation may imply that we need to create cultural infrastructures that are not so much, or not only, about supporting individual artists but also about supporting those rituals. Or rather, the reason why we support individual artists, writers, and other creators should not be based on their individual rights and the "originality" of their works alone, but also and mainly on the meaning of their artistic participations create for the community, on the performance, ritual, destination, and *communicative* value of what they do. More work is needed on how this could be done in practice.

Moreover, if technologies and media such as generative AI are so important for and in creative processes, performances, and rituals, then critical reflection on, and regulation of, these technologies is crucial. We need to reflect on how to promote and sustain plural, participatory, and democratic forms of collective meaning-making within these posthuman ecologies and indeed *with* these rituals, in which not only humans but also technologies and media already play a crucial role, and in which these technologies and media should not be taken as given but seen as needing evaluation as much as we evaluate the human creative participants. As is well known, currently plural collective meaning-making is threatened by fragmentation, polarisation, and phenomena such as epistemic bubbles and echo chambers. There are also tendencies towards homogenization and uniformity

linked to current technologies and platforms. Addressing this requires regulation of tech companies and a democratisation of tech development in general.

Generative AI does not operate and perform on its own; it is often embedded in digital platforms and infrastructures (e.g. cloud, data centres). Nowadays, AI-based platforms, in particular, structure the conditions of communicative performance, governing visibility, participation, and legitimacy of creative works. A critical evaluation of current AI rituals with generative AI needs to include an analysis and evaluation of these conditions. For instance, in music, a platform such as Spotify is not a neutral medium but governs which music performances and rituals are visible, included, and legitimised, thereby shaping and at least co-governing their (potential) communicative reach, value, and meaning. Do we want to leave this important task entirely in private hands? Currently, the development of generative AI is dominated by a few tech companies. What rituals does this create? What does this infrastructure mean for music communities, for art communities? What forms of life does it support or hinder? Furthermore, it has become increasingly clear that there are material conditions for performances with AI in general, involving the exploitation of human labour and having a negative impact on climate and the natural environment. A politics of art and tech, then, understood as a politics of communication and ritual, needs to be attentive to those problems. If creativity with generative AI is to become a making-with, we need to ask who currently owns the conditions of making-with and what can be done to improve these conditions.

6. Conclusion: The Future of Creativity in the Age of Generative AI

In the age of generative AI, creativity no longer emanates from a singular creator-originator but unfolds through communicative and performative rituals and processes that involve and bind human and nonhuman actors. By proclaiming the Death of the Creator and moving beyond thinking in terms of the human/computer dichotomy, this paper proposes a posthuman *communicative poetics of creation* grounded in relationality, process, performative iteration, and collective and ritual meaning-making: a performative unfolding of relation and communion rather than an expressive act of origin, a shared ritual of meaning-making rather than a process of transmission and control. Rather than ushering in the necessary loss of creativity (following a supposed “death” of the creator in the more mundane sense that humans are replaced by machines), the proposed conceptual shift that reconceptualises creation and creativity in a ritual-communicative way seems to rather open up new possibilities for co-creation, some of which might well be better ethically and politically speaking. If we see creation not in terms of human expression or cognitive operations but in terms of hybrid performance and ritual, if we shift from origin to destination and from individual expression and possession to communal participation and the staging of creativity, if we change the aim of creation from control and domination

to love and making-with, if we see the human role in creation as a participation in ongoing hybrid *communicative becoming*, then this reconceptualization may well support and accompany the emergence of some interesting, meaningful, and ethically and politically responsive forms of meaning making in the age of generative AI. If we frame *AI rituals* as communicative and performative acts and events of collective meaning-making, and if we manage to create the conditions for their ritual-communicative success, then creativity and art seem to have a future in the age of generative AI.

Note, finally, that my construction of the concept of “AI rituals” draws on the performative and communicative aspects of rituals, emphasising their social form and functions. This leaves out other approaches to ritual, for instance accounts that focus on transformation of consciousness or relations with more-than-human or other-than-human powers (e.g., spirits) and other worlds. It would be interesting to explore what “AI rituals” would mean based on such readings, considering both Western and non-Western rituals and religions.

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Yan, Dave. "Posthuman Creativity: Unveiling Cyborg Subjectivity Through ChatGPT."
Qualitative Inquiry 31, no. 2 (2024): 253-264. doi: 10.1177/10778004241231923.