

The Art of Artificial Creation

A Philosophical Guide towards Approaching Image Generating AI

Iris van der Horn

Erasmus school of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam

July 17, 2023

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been rapidly developing over the past few years. To the point where it seems an unavoidable topic. One of the many things AI can now do is generate original images. Someone can go on the internet, look for an image generating AI (Like Stable Diffusion) and give it a description, for example, “Robot in the style of Monet”. One could even upload an image of what they want it to resemble, like Monet’s *Woman with a Parasol, Facing Left*. Then, as simple as that, a brand-new painting is created:



The result is something simultaneously new and familiar, Monet his signature brushstrokes, but not quite. In this case the machine nature of the creator is betrayed by small mistakes, like the left arm blending into the background. Still, it serves to illustrate the possibilities, to help imagine what more advanced AI could create. AI is characterized by its ability to learn and improve upon itself. As it will keep learning and improving, it will become increasingly difficult to tell AI images apart from human made ones. Now, there seems to be a sense of unease when discussing the possibilities of AI, when confronted with this idea that we could no longer distinguish between AI and human creation. I believe part of this uneasy feeling is because of a general unfamiliarity with AI. More specifically, there seems to be a lack of direction in how to view AI generated images. There especially seems to be uncertainty on whether AI generated images can and should be viewed as art, and even more so if that would then make image generating AI artists.

I want to offer some clarity in the complex discussion on image generating AI and art. Specifically, the main question I want to answer in this text is if image generating AI should be considered artists.¹ In answering this question, I want to discuss different ways of approaching image generating AI as well as the different roles an AI as artist could play in

¹ I use the term ‘image generating AI’ to refer to all, both current and future, AI programs able to generate images (Stable Diffusion, DALL·E 2, Midjourney, and many more). Therefore, I will throughout this text use ‘image generating AI’ as plural.

relation to an artwork. To begin answering this question I will be defining what image generating AI are. I will attempt to do so firstly by comparing image generating AI to other forms of technology, and especially to other technology made for creating images. Then secondly, I will define image generating AI in relation to humans creating images. In doing so I will rely largely on continental philosophy of technology as well as anthropological notions of human tool use and creation. Once I have discussed both these questions, I will discuss if image generating AI can be artists. Thereby not just discussing what image generating AI needs in order to be considered artists, but also considering arguments as to why image generating AI could not be artists. To this end I will use continental aesthetic philosophy in determining the relation between an artist, an artwork and the tools used to create an artwork. Finally, this will enable me to answer the question if image generating AI should be considered artists. I will thereby question if the artist is an image generating AI changes the way an artwork is looked at and interpreted, as well as bring into question if the artist needs to be considered at all when viewing an artwork.

By the end I hope to have shown multiple points to consider when discussing image generating AI and if they should be considered artists. This would make it possible to decide whether an AI image should be considered as an artwork, and more completely, if the AI program should then also be considered the artist. Ideally this theory can be held on too, whatever the future of AI images holds and no matter how fast the technology develops. So that hopefully, when confronted with an AI image that uncertainty is gone, and instead meaning or enjoyment, or both can be found.

1. Defining Image Generating AI

The first step in deciding if image generating AI should be considered artists is defining what image generating AI are. Now, defining image generating AI is not a simple task. The biggest challenge is that AI is in constant development, therefore the abilities of image generating AI and the qualities of the images it creates are constantly changing and improving. Because image generating AI is so new and still changing, former definitions might not be sufficiently relevant. Furthermore, there is still much debate on defining AI as an intelligent entity and otherwise to using words related to human abilities to describe AI functioning. To overcome these challenges, I will be defining AI by relating it to already better-defined concepts and discuss what separates AI from these. I will start by giving historical definitions of AI as a form of technology (1.1). In doing so I will discuss the traditional as well as the modern and Heideggerian definitions of technology. Because technology as such is very broad, I will focus on what separates image generating AI from other forms of technology used to create images (1.2). Keeping this comparison in mind I will then be questioning how technology can impact art and in what ways it has already done so (1.3). Lastly, I want to discuss how to define image generating AI, not in comparison to technology but in comparison to how humans create (1.4). By the end of this part, I will then be able to define image generating AI in a way that will help me to determine if image generating AI can be artists.

1.1 Defining Image Generating AI as Technology

To start defining image generating AI, I will first define artificial intelligence in general, starting from the beginning. The discipline of AI commenced around the late 1940s, generating a discourse and attempts focused on combining computer science with philosophy and psychology in order to understand intelligent behaviour and be able to artificially create it in the form of intelligent computer programs (Sharples, Hogg, Hutchison, Torrance, & Young, 1989, p. 1). The most influential text of this time is Alan Turing's 1950 paper "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" in which he discusses the standard of determining machine intelligence by its ability to emulate human behaviour. From that moment on AI could be defined as a computer program able to emulate human ways of problem solving and thinking. The first successful attempts at AI were made around the same time. These early AI focused on rules and logic, able to learn more due to the use of symbols. Philosopher John Haugeland (1985) referred to this as Good Old-Fashioned Artificial Intelligence (GOF AI). This type of AI is now generally seen as a failed project because it did not succeed to emulate human ways of thinking. The failing is blamed mostly on the limits of its solely logistic reasoning and the over-reliance on symbols; GOF AI was not sufficiently grounded in the constantly changing real world. Later attempts of AI relied more on learning and recognizing complex patterns rather than on systems of logic. Those who took up these new methods, referred to as deep learning, were inspired by the increased knowledge of the functioning of the human brain. The most recent centuries of AI are marked by the increasingly realistic aim of what Searle (1980) termed Strong AI: AI with capacities such as reasoning, planning, and problem-solving, not just based on human functioning, but inseparable from human minds.

So, image generating AI can be defined as a form of AI. They are computer programs able to generate unique images through learning methods inspired by human functioning. Now while this is a specific definition, it does not immediately help in deciding if these computer programs can be considered artists. Taking a step back, image generating AI, being computer programs, can be defined as a form of modern technology. Now, technology can be viewed in

multiple ways. In its most traditional definition, it holds the notion of *Techne*. *Techne*, as used originally by Plato and Aristotle, describes craft as practical knowledge. It describes things like the making and applying of tools and use of craftsmanship. Technology in this sense is any tool, from a hammer to a crane. It seems that all technology was defined by its practical use: “A man-made means to an end established by man” as Heidegger put it in his “The Question Concerning Technology” (1977, p. 5). However, as technology developed, modern technology becomes additionally defined by its reliance on modern physics and scientific knowledge. This is also apparent in how AI relies on modern cognitive research. In fact, in modern technology there is not just a reliance on modern science, but a mutualistic relationship with it. Technology is shaped by modern science, but it in turn also shapes what modern science can do. Heidegger, in the context of this relation with science, discusses technology as more than just a tool. Technology, according to him, is a mode of revealing; it brings forth something that was not there before. For example, the need to provide energy to power machines revealed the usable energy present in nature. AI can fit within this mode very well, especially considering how the technology is made possible due to studying the human brain functioning, and how in turn AI also reveals new things about the functioning of human consciousness. Heidegger here also stresses that “The essence of technology is in a lofty sense ambiguous, Such ambiguity points to the mystery of all revealing, i.e., of truth” (p. 33). Following Heidegger’s line of thought in defining AI as modern technology, there is room for ambiguity, thereby also leaving room for considering image generating AI as an artist.

So, image generating AI, can most straightforwardly be defined as a form of artificial intelligence able to create images. A broader definition of AI would be to define it as a form of modern technology inspired by human ways of thinking and learning. In defining image generating AI as technology, it is defined both by its practical use and by its relation to scientific development, thereby leaving room for change and ambiguity. In considering a Heideggerian definition of modern technology as a mode of revealing, image generating AI might reveal new ideas on creating images and perhaps on how art is created and viewed.

1.2 Comparing Image Generating AI to Other Technology

What separates image generating AI from other AI is its ability to create images, the question now is what makes image generating AI different from other technology related to creation. To answer this question, I want to start by distinguishing between the two possible goals that underly all creation: a practical goal and a creative goal. Something created with a practical goal has a clear direct use. Most, if not all, technology falls within this category, the term itself being defined by practical use. Things created with a creative goal on the other hand have a more indirect use, generally relating to expression, most (if not all) art belongs to this category. Now this is not a harsh distinction, in fact a lot of creations with a practical goal cannot be created without some form of creativity. As Hannah Arendt (1998) mentions, even the simplest tools still have a shape. Therefore, she claims: “There is in fact no thing that does not in some way transcend its functional use²” (p. 173). This is especially apparent when it comes to the creation of images. Even if the image is created with a practical goal, such as to explain or to sell something, it does so through a creative visual means. So, because image generating AI are made to create images, they have both a practical goal and a creative goal.

² I want to add that in the digital age some technology (including some AI) exists only as an unseen program in a computer, thereby only having a digital form of numbers and figures and really not transcending their function in any way.

In this way image generating AI is similar to other technology made for both practical and creative use, such as photography or filming equipment.

What makes image generating AI especially interesting is that they are both a product of human creation and, taking their task as an image creator seriously, capable of creation on their own. Unlike cameras or paint brushes, Image generating AI can create by themselves, needing only a human instruction and no other human engagement. Generally, when thinking of machines creating products by only following instructions, one thinks of mass production; factories where machines do exactly the same thing over and over again, making copies of the same product. The difference with AI image generators is that they do not mass produce the same image, but always create something more or less unique. Thereby already making it difficult to compare image generating AI to any other machines meant for creation. Machines follow a very specific goal when they are ‘creating’, they strictly follow their detailed instructions and programming. But what is asked of Image generating AI is quite different from what is asked of most machines, in that it requires something similar to creative creation, to make decisions not based solely on logic, but also based on some form of expression. While other machines can follow clear instructions and then produce something exactly as instructed, an AI image generator, even when given a clear instruction like “robot in the style of Monet”, must still do some ‘creative’ decision making. Decisions like blending the parasol into a hat, giving the robot big eyes, or making its face a cube shape cannot be explained through solely practical reasoning. Within a strictly technological approach, decisions are based on what has been learned, by following the programmed process. Despite this, decisions made by an AI image generator cannot be exactly predicted, because the program is based in more than just logic. In fact, an AI image is unique each time, even with the same instruction. This is the biggest difference to keep in mind between AI and other forms of machine creation. Having image generating AI means programming and instructing a machine to be creative, or rather to make its own choices. As, in asking an AI to create a new image, we ask for it to create something of which not every detail can be put in a clear instruction. Image generating AI can then be defined as a form of modern technology able to create unique images by making decisions based on what they learn from the information they have access to.

1.3 How Technology Impacts Art

Now, viewing image generating AI as technology, does not at all exclude them from the realm of art. Technology, from a general point of view, actually plays a large role in shaping art. Therefore, I want to discuss how other forms of technology related to creation have impacted art and how image generation AI might do so in a similar way. More specifically, I would like to discuss Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the impact of photography and film on art. As discussed, what separates image generating AI from these other technologies is how quickly and easily it can produce images with minimal human involvement. I therefore also want to discuss Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s theory on how technological mass production is changing art as well as the larger culture surrounding art, and thereby discuss how image generating AI relates to this process.

Philosopher Walter Benjamin starts his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1969) with a quote by French poet Paul Valéry, a part of which reads “We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion

of art”. Now, reading this today I cannot help but wonder if image generating AI might be part of such innovations. To avoid reaching too far into the realm of speculation, I want to rather discuss how technology of the past has shaped art, perhaps to find a pattern here in which AI might fit.

Benjamin discusses the innovation of reproduction as something which has drastically changed art, specifically technical reproduction such as through photography and film. Art has always been reproducible in the sense that a replica can be made, or otherwise in forms like stamps and woodcuts. However, Benjamin argues that with photography and film and sound reproduction, the process become much more direct. Still no matter how good a reproduction of something is, Benjamin points out how it will always lack the presence of the original in time and space. The unique existence of an artwork, including its physical location and the history it has been through, cannot be replicated. Now this unique existence of the work is what might be referred to as its authenticity. Benjamin then argues that “the whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical – and, of course, not only technical – reproducibility” (p. 222). At the same time the concept of authenticity loses meaning if the original medium is photography or film. Benjamin gives the example of making several prints from a photograph, and to then ask for the original ‘authentic’ print makes no sense.

This concept of authenticity is especially up for discussion when considering image generating AI. These images both originally exist as a form of reproducible media, but are at the same time, be it to varying extends, based in the (semi-)reproduction of authentic images. In the introduction of this text, for example, there is an original image, clearly based in the reproduction of Monet’s *Woman with a Parasol, Facing Left*. Benjamin explains how “the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (p. 222). However, in the case of AI images the idea of an ‘original’ can be questioned. On the one hand the AI image is original in the sense that it is a new image, it is not a direct reproduction. While on the other hand, this image is made entirely by reproducing elements of a large number of other, ‘original’ images. Now Benjamin also introduces some nuance in the concept of authenticity when discussing photo- and video- graphic reproduction. He points out how in some reproductions, aspects or effects can be captured that escape the natural vision, and how technical reproductions can put the copy of the original into situations which would otherwise not be possible for the original itself, creating new inauthentic versions of an authentic work. Much like with AI images it can be debated whether these versions are artworks on their own, or not art at all, but only a different form of reproduction.

Benjamin further discusses how technological reproduction relates to a change in the traditional value of the cultural heritage of art. Part of the authenticity of an artwork relates to its history and how it is embedded in tradition. Tradition itself being constantly changing and alive, thereby the way an artwork is viewed also constantly changes. However, while different paintings, statues and buildings have had different cultural meanings and interpretations, Benjamin argues that due to their uniqueness some form of ritualistic or social function is always recognized and has always remained, even if only as a symbol of beauty. With new reproducible art forms, like photography and film, art is freed from its dependence on ritual. Art is no longer designed for a social or ritualistic function, but it can be designed for reproducibility. So, with the introduction of large-scale reproduction, art gains more emphasis with respect of its exhibition value, rather than its cult value. The most important conclusion in Benjamin’s essay is then how “mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the

masses towards art” (p. 233). Where paintings are originally not suited for organized reception by the masses, films specifically are. Everyone is invited to discuss it, to give their opinion on it, at the same time. Now with the internet this has become true not only of film but just as much of paintings. Even if an artwork can only be viewed in one place, its reception can be shared and discussed by the masses everywhere and at any moment. Mass reaction towards film is now as much possible as towards fine art paintings. The public has taken over the position of the critic. However, Benjamin argues that rather than being critical, the public tends to be an absent-minded examiner. Now more than ever “the mass is a matrix from which all traditional behaviour towards works of art issues today in a new form. Quantity has been transmuted into quality. The greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation” (p. 236).

Arguably, as the traditional attitude towards art has changed due to mechanical reproduction, so too can it change due to image generating AI. On the one hand, having a machine which can quickly generate art resembling images, might cause a shift in the public towards being more attentive to elements of authenticity and artistry; a shift towards a mass appreciation for art that in no way could have been made or be imitated using AI. On the other hand, the easy accessibility for anyone to create an image resembling an artwork might push the idea of authenticity even further away in the background.

The one change I dare to be certain of, is one Benjamin also discusses. He mentions how differentiating between the value of different art mediums, like painting and photography or theatre and film, quickly becomes confusing and devious, precisely because of the changing character of culture, of the historical transformation underlying the impact and value of these art forms. So, relating to this, even if AI images might be excluded from being art, the way these images act similarly to some art, specifically being able to be reproduced, printed, and spread the same way as photographs and images of artworks, will make the discussion on both their value and the value of different art mediums even more confusing and devious.

As becomes clear in discussing Benjamin, the line between what is reproduction and what is art can quickly become confusing. Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) take this even further, discussing how it is not only mechanical reproduction of art, but mass production in general which blurs the line of what is and what is not considered art. So, it would be too simple to conclude that just because image generating AI are a form of technology, the images they create are only machine products and therefore not works of art. Horkheimer and Adorno discuss how art has increasingly become a product of mass consumption. They argue that while art has always been a product, “what is new is not that it is a commodity, but that today it deliberately admits it is one; that art renounces its own autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumption goods constitutes the charm of novelty” (p. 157). And where Benjamin mentions cult value being replaced with exhibition value, Horkheimer and Adorno similarly mention a use value in the reception of cultural commodities, being replaced by an exchange value. “In place of enjoyment there are gallery-visiting and factual knowledge: the prestige seeker replaces the connoisseur” (p. 158).

Now, if art is looked at as just a product, then arguably even if AI images are defined only as products of technology, they could still fulfil the same role as art. However, Adorno (2013) warns for viewing art as just a product for aesthetic enjoyment. Because “art perceived strictly aesthetically is art aesthetically misperceived” (p. 8). He argues that instead there is a certain

‘other’ to be sensed when experiencing art. This ‘other’ in art can be anything relating to its theme and historical context, the life it has come to lead. The identity of the artwork, this otherness, essentially comes from how the artwork exists. However, Adorno continues by asserting that art has become very self-consciousness, starting with movements like cubism and dada. The artwork constitutes itself in relation to what it is not, and to what makes it an artwork in the first place. This self-consciousness results in art countering itself, to be culture-critical, thereby casting of the illusion of its purely aesthetic or spiritual being. “Art is the social antithesis of society, not directly deducible from it” (2013, p. 10). In this sense, while AI images certainly contribute to the mass producing of images and thereby to a culture industry where art is commodified, there is still something separating the AI images from even this commodified art. Unlike artworks, AI images seem to simply be part of the industry without in any way being critical or conscious of this.

So, An AI, when defined as only technology, cannot create an image with any culture-critical awareness. However, an AI image could still be used, be framed in such a way that it comments on or shows awareness of the current culture and the role of AI in it. On top of that there can be an ‘other’ present in AI images, in that they are not created by humans, that there is in this sense a unique modern context to the image. So, image generating AI, despite being defined as technology, can still create images which might be considered art. These AI generated images could then be considered another new way in which art attempts to counter itself. Considering this, as well as how technology has previously shaped art, I cannot imagine that image generating AI will not, in one way or another, impact the world of art.

1.4 Comparing Image Generating AI to Human Creators

Now, considering that unlike other technology image generating AI might be able to create art, it is worth defining image generating AI not just in comparison to other technology, but also by its resemblance to human creation. Having previously described the way in which image generating AI creates images as making creative choices based on what they learned from the information they have access to. It can be questioned how this is any different from the way in which humans create. I want to question if AI should really be defined as technology at all, if in making its own choices based on learning rather than on practical use, it does not become something entirely of its own. I want to compare and discuss what separates image generating AI from ‘human creators’, and specifically from humans creating images.

Creation has always been viewed as something inherently human. Hannah Arendt (1998) discusses creation through the concept of homo faber: the idea of humans as makers, using tools to cope with and control their condition. Arendt emphasizes how this separates us from the natural realm and restricts us to a realm specific to human life, a realm with institutions and culture. Creation then, does not have to be strictly practical, strictly related to labour, to survival. In coping with our condition there is just as much a need for creativity dedicated to works of art, poetry, and writing. Arendt stresses the necessity of all forms of artificiality in the following statement:

In order to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for men during their life on earth, the human artifice must be a place fit for action and speech, for activities not only entirely useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from

the manifold activities of fabrication by which the world itself and all things in it are produced. (p. 173)

Viewed in this light AI image generators are comparable to human creators in that they to rely on artifice. In a quite literal sense, the images created using AI show a fabricated world, a produced world. However unlike in human creation it does not seem that AI creates for any reason of shaping the world, it does not seem to want to turn the world into a home. In other words, the position from which an image generating AI creates images is very different from a human position.

To better explain the extend of this difference in position I want to discuss philosopher Helmuth Plessner (2019). Like Arendt, Plessner explains our need to create things as a means to cope with our condition. He specifies this unique human condition as characterized by our ‘excentric positionality’, which comes down to us existing in a world, with the ability to reflect both on the world and on our position in this world from an outside perspective. Plessner thereby emphasises that simply creating is not enough, but that we must invent as well. We must create things that are new. Constantly striving after novelty, wanting to always outdo ourselves, Plessner argues, is an attempt to find stability within this positionality: “Excessiveness-falsely absolutized as a tendency of life to enhance itself-is the necessary form taken by the human attempt to compensate for his own dividedness, lack of balance, and nakedness” (p. 297). This constant need for novelty would explain why we now create machines as complex as we do, how we have come to create AI in the first place. Plessner argues that this need will continue endlessly, because no matter how excessive, creation is never quite sufficient to overcome our human positionality. But, when an image generating AI creates an image, it does not have a human positionality to overcome. It seems to lack the need for creativity. However, while an image generating AI might not feel the need to create like humans do, it still creates, and it still seems to make certain choices in order to do so. So, despite the position of image generating AI being different from the human position, there might still be some form of creativity necessary to overcome it.

So, what then might this AI form of creativity look like? Well, besides explaining why humans feel a need to invent and create, Plessner also attempts to explain what exactly creativity is. According to him, the secret to creativity has to do with some sort of “fortunate touch [glücklichen Griff]” (p. 299). Plessner describes this touch as an encounter between a human and the world. It is not only a matter of thinking something but also of converting the possible to the actual. This means creativity depends on circumstances, on the state in which the world is encountered. In other words, creativity does not come out of nowhere: Humans could not have invented computers without the previous discovery of electricity. Still, Plessner asserts that besides its reliance on the world and reality, human creation remains artificial: “The creative touch is an achievement of expression. This lends the act of realization, which is dependent on the materials provided by nature, its artificial character” (p. 299). This reaffirms that, as concluded earlier with Arendt, the artificial nature of AI does not separate it from human creators. In addition, it does not exclude image generating AI from potential creativity. What does separate image generating AI from human creators is the position from which it creates, and thereby the way in which it encounters the world.

According to Plessner, creativity is an achievement of expression. It must then be discussed what an image generating AI expresses. Plessner distinguishes between two ways of

expression. Firstly, expressing oneself in a directly communicative and social sense and secondly expressing oneself in a more abstract sense, related to experience, feelings, and fantasies. The first stems from existing together with others and the latter is related to “the tendency to preserve and structure what is fleeting in life by giving it form” (p. 300). Image generating AI, existing in a world together with humans and made for creating images seems to be tasked with both ways of expression at the same time. They are assigned to create images following a directly communicated instruction, but just as much an image always contains a certain abstract feeling or atmosphere. In following Plessner’s idea of expression as preserving that which is fleeting in life, it must be considered that AI have a much different experience of what is fleeting. After all AI are designed to last forever, they cannot die the way humans do, and therefore they can hardly be aware of the fleetingness of life.

So, while it seems reductive to define image generating AI as a form of modern technology, following Plessner, it seems just as reductive to define image generating AI as similar to humans. I would say that image generating AI is best defined as artificial intelligence, as something artificial, not human, creating an image relying on some form of intelligence, in this case the ability to learn and make decisions based on the information it has access too. This simple definition still leaves room for multiple ways of approaching image generating AI, specifically they could be viewed as either a tool for humans to create images with, or as independent creators, creating their own images. I would argue that additionally, image generating AI can be defined by what they can do, which is creating images, and arguably creating art. So, whether an image generating AI should be defined as an artist then depends on whether it can create art.

2. Can Image Generating AI be Artists?

Having shown the ways in which AI can be defined, I want to return to the main question. To know if image generating AI should be considered artists it must first be discussed if they can justifiably be considered artists in the first place. This means discussing if image generating AI can create their own art and in turn if being able to create their own art then indeed makes them artists? To figure this out I will start by defining what makes an artist (2.1). Following this definition, I will discuss if image generating AI can fit within this definition. To do so I will address the question if image generating AI has the intentionality and the mental states necessary to create art (2.2). Following this I will discuss the relation between artists and art and thereby if image generating AI could have this same relation to the images it creates (2.3). In addition, I will consider the opposing idea that an image generating AI by itself cannot create art, and that AI generated images can only become art due to a human artist using an AI as a tool (2.4). To this end I will examine if there is a difference between a human artist using image generating AI as a tool and a human artist not using image generating AI. By the end of this part, I wish to discuss the idea of a human artist creating an image with AI, not used as a tool but treated instead a fellow artist with which they are collaborating.

2.1 Defining an Artist

The straightforward definition of an artist is someone who creates art. This simple definition, however, has two important underlying implications. The first is in creation, because creating art implies an intention, and thereby supposes that the artist has a consciousness, or at the very least intentional mental states. As discussed previously with respect to Arendt and Plessner, creation also relates to the world, more specifically to the relation between the creator and the world. An artist creates art, not just to create an image, but to express and overcome something: In an artist, some level of creative intention is always present. So, for an image generating AI to be considered an artist it must possess some form of intentionality.

Secondly, defining an artist as someone who creates art, means having to define when a creation is considered art. Now, what makes something an artwork is hard to determine, as art contains a subjective element and both art and artistic discourse are in constant change. What I would therefore like to focus on is the relation between the artwork and the artist. Examining this relation means discussing how an artwork reflects the reality and experience of the artist. And as discussed, image generating AI experience the world from a different position than humans.

So, in order to determine if image generating AI can be artists, it must first be questioned if they can have intentionality and secondly it must be questioned if the art they create reflects their experience of the world.

2.2 Can Image Generating AI have Intentionality?

So, to know if image generating AI can be artists, it must first be discussed if they can be creative, or related to this, if image generating AI has the intentionality necessary for creation. Now intentionality, referring to mental states directed at something in the world, is not a new topic in AI discourse by any means. Philosophy of mind has always been an essential part of artificial intelligence, as the very concept of AI begs the question of how concepts like thinking, reasoning, and creating are defined. I want to discuss both sides of this discourse, explaining both under which circumstances AI can be considered as intentional as well as take seriously the arguments made against the possibility of AI intentionality.

2.2.1 Testing AI Intentionality

To properly discuss the intentionality of image generating AI I want to start by discussing Alan Turing (1950), who undeniably impacted this field by disregarding the question “can machines think?”. Turing, to avoid the ambiguities of defining ‘thinking’, addressed an alternative question in the form of what is now known as the Turing test. He describes a way of determining machine intelligence through what he calls the imitation game. There are two players, one of which is a human and the other a computer, and there is a human interrogator, trying to figure out which one is which. The goal of the computer is to cause the interrogator to make the wrong decision, while it is the person’s goal to help the interrogator. The game is played, only through typed text, so the interrogator cannot see or hear the two players and must judge who is a machine purely based on their answers. Now the question Turing asks is “Are there imaginable digital computers which would do well in the imitation game?” (p. 442). To which he answers that there are, and he believes them to be possible in the future. And indeed, while arguably not yet to the extent Turing predicted, several AI, most notably ChatGPT, have already passed some form of the Turing test (Oremus, 2022).

Now, obviously the imitation game is based in text, so how would this apply to AI image generators? Well, one could ask an interrogator to look at two images and determine which one is AI and which one is human made. This method has already been used several times, with some variation. However, I would say that this is not equal to the way in which the original imitation game tests the AI. Arguably it should also be tested if image generating AI can talk about the image, about how and why it was made, the same way a human artist can talk about their work. Alternatively, to avoid using text, both artists could be asked to show images of the progress of creating the image, practice sketches or idea mood boards. I do believe that an AI capable of beating all these alternative games is imaginable and could even be possible in the future.

However, the Turing test is not the definite means of testing machine intentionality. In fact, Turing himself acknowledged and discussed some possible criticism. Most interestingly for the approach of AI as artist, is the argument described as the argument from consciousness. The argument is that machines cannot create art stemming from thought or driven by emotions, because they cannot experience feelings such as pleasure, grief, anger, or depression. The problem with this argument, as Turing points out, is that practically the only way to confirm if a machine can think and feel is to be the machine and to feel oneself thinking. Which would just as much be the only sure way to know whether a fellow human being is feeling. This results in a problem called solipsism; the idea that your own consciousness is the only one you can be truly sure of. Since solipsism is a difficult view to hold on to in practical communication with people, Turing argues that those who support the argument from consciousness could be convinced to abandon it and accept the imitation game as a valid test, to avoid being forced into a solipsistic position. However, while the Turing test is an interesting starting point, it can be questioned if it is enough to test AI intentionality.

2.2.2 Limits of Knowing AI Intentionality

The most important critique of the Turing test is that it only tests the AI ability of imitation rather than other markers of intelligence. What remains is the question Turing attempted to avoid, i.e., how to define thinking, define mental states. This all results in a debate on functionalism. Functionalism being the idea that mental states should be examined by the way they function rather than by their internal constitution. So, if an AI is functionally

indistinguishable from a human; we should assume a similar mental state. In the case of AI images this means that if an AI can create an image that moves us in the same way a human artwork does, we should assume a similar intentionality from the AI artist as the human artist. Then again, one can say that just because an AI functions like an artist, this does not actually prove it has intentionality, it could just be imitating an artist and be devoid of any artistic intention.

Searle in “Minds, Brains, and Programs” (1980) attempts to show why human intentionality must be valued higher compared to machine intentionality. In response to the Turing test, he introduced the thought experiment of the Chinese room, in which he hoped to show that just because a machine was programmed in a certain way, it nevertheless did not possess literal cognitive states. The experiment supposes that someone who is unable to read or recognize Chinese, is locked in a room with three large batches of Chinese writing. Additionally, this person is given instructions in English (assuming the person speaks English) for correlating the different batches of Chinese writing. In studying these instructions, the person can now correlate one set of symbols with another set of symbols and is able to write down a new set of Chinese symbols in response to the symbols of the third batch of writing. Now, unknown to the person, the people giving them these writings call the first batch ‘a script’, the second ‘a story’ and refer to the third batch as ‘questions’. And they refer to the symbols the person writes back as ‘answers’. The set of rules in English is referred to as ‘a program’. Searle complicated the situation, by introducing the notion that the person is not only given Chinese writing but also English scripts, stories, and questions, which the person answers in English. Now suppose the person becomes really good at writing the Chinese symbols, to the point that they become indistinguishable from responses a native Chinese speaker might give. So that from an outside perspective the answers the person gives to the Chinese and English questions are equally good. As Searle explains then “In the Chinese case, unlike the English case, I [the person] produces the answers by manipulating uninterpreted formal symbols. As far as the Chinese is concerned, I simply behave like a computer; I perform computational operations on formally specified elements” (p. 418). Now, the point Searle wants to make is that although he functionally speaks Chinese, he still does not actually understand Chinese and therefore does not understand the stories he reads, or the answers he gives. As he puts it, the person only understands the syntax but not the semantics. He thereby argues that semantics cannot be derived from syntax alone. Even ‘semantical’ rules present in programs only present relations between purely formal operations. According to Searle any intentionality present in computers comes from outside, is only derived from the intentionality of the human programmers and the human users of the computer.

Now, one might respond to all of this by claiming that the person in the room does in fact learn Chinese. For example, let me suppose the same thought experiment, but instead of Chinese writing the input is something simpler, like sudoku puzzles, even if the person has never seen a sudoku and does not know the rules, with the English instructions to writing the solutions, and provided with enough examples, the person might start to eventually understand how to solve the puzzles himself. Something similar can be imagined with Chinese, however as Chinese is a complex language it might take much longer. Another response might be that, while the person might not become a fluent Chinese speaker, the system as a whole, of which the person is part, does understand Chinese. The point being that Searle did not consider the different levels of a computational system. Or related to this, the different levels of intentionality, where the person might not be a fluent Chinese speaker, he

might come to understand some aspects of the language. Similarly, while an image generating AI might not be capable of artistic expression on the level of humans, this does not necessarily mean it is devoid of any form of intentionality.

2.2.3 Comparing AI Intentionality to Other Intentionality

While it can be justified to think of image generating AI as intentional artists, it is not without consequences. In fact, it can even be considered dangerous to talk about AI this way, using terms traditionally reserved for humans. Philosopher Thomas Fuchs in his “In Defence of the Human Being” (2021) makes a strong point for the incomparableness between humans and machines, arguing that persons are not programs and programs are not persons. He warns against using terms relating to living things and lived experience when talking about computers, words like ‘thinking’ or ‘creating’. He argues that AI only try to simulate living beings but never actually be one. Fuchs specifically critiques the term ‘artificial intelligence’, thereby building on Plessner. He uses the argument that machines do not share the excentric positionality of humans, as AI are unable to reflect on themselves from the outside in the same way humans do (p. 29). So, while machines can simulate reflexivity and intelligence, they do not have any actual understanding of the meaning of what they do and say. Building on this lack of understanding, Fuchs argues that “our intuitive familiarity with the world cannot be captured in algorithms” (p. 31). Therefore, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, for AI to express anything related to our in-capturable relation with the world. In response I want to argue that, as AI keep existing and developing, over longer periods than the human lifespan, they might instead develop a familiarity with the world of their own.

Now, Fuchs’s focus is on machines directly simulating humans rather than on machines simulating human-creation, as is the case with AI image generators. This however makes no difference as Fuchs’s argument can easily be extended towards creative creation, which is just as much related to our excentric positionality. Machines could try to simulate human creativity, while not being able to understand the meaning of what they create. But this also begs the question whether any artist needs to have an intended meaning when creating their art.

Relating to this there is another important point Fuchs makes. That is how “we are only too inclined to project our own experience and feelings onto the technical simulations” (p. 23). So even if we accept that machines cannot create in the same creative way humans do and that there is no intended meaning beyond an AI image, we as humans are able to project our own meaning onto it. However, following Fuchs’s argument that AI cannot understand the world as we do, they might not even be able to ever create something which will evoke feelings of the same kind as human artworks can. We might, by way of projection, find some meaning in an AI created image. However, it would be unlikely it would move us in the same deep way as expressive paintings have moved us throughout history.

In opposition to Fuchs’s cautiousness when it comes to humanizing AI, I want to discuss the philosopher Daniel Dennett (1997). Dennett argues that we cannot only talk about AI in a human-like way, but that there is a strong possibility that machines will be able to think and create in a similar way as humans. Dennett claims that our current definitions of mental states are unnecessarily bound to human beings. In his “Consciousness in Human and Robot Minds” Dennett argues in favour of the possibility of not just AI intentionality, but specifically of machine consciousness, attempting to refute some commonly used arguments against it. He

contends the notion that consciousness requires an immaterial mind, or that consciousness can only exist in an organic brain, or can only be present in something natural and born, and not in something manufactured. All of which he dismisses as old-fashioned dualism, vitalism, or essentialism. He argues against the idea that there is some mythical value in the origin of something. He gives the examples of a fake Cézanne painting and a replica of an exclusive wine. If the painting is indistinguishable from a real one by experts, why should it not hold the same value? And if the only difference between the wines is their region, it is exactly as good as a wine. In the same vein Dennett argues that if a robot, an artificially created being, has the same exact qualities as a human, it should be treated in the same way. It should be treated as also having a consciousness (pp. 18, 19). He also points out that it is likely that a machine type of consciousness would need to go through some type of grow up process first before becoming a full conscious being. Of course, with AI this is already more or less the case, where the program functions on a basis of learning, and gets better over time as it learns more.

Now there are several issues with respect to this argument. For one, one could argue that a perfect imitation of something like a wine or a famous painting, is not possible. That there is something intrinsic to the region, that gives the wine its flavour, that there is something of Cézanne's whole life reflected in his brush strokes that is impossible to copy. That there is something inherently human to our consciousness that cannot be remade. Dennett seems to argue however, that even if the consciousness of a robot is not on par with human consciousness, it is consciousness all the same: "If the best roboticist can hope for is the creation of some crude, cheesy, second-rate, artificial consciousness, they still win" (p. 20). Although he admits that the creation of even such a consciousness is not guaranteed. The one argument against the possibility of machine consciousness which Dennett thinks is defensible is that robots will always be much too simple to be conscious. Or rather, that human consciousness is far too complex. Still, Dennett argues that other artificial body parts, such as heart valves or artificial ears and eyes, have done a serviceable (even if not perfect) job, despite lacking some of the complexity of human cells. Dennett thereby declares that "an artificial brain is, on the face of it, as 'possible in principle' as an artificial heart, just much, much harder to make and hook up" (p. 20). He also makes the strong point that it might be more worthwhile to set out to make a theoretically interesting robot independent of the philosophical question whether it is conscious. Dennett ends his text by discussing if things could matter to a robot, if they could experience some form of pleasure and pain. To which he concludes that when machines are conscious, they will come to a point that we have to take their word for it, that we will have to believe an AI when it makes statements about its own internal states, just as we believe humans.

I want to discuss the idea of AI possessing intentionality (of having mental states directed at the world) but not possessing the same level of consciousness (of awareness of the world) as humans. Viewing AI consciousness not in comparison to human consciousness but as a lesser consciousness can be in line with the arguments of both Dennett and Fuchs. The way Dennett argues for considering any form of machine consciousness and the way Fuchs discusses AI is remarkably similar to how Plessner talks about animals and animal consciousness. According to Plessner (2019) "The human does not invent anything that he does not discover. The animal can find [finden], but not invent [erfinden], because it "thinks nothing of it" [nichts dabei finden]" (p. 298). For Plessner animals have a closed or centric positionality while experiencing the world. Unlike humans, animals do not reflect on their positionality, they do not reflect on their experience from a perspective outside of their bodies. Similarly, we can

present AI with information, it will find this, and it can use it, but it does not invent because it will think nothing of it. Although of course it is questionable to think of an AI as ‘experiencing’ at all, machine positionality seems closer to centric positionality than human excentric positionality. So, while Fuchs argues against AI consciousness altogether, he does so based on their lack of excentric positionality. This leaves room for viewing AI conscious more similarly to animal consciousness based in a centric positionality. The difficulty to keep in mind here is that we, as humans, really cannot say much about animal behaviour and consciousness without risking some form of anthropomorphism. It can be argued that this is the same for how we view AI, that there is a tendency to attributing human characteristics that are not actually there. The obvious difference compared to animals is that AI can communicate in the same language. Either way, while humans might not be able to fully understand the extend of machine intentionality, some form of artistic intent can still be assumed based on how an image generating AI functions.

2.3 Can Image Generating AI Reflect their Reality?

As discussed, besides having intentionality, an image generating AI also needs to create art to be an artist. However, if an AI generated image is considered art, this is not enough to assume that the image generating AI itself is an artist, because the artistic quality of the image can also be attributed to factors unrelated to the AI which created it. So, for image generating AI to be artists, they need to not only create art, but the art they create also needs to reflect something of the artistry of the image generating AI. The question then becomes if image generating AI can reflect something of themselves through the images they create. To answer this question, I want to discuss how throughout continental aesthetic theory art has been discussed to reflect the reality and experience of the artist, enabling me to determine how AI generated images can relate to this.

2.3.1 How Art Connects Artists with Reality

Now, the idea of art reflecting reality, and thereby the artist, starts with Kant, or at least was redefined by Kant. In fact, much of the continental aesthetic theory that I will be discussing is in one way or another a response to Kant and the ideas presented in his Critique of Judgement (1790). To put it simply Kant turns aesthetics into an interplay between our thought and the world. Fine art thereby being an activity through which the world consisting of things in themselves, and our experienced and observed relation with the world can be explored. According to Kant, art can form new connections between concept and intuition, forcing us to recontextualize what we experience. Concepts like light, materiality and movement can be described and appreciated through art. Now, while an image generating AI might not literally be able to see the physical world, it does form connections between the different images and depictions of the world it uses to train. In addition to an insight in the actual world an AI might similarly, or even more so, provide an insight relating to what might be called the virtual world.

Having established the basic notions of Kant’s theory on art I want to continue by discussing the responses to it, as it is in these that the relation between art and artist is most thoroughly explored. I will start with Hegel, who in his Aesthetics (1810) responds to Kant. Hegel claims Kant’s theory to be too subjective: limiting knowledge to appearances and placing the things in themselves as concepts beyond our grasp. Hegel instead asserts that knowledge and reality are one and that the idea of beauty of art is instead related to an ideal way of presenting something in accordance with reality. “For any content can be represented quite adequately, judged by the standard of its own essence, without being allowed to claim the artistic beauty

of the ideal” (p. 73). In fact, compared to an ideal beauty, a simple representation of something appears, according to Hegel, defective. Hegel hereby discusses what makes an unsuccessful artwork, which for AI images becomes a challenge to overcome.

Defectiveness, for Hegel, is not necessarily due to a lack of skill on the part of the artist. Rather “defectiveness of form results from defectiveness of content” (p. 74). Hegel places great importance on the idea underlying an artwork. So, there might be art which is perfect in technique and skill but lacking the concept of a true artwork. For Hegel, the idea and concept are really what makes the ideal artwork. Hegel emphasises that “Only in the highest art are Idea and presentation truly in conformity with one another, in the sense that the shape given to the Idea is in itself the absolutely true shape, because the content of the idea which that shape expresses is itself the true and genuine content” (pp. 74, 75). Hegel expands on his aesthetic theory of the ideal by distinguishing between three different forms of art: the symbolic, classical, and romantic. As well as between different mediums of art like sculptures, paintings, or poems. For AI art the kind would be digital images. Hegel argues that although some art mediums might be more suited for specific forms of art, they are not limited to one or the other. The question is then if image generating AI could be a suitable medium for any of these forms.

The first form, Hegel discusses is symbolic art. In symbolic art, the artwork aims to portray an idea without physical form, through ways of shapes which represent the idea. “The first form of art is therefore rather a mere search for portrayal than a capacity for true presentation: the idea has not found the form even in itself and therefore remains struggling and striving after it” (p. 76). Symbolic representation of an idea is something AI is most certainly capable of. In fact, it is how most image generating AI function, by being presented an idea that they then illustrate. The issue with symbolic art for Hegel is that in it the idea is only abstractly determined, or even entirely indeterminate and therefore the correspondence of meaning and shape is always somewhat defect.

The second form of art is what Hegel calls the classical. Here the idea is in harmony with its shape. It actualizes the completed ideal. In classical art the content consists in itself, being the concrete idea. This however also limits it to ideas which can have a concrete, physical, shape. I believe that, again, especially with the right training and programming, AI art might capture the essential nature of what it is meant to portray, the same way some great human artists can, or arguably when it comes to concrete shapes, even better, considering its ability for photorealism.

The third, and for Hegel also the highest form of art, is romantic art. Here instead of harmony and unification between idea and reality, art includes the opposition that comes with the restrictedness of the sphere of art. When trying to capture abstract concepts into concrete forms, it goes beyond the classical form of art and its mode of expression. This form relies on combining the inner conscious world and the external world of forms. While this art is presented by an external medium, it relies on the depth of feeling. The inner world constitutes the content of the romantic sphere. This then would require AI to have some form of inner consciousness and feelings. The question of viewing AI images as romantic Hegelian art then relies on the question of machine intentionality.

To summarize, Kant introduces the idea of art as a way of connecting concepts and things present in the world to our thought by visualizing them. Hegel then builds upon this

connection between art and the world and distinguishes three different forms of art depending on how well the artwork unifies an idea of something with reality. Whether an image generating AI can create art that connects its thoughts and reality then depends on how much one wants to attribute intentionality to it.

2.3.2 How Artists Shape Reality

Kant and Hegel represent a way of thinking about art in relation to both the artist and reality. I now want to discuss Schopenhauer, who builds upon this relation, but replaces Kant's divide between thing and appearance, with the idea of the 'will' where acts and representations are intertwined. Most influential is Schopenhauer's notion that perception, by definition, is an apprehension of the noumenal. The idea that our body is part of the world and the way in which we perceive and experience it. Schopenhauer discusses the will as that which moves us forward, that which we strive for, the will is thereby always part of both the body which it moves forward and its actions. Moreover, Schopenhauer, after emphasizing the importance of the will, sees aesthetic pleasure as a temporary escape from its grip. He argues, "it is quite obvious that the beautiful as such excites pleasure in us without having any kind of connexion with our personal aims, that is to say with our will" (Schopenhauer, 2004, p. 100). In the beautiful is always an element of the intrinsic and primary forms of nature, of a pure intelligence. The will then completely vanishes from our consciousness as we perceive something truly beautiful, which is where the feeling of pleasure comes in. In this sense, regardless of any expressed feelings or ideas, all AI need to do to be considered art, following Schopenhauer, is make us experience that same pleasure.

However, creating an artwork which gives rise to true aesthetic pleasure is not something any artist can simply do. To explain what sets those works apart from other images Schopenhauer discusses the idea of artistic genius. Artistic genius, whether it be an artwork, a poem or even philosophy, contains a type of primal knowledge, separate from the will. "For only in the condition of pure knowledge, where will and its aims have been completely removed from man [...] can that purely objective perception arise in which the (Platonic) Ideas of things will be comprehended" (Schopenhauer, 2004, p. 103). The perception which arises however must precede the actual conception of an artwork. The conception being the first knowledge which constitutes the intrinsic material, or what Schopenhauer calls the soul, of an artwork. In other words, according to Schopenhauer, what constitutes brilliant art is partly an unintentional, in part unconscious, instinctive element which is "entirely separated from and independent of the will, is will-less" (p. 104). So, what Schopenhauer requires from an image generating AI to be an authentic artist, is not intentionality, but rather instinct, an unconscious primal knowledge. Arguably this is all an image generating AI really has, its entire program and functioning is designed around a type of artistic information, which can arguably be described as primal artistic knowledge. Although one might still use similar arguments regarding machine consciousness, to disregard the idea that an AI could have any sort of primal or instinctive feelings, or that if it has any, this is a very different primal feeling than the one present in humans.

However, representing the world is not the only way in which art might relate to the world. I hereby also want to discuss Nietzsche's aesthetic theory, keeping in mind that Schopenhauer was a big influence on his work. Nietzsche completely disregards Kant's notion of the thing in itself. For Nietzsche art is not a representation of reality, but becomes an active way in which reality is shaped. Nietzsche's theory on art relies on the dualling aspects of the

Dionysian; the frenzy and chaotic, and the Apollonian; the ordered and structured. Where the artist constantly mediates between inner chaotic impulse and outer organized form, it is in art, Nietzsche argues, that we can dissolve this tension between ourselves and our experience of the world. Now, for an AI it is hard to imagine a similar mediation going on, as computer programs are characteristically only structured and logical, lacking Dionysian aspects. Even more, if an image generating AI has a different experience of the world, there is also a different tension (if there is a tension at all) which its art dissolves. Still, arguably some form of mediation can be found in looking at the way in which an image generating AI processes a chaotic amount of inner information in a structural way to create an image.

Nietzsche rejects the concept of an original thing entirely. Perception, according to him, does not involve a relation between concept and thing, it is only an indefinable something which is transformed by our senses into experience. Both the creation and the appreciation of art are based on perceiving. Any value and truth found within art then becomes our own creation rather than something inherent to the artwork. For Nietzsche, what we refer to as things in themselves are just figures of speech. In his essay “On the Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” (1990) he explains: “We believe that we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things – metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities” (Nietzsche, 1990, p. 82). By creating concepts of things, we then overlook what is individual and what is present in the world. Art in this case is a new realm, a new medium for creating metaphors. AI art, in a sense exemplifies this very idea, as all the images it creates are based on a large amount of data of similar things. The AI image presents a metaphor of something which does not respond to any actual original entity.

Nietzsche furthermore discusses how there is no such thing as a ‘correct perception’, because between the two different spheres of subject and object there is no ‘correctness’. At most, Nietzsche argues, there is an aesthetic relation. An aesthetic relation is something which image generating AI, even if nothing else, is capable of recognizing, as it is based on recognizing patterns in images. Arguably, Nietzsche might even say that AI can come closer to representing something resembling a thing in itself than any human artist. As Nietzsche writes:

When the same image has been generated millions of times and has been handed down for many generations and finally appears on the same occasion every time for all mankind, then it acquires at last the same meaning for men it would have if it were the sole necessary image and if the relationship of the original nerve stimulus to the generated image were a strictly casual one. (p. 86)

One can imagine that an AI can generate the same images millions of times, throughout multiple generations. Although, admittedly AI image generators can just as easily create many slightly different images based on the exact same description.

So, where Kant and Hegel discuss art to connect ideas and representations of the world with the world itself, for Schopenhauer the connection between an idea and the way it appears in the world is already made and expresses itself as a primal knowledge in truly beautiful artworks. Likewise, it is imaginable that Image generating AI must then also possess knowledge of ‘being an artist’. Going one step further, for Nietzsche there is no representation or idea of the world or of things in the world at all, there is only the world as it is. Art does not

represent some idea of the world but just the world, a perception of it. In this way an image generating AI is not required to have an idea the world or things in the world to create art. Furthermore, because according to Nietzsche there is no correct way of perceiving the world, the way an image generating AI perceives it and represents it in art can be equally valuable to the way a human artist would do it.

2.3.3 How Art Reflects the Artists Experience

As Nietzsche does away with the idea of form and essence so does much of the western aesthetic philosophy following him. Simultaneously, so does art; gaining more and more abstract and experimental forms. A new way of looking at the world, and thereby at art, emerged: phenomenology. Phenomenology places all focus on experience. Which, at first appears to be problematic for approaching image generating AI as artists. Because the way an image generating AI experiences the world is ultimately different from the way a human artist does. AI does not consist of the same body, the same senses. Still, a phenomenological approach to image generating AI is possible and might be a worthwhile endeavour for both art and technology.

Heidegger is arguably the philosopher best known for his phenomenology. For Heidegger experience is not just sense impressions, it is an active state of discovering the world. In *Being and Time* (1962) Heidegger stresses the notion of 'Dasein', referring to our mode of being in the world. He also makes an important distinction between viewing objects as ready-to-hand and present-at-hand. The former refers to objects viewed as tools, to be immediately used, and the latter refers to objects in a pure factual way, without considering the wider relation to the world and its use. Ready-to-hand is also how we tend to view objects as being arranged and organised through Dasein. As already discussed, modern technology too is shaped by the way it came into the world, being depended on and shaping modern science. In fact, as technology is a mode of revealing, it can also be described as experiencing, as being in a state of discovering the world. These Heideggerian concepts are important to keep in mind as I now want to discuss his "The Origin of the work of Art" (2002). The word 'origin' in this title refers to the form which makes art what it is, the source of its essence. He questions not only how an artwork comes to be, but, more interestingly for AI art, when the artist becomes an artist. Heidegger than answers these questions the following way:

The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other. Nevertheless, neither is the sole support of the other. In themselves and in their interrelations artist and work are each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both, namely, that which also gives artist and work of art their names – art. [...] art is the origin of both artist and work. (2002, p. 1)

So, what Heidegger is most concerned with is the essence of art, he wonders however if art can really have an origin at all. This is where Heidegger turns to phenomenology. Where we must take works of art as they are encountered by us when we experience and enjoy them. In addition to this he refers to Kant and points out the aspect of artworks as a thing, but not just a think as it is "something else over and above its thingliness" (2002, p. 3). And it is this something else which constitutes the artistic nature of an artwork. Art is a thing that is made, but it goes beyond that, beyond what the mere thing itself is, it manifests something other than itself. To put it differently, for Heidegger art is an allegory, a symbol. Unlike Nietzsche who refers to art as metaphors for things, Heidegger interprets art as an allegory with an element of

truth present in the work. In fact, he later defines art as “the setting-itself-to-work of truth” (2002, p. 19). Where art reveals something timeless about the being of the thing it depicts, it sets truth into work. Heidegger in his conclusion returns to the idea of art as reproducing things, specifically the reproduction of the general essence of things. This essence is supposed to be different from an isolated thing in itself, but is rather related to how it is experienced, as its being in the world: its *Dasein*. While an AI might not quite experience the world the same way, the images it creates could in some way set a truth into work, albeit a truth of a different nature, revealing a different mode of being as to how the things depicted exist in the world of the AI.

French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1964) builds further upon Heidegger’s phenomenology. In his essay “Eye and Mind” he discusses how art, and especially painting, can view the things in the world, in full innocence, without being obliged to appraise what it depicts. He argues that art can draw upon a meaning of the world which science, and even writers and philosophers, have been unable to capture. Merleau-Ponty especially draws attention to how the artist needs his body, and especially his eyes and vision, in order to paint, declaring that: “We cannot imagine how a mind could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings” (p. 2). He makes the point of how we are tied to our body as a single being, and points out its double aspect: “A human body is present when, between the see-er and the visible, between touching and touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand a kind of crossover occurs, when the spark of the sensing/sensible is lit” (p. 4). It is in this exchange that Merleau-Ponty finds all the aspects of painting, where art illustrates all the mysteries of the body and its connection with vision. He explains how qualities like light, colour, and depth, are only there because our bodies, our eyes, echo the world in this way. Merleau-Ponty not only makes a point about how painters view and interact with the world, but also how art is generally observed by people. He argues that the gaze one has when looking at a painting, is different from the one looking at a thing. The gaze does not fix an object in its place but wanders over a painting, “rather than seeing it, I see according to, or with it” (p. 4). He thereby argues that paintings are much more than just images, that drawings and paintings are nothing like tracings or copies at all. Because the gaze of a painter is a trained one, it has learned to see the world in a certain way, sees the world and what it would need to become a painting. In other words, Merleau-Ponty states that “the eye is an instrument that moves itself, a means which invents its own ends; it is that which has been moved by some impact of the world, which it then restores to the visible through the traces of a hand” (p. 5). Similarly, by viewing the eye as an instrument, one can learn how to look at paintings, to appreciate specific aspects of the work. He points out that no matter in what culture or for what purpose we find paintings, they always celebrate the mysteries of vision, that the world of the painter is always a visible world. As he puts it: “Painting gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible” (p. 5). Painting can reach beyond just what is visually given and open a texture of being and experience, where sensorial messages are only part of what makes the painting. Merleau-Ponty in this way describes painting as something as far removed from computers and AI as possible, not only as related to the body but also as something almost magical, a magical ability where special objects make themselves exclusively seen by the painter: “Light, shadows, reflections, color, all these objects of his quest are not altogether real objects; like ghosts, they have only visual existence. In fact, they exist only at the threshold of profane vision; they are not ordinarily seen” (p. 5). Because of this, there is something personal in all paintings simply through their

relation of the vision, shaped by experience, of the person. The painter ‘birthing’ his own vision upon the canvas.

Merleau-Ponty’s strong focus on experience through the body then becomes a problem for AI art. The ‘eyes’ of an AI do not view the world in the same way. An AI ‘views’ things through programming, or other images, it does not view a landscape, but only an image, or at most a 3d model of a landscape. It does not have sunlight dancing in the corner of its eyes, at most it ‘sees’ a lens flare. Its way of viewing and its field of vision are different, are always mediated by a sort of lens, or another image. I would then like to reiterate that image generating AI might not be capable of creating the same type of experienced, body mediated, art Merleau-Ponty talks about, but they could create art based in their own mediated computer ‘body’. Of course, an attempt could be made to equip an AI with images as close to human vision as possible, but it might be more interesting and worthwhile to have an art based in machine experience. In addition, Merleau-Ponty’s point that we can train how we view and appreciate an artwork, means that we could also train the way we look at AI artworks. Not only to recognize the sort of techniques an image generating AI might use, that a human might not, but also to find a sort of aesthetic appreciation in the images created by AI, transforming the images into art.

To further support the idea of a phenomenological approach to image generating AI creating art based in machine experience, I want to discuss how Merleau-Ponty talks about method. He argues that there is no method or perspective, no fundamental law of painting, which could respect every aspect of the existing world. He asserts that no form of expression could be mastered that captures the full experience of the changing world, and that therefore “the language of painting [...] must be made and remade” (p. 10). AI could then be considered a new language for painting. Merleau-Ponty hereby also touches upon the historical aspect in art. He points out how throughout history and culture there have been many styles and ways of interpreting the world, with sometimes a focus on perspective, other times on colour. In the end Merleau-Ponty concludes that:

The effort of modern painting has been directed not so much towards choosing between line and color, or even between figurative depictions and the creation of signs, as it has been toward multiplying the system of equivalences, towards severing their adherence to the envelope of things. This effort may require the creation of new materials or new means of expression. (p. 15)

Hereby Merleau-Ponty not only allows for the new perspectives and methods as found in movements of his time like Cubism and Dada, but also clears the way for the idea of AI art.

To put it simple, a phenomenological approach to image generating AI, would mean looking at the images it creates as an expression of how the AI experiences the world. Now it can be questioned if AI can experience the world at all, to which I would like to discuss Philosopher Hubert Dreyfus who in his work notes how AI research has learned and can still learn from phenomenology, specifically in how to ground AI in the world. He notes Heidegger’s concept of ready-to-hand, where we view objects in relation to experience and how AI can only be programmed with factual knowledge, present-at-hand information. The problem for AI, Dreyfus points out, “wasn’t storing millions of facts; it was knowing which facts were relevant in any given situation” (2007, p. 1138). He thereby emphasizes the necessity and importance of an AI embedded in the world, a Heideggerian AI. However, most of the AI he

discusses, who attempt to take a Heideggerian approach seem to be lacking. The problem being that objects are not just models present in the world but are part of the world itself and so are we as humans. We do more than just thinking about things, as AI are programmed to do. Instead, we are in constant interaction with the world. Dreyfus in the end concludes that if we want AI to be functionally equal to humans it would need not only a model of brain functioning but also a model of Dasein, “of our particular way of being embedded and embodied, such that what we experience is significant for us in the particular way that it is. That is, we would have to include in our program a model of a body very much like ours with our needs, desires, pleasures, pains, way of moving, cultural background, etc” (Dreyfus, 2007, p. 1160). Which, at least to Dreyfus, seems to not have a chance of being realized. Still, I would argue for the possibility of a model that does embed the AI in the world, but without necessarily being equal to human embodiment. Thereby a phenomenological approach to AI art, could focus on the unique, non-human way an AI experiences the world, or perhaps even on how it experiences its own, largely virtual, world.

2.3.4 How Art Distorts Reality

Now, having discussed the extent to which an image generating AI is embedded in the world, I want to specifically discuss the way in which an AI experiences. Image generating AI do not experience through senses, but through images, whether that be photographs, videos, detailed models, or images of paintings. Therefore, I want to discuss the aesthetic theory of Baudrillard (1987) who specifically focuses on the artistic quality of images, and their relation to truth and reality. This is not only important in understanding the experience of an image generating AI but even more so because the art an AI creates is also in the form of an image. Where Heidegger discusses art in relation to revealing truth, Baudrillard warns for the opposite, for images distorting reality. Baudrillard discusses how in his time, besides traditional art, there are photographs, movies, and television, and how those mediums seem to be much closer to reality. Baudrillard warns: “It is precisely when it appears most truthful, most faithful and most in conformity to reality that the image is most diabolical” (p. 13). Image generating AI is interesting in that it can both produce images that resemble reality as close as photographs, but just as easily produces completely abstract images that look like they were painted. AI seems to always create something on the verge of reality, resembling something that could exist, but is not quite real. A great example would be an AI trained in creating photorealistic images of non-existent people (<https://thispersondoesnotexist.com/>). Baudrillard takes issue with how naively we trust the realism of images. Or rather, how their conformity to reality becomes a force of distortion. Baudrillard uses the example of movies, where they resemble reality enough to seduce us, only to then distort that reality slightly, shaping how we from then on view the real events. Baudrillard uses the movie *apocalypse now*, and the Vietnam war as an example of this:

In the dialectical relation between reality and images [...], the image has taken over and imposed its own immanent, ephemeral logic; an immoral logic without depth, beyond good and evil, beyond truth and falsity; a logic of the extermination of its own referent, a logic of the implosion of meaning in which the message disappears on the horizon of the medium. (pp. 21, 22)

He criticizes our naïve optimism when we look for a good usage of the image, a moral, meaningful, or informational usage, without also seeing that images revolt against this good usage, present a negation of meaning. He warns for the dangers of artificial memory and

touches upon how, in documenting historical events, they gain an aesthetic dimension, with added nostalgia, some other elements thereby forgotten or distorted. Baudrillard goes as far as calling it the annihilation of memories and of history. With the wide accessibility of AI this distortion can only accelerate. Instead of a dialectic between image and reality, art revealing something meaningful about reality, Baudrillard argues for the contrary. He argues for finding meaning in images in its ‘telescoping’ into reality, not revealing an experience of the world but experiencing the collusion of images and reality. He talks about the cinematographic view of the world, an “ideal confusion which transfigures life, as in a dream” (p. 26). Baudrillard argues that where our interest in traditional art stems from its relation to meaning and representation, we are fascinated by images because of the contrary, “because they are sites of the disappearance of meaning and representation, sites in which we are caught quite apart from any judgement of reality, thus sites of a fatal strategy of denegation of the real and of the reality principle” (p. 27).

So, there is an important difference to be made when approaching AI as an artist, between approaching it as a painter, or rather more like a photographer or a movie director. The question then becomes whether we should consider AI generated images as a form of art, like drawings and paintings, or rather like the diabolical images Baudrillard discusses. I would argue that, depending on how the AI is trained and the sort of images it creates, it could be both. I hereby must discuss the paradox regarding images which Baudrillard points out. He argues that the number of images we create rapidly increases, infinitely increases (now with AI, even more so than in the time of Baudrillard’s writing), but that the extension of meaning remains limited. The paradox is then that these images describe the equal impossibility of the real and of the imaginary. Images, for Baudrillard, have upset the balance between reality and the imaginary. The fatality being the endless enwrapping of images, without destination, “which leaves images no other destiny than images” (p. 28). And this could very well be the conclusion with respect of AI images. These infinitely creatable artificially generated images do not reflect their creator but are just images with endless possibilities, but no destination.

Yet, I am not quite satisfied with this conclusion for several reasons. For one, the assumption in this paradox that the extension of meaning is limited. For it can be argued that meaning is based in experience, in a personal experience of an everchanging world, and thereby that meaning too, is infinite. In fact, Merleau-Ponty (1964) argues something similar. Within his idea of art constantly reinventing itself Merleau-Ponty also notes the endlessness of the projects of art. He convincingly states that “for painters, if any remain, the world will always be yet to be painted; even if it lasts millions of years... it will all end without having been completed” (p. 19). This also means that, regardless of the role AI will play in the future of art, there will always be plenty to be explored and created both by human artists and by AI. Related to this, the other reason I do not want to dismiss AI images as without meaning or destination, is that they are something other than human images, in that they are made largely by a machine, and by doing so they not only blend the real and the imaginary, but also the artificial. They can be meaningful in that their blend of the real and imaginary might be fundamentally different from how a human movie director tends to blend the real and imaginary.

Now, in discussing images Baudrillard also coins the term hyperreality, which I think is especially interesting in discussing AI images. Hyperreality is the moment when images become more real than the real, than the actual physical world. When the quality of images

gains a disturbing sort of perfection, not just representation or evocation, but simulation. This is especially demonstrated in how the real is absorbed in cinematographic hyperreality, and how cinema coincides with itself, constantly plagiarises, copies, and remakes itself, each time more real, more ‘perfect’, than the original (a great modern example of this is how Disney has been remaking their classic movies in hyperreal live action). Looking at this it seems to me that AI art is inherently hyperreal, in the sense that it is based, on the things it has learned, on constantly plagiarising, and remaking the images which it was trained with. And while Baudrillard warns for a loss of meaning in hyperreality, I do not think this is necessarily the case, as just as much a different sort of meaning could be found. Perhaps a ‘hypermeaning’, where the meaning refers not to an experience of the real but to an experience of the hyperreal world of the image generating AI itself. In this sense then, hyperreality is reflected in the images created by image generating AI, and therefore, it can be said that image generating AI can indeed reflect its own reality.

In conclusion, the way art and artist are connected is always through the way in which the artwork reflects how the artist is present in and relates to the world, whether that will be by representing ideas or an experience of the world. I would then state that art made by image generating AI can indeed also reflect this connection, whether the artwork presented is the true world, only a virtual world, or a distortion of reality. It can then be said that image generating AI can be artists. Although it should still be questioned if the connection with the world that is represented in the artwork is really that of the image generating AI itself, or if it is only that of the person using the AI, or the human artists who made the images the AI uses to learn.

2.4 Can Image Generating AI be Independent Artists?

So, while image generating AI can make their own independent decisions when creating an image, they still will not act without some human involvement, without being given an instruction. Everything discussed above could be disregarded if one considers that image generating AI only express what they are asked to express. It can then be argued that the artist of an AI images is not the image generating AI but the person instructing the AI, the person providing the idea. Any intention or reflection of reality present in an AI generated can be traced back to the human instructing the AI, or to the human made images used to train the AI. I want to discuss how image generating AI can be used as a tool by human artists and specifically how it is used differently from other tools artists might use. Finally, I want to discuss how, even when properly acknowledging that image generating AI depend on humans, they can still be considered as independent artists.

I want to argue that, just as with a camera, it is in combining the technological qualities and the human qualities of creation that the tool is most optimally used. To quote Benjamin (1969), just as how “a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye” (p. 235), a different nature might also open itself to the AI. AI can thereby be used as a tool to create not just images, not just art, but new ways of art, exploring the line between human and non-human creation. Since image generating AI is still very new, there are a lot of possibilities to explore. AI images can be used as a sort of ready-made, or an artist might want to change or add something to the image. Artists could train an AI to imitate their own specific style or make full use of the machine nature to let it create images based in complex calculations that humans are not capable of. AI image generators, approached as tools, have the potential for creating many new and original pieces of art. This becomes clear considering

that more and more artworks incorporating AI are already making their way into the world of art: Images made using AI have won photography contests and have been exhibited in museums.

What makes image generating AI an interesting tool for new art is how its capabilities can be combined with the ideas and creativity of human artists. However, it should be questioned if in approaching image generating AI just as a tool, AI is given too little credit. It can also be argued that in the examples given above the image generating AI is not a tool but also actively adds its own expression and interpretation of ideas to the information and instructions given by the human artist. Again, Image generating AI could be considered artists. In fact, it can be argued, that even when a human instructor is necessary, this does not make it any less independent than human artists. The person instructing an AI can be viewed as only making a request, while the AI makes the creative choices and creates the image, similar to how a painter can be asked to paint a portrait: The painter is the artist, not the person requesting to be painted. Of course, just like human artists who can work together, human artists can also combine their own work with an AI generated image. The image generating AI can then be viewed as a collaborating artist rather than as a tool. In fact, it might be that within this collaboration the most interesting pieces of art could be created, exploring how different forms of intentionality can combine and how different experiences of reality intertwine.

In conclusion, while it is indeed possible for image generating AI to be artists, there are multiple points to be carefully considered when doing so. Most importantly, one must consider that the intentionality of image generating AI, although it is certainly possible, it is not yet proved that image generating AI relate to the world and experience it in a different way, and that image generating AI require some human involvement to function. With these points in mind the main question returns. Having determined that image generating AI can be artists: Should they be?

3. Does the Artist Matter?

The question that remains to be answered is if image generating AI should be put in the position of the artist at all. I will address the concerns related to attributing the title of artist to image generating AI. To do this I will discuss in how far the meaning and value of an artwork is determined by the artist who made it (3.1). I will also discuss if there is another way in which the artist is present in an artwork and if this is relevant for how the artwork is perceived (3.2). More broadly I will then address if the knowledge of who made an artwork and why, is relevant to an artwork at all and thereby if it changes an artwork when it is made by an image generating AI (3.3). Finally, I will discuss if an artwork needs to have a meaning, or a story, if it really needs something ‘other’ to be considered art at all, or if an artwork could just be an artwork regardless of the artist being an image generating AI (3.4). By the end of this part I should be able to reach a conclusion on if image generating AI should be artists.

3.1 Does the Intention of the Artist Matter?

Artists need intentionality to create art, however this does not mean that the intention of the artist determines the meaning or value of the artwork. It might seem natural to assume that the meaning of an artwork is that which the artist intended to say with it. There is however a strong argument to be made in favour of valuing the observer’s interpretation of an artwork over the intention of the artist. In his influential text “The death of the author” (1977) Roland Barthes explores this idea. His focus is generally on authors and writing rather than painting, but still I think his text can well be applied to AI and the images they create. Barthes starts his text by pointing out the disconnect between the intended meaning of an author and the meaning the reader finds in a text. He then rightfully questions: What does it matter who is speaking? The same question can be formulated concerning AI art: What does it matter who creates the image? The point Barthes makes is that a writer, rather than a divine creator putting together puzzle pieces of a narrative and giving meaning to a story, is instead a mediator. He argues to not focus on the intended meaning of a work of art too much. A meaning derived from a text depends on each reader, he argues that therefore there is no correct meaning. The reader is what completes a text, gives it its final meaning. Meaning that every artwork should be viewed as having multiple meanings, rather than the creator having the correct one. Which means that even if one were to argue that image generating AI do not assign any meaning to their artworks, even if they do not have any artistic intention, the images they create can still gain meaning when observed. AI art can be given a meaning by the viewer and moreover, this given meaning is as valid and correct as any other. The use of colour, and the specific shapes an AI chooses when generating an image, might not be intended to have a specific meaning, but that does not stop a viewer from finding it. It is also this ability, to bring our own meaning and interpretation to an artwork, which often makes it difficult to distinguish between AI and human made images.

As Barthes discusses, people have no trouble giving their own interpretation of works, even if their own interpretation goes against or even contradicts the meaning explicitly intended by the artist. Following Barthes, one might then argue that the artist does not matter at all, and thereby that it would not matter if the artist were a human or an image generating AI. Interestingly, in practice it does seem to make a difference. For example, it seems to me that when people are told that an image is AI generated, there is a sort of resistance towards interpreting it. When an original human intention is absent, there seems to be more hesitance towards interpreting art, towards giving an artwork any meaning at all. In fact, when I

imagine a group of people discussing an artwork and its possible meanings, who are then after some discussion and interpretation told that the artwork was made by an image generating AI, I imagine most people feel a sense of embarrassment, of being tricked even. Although it can be argued that this reaction is only due to not knowing how to view image generating AI or rather because image generating AI is generally not yet seen as an artist. I can imagine that, as image generating AI develops and people are exposed to AI generated images more and more, they might also be more ready to find more value in their own interpretation of these artificially generated artworks. Still, it can be said that if the artist really does not matter, then any feelings of resistance towards art made by image generating AI should not be there in the first place. So perhaps the artist has other roles, more important than intending meaning.

3.2 Does the Style of an Artist Matter?

In response to Barthes' controversial text, Foucault (1977) writes his "What is the Author". He affirms the idea presented by Barthes that the divine all-knowing image of the author is disappearing and urges that we must locate the space now left empty by this disappearance. He discusses how, even if we do not give meaning to a work, the artist might have many other functions. Foucault gives the example of the author as a source of expression. A text always contains certain signs referring to the author, the authors style if you will, something expressed consistently throughout all works by that author, a sign of authenticity. A similar thing is often said about painters, having a distinct artistic style, even if this evolves over time. So, can it really be said that an image generating AI has its own authentic style? Often the style of an image generating AI is based in what they learn and take inspiration from, and therefore more an expression of other artists than the AI itself. Still, most human artists are also inspired and sometimes even schooled by the great artists that went before them. In addition, many famous artists have, throughout their careers and based on the artistic movements of their time, dramatically changed their own style, changed the way in which they expressed themselves, while at the same time remaining authentic. It should be questioned if this is any different from the way in which image generating AI changes styles or is influenced by other artists.

Either way, Foucault argues that while the expression of the author is visible in the work, it should not change the way in which the work is viewed. In line with Barthes, Foucault argues that the author is not a genial creator, not the source of all significations and meaning in a work. In fact, he argues that the focus on the authors intention and authenticity prevents discussion of the mode of existence of the work itself. Foucault concludes that the author function does not remain consistent in form and complexity and in facts often shifts along with society. He thereby asserts that as society changes, "we can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author. Discourses, whatever their status, form, or value, and regardless of our manner of handling them, would unfold in a pervasive anonymity" (p. 138). In this culture where the author has truly disappeared there will be little difference between a work created by an AI image generator and a human artist.

3.3 Does it Matter if the Artist is Image Generating AI?

So, the artist of an artwork being image generating AI should not affect the meaning or interpretation of an artwork, however it might still affect the way an artwork is viewed in other ways. As discussed before, image generating AI will impact the world of art in one way or another, thereby the fact that an artwork is created by an image generating AI might not change the meaning of an artwork, but it can change the way an artwork is looked at in a

historical context and might thereby also affect the value of that artwork. To properly discuss this, I want to return to Adorno (2013) who discusses the social and historical function of art. Or rather he discusses how art refuses a social function because it constantly changes its form and rules. Adorno argues that art has become bound to the uncertainty over what purpose it serves. Much easier to capture is the historical function of art, as a product of a specific time: an artefact. Throughout the text he stresses that history is inherent to aesthetic theory: “The tension between what motivates art and art’s past, circumscribes the so-called questions of aesthetic constitution. Art can be understood only by its laws of movement, not according to any set of invariants. It is defined by its relation to what it is not” (p. 3). Considering this, image generating AI seen as artists would be another way of changing the rules and forms of art. In this way the fact that the artist of an artwork is an image generating AI does matter.

Even if image generating AI seen as artists does affect the way art is viewed in a larger, structuralist sense, it should still be questioned if it also changes the way an individual artwork is viewed. Well, first Adorno makes a clear argument against any psychological interpretation of artworks and their meaning. He argues that while it can matter who made an artwork, the intentionality of the artist does not matter. He argues that good art rests on far too many other factors than just the mental state of an artist, like unconscious factors such as the material and laws of form. In fact, Adorno argues against finding meaning in an artwork at all, saying that the more an artwork is understood, the less it is enjoyed (p. 16). This however does not mean that an artwork must only be viewed aesthetically, only as a source of beauty and enjoyment. On the contrary, Adorno continues by proclaiming that, in modernity, the concept of enjoyment has become “a bad compromise between the social and the socially critical essence of the artwork” (p. 17). It is due to the historical self-awareness inherent in contemporary art and art theory, that even as art is increasingly made for people to enjoy, this simultaneously results in an antipathic movement of increasingly vague, spiritualized art attempting to comment on and critique this consumer genre. Adorno in the end concludes that no art can exist in modernity without presupposition. Even if the author is dead (literally or metaphorically) they still provide a context for the work because in modernity: “Knowledge colors aesthetic experience: One sees a painting differently if one knows the name of the painter” (p. 246). In conclusion Adorno argues that an artwork cannot be viewed just as it is, but instead is always ‘painted’ by the knowledge we have about the work, its social and historical context, when it was created and who created it. So following Adorno, not only does it matter that the artist of an artwork is image generating AI, knowing this also changes the way in which we view the artwork.

3.4 Will it Matter if the Artist is Image Generating AI?

Now, while I mostly agree with Adorno, especially when it comes to how art is viewed today, in modernity. I also want to argue that this might change in the future, that aesthetic experience can be freed from the influence of knowledge, that art can exist without presupposition. In fact, I think AI might bring about this very change. I want to argue that it is possible, and perhaps should even be encouraged, to view artworks without considering their historical or societal context or their possible meaning. I want to discuss how image generating AI being artists, can contribute to a shift in going against any sort of interpretation of art, whether that be an interpretation of an author’s intention, artistic expression, or a social historical interpretation. In this way I want to see if it is possible to approach art in such a way that it really should not matter if the artist of an artwork is image generating AI or not.

Now in abandoning all meaningful interpretation of art, one might wonder what is left. To answer this question and to end this text I want to discuss Susan Sontag (2009). Sontag argues that instead of a hermeneutic approach to art, we need “an erotics of art” (p. 14): a sensuous approach based in feeling and form rather than in intellect and content. To support this idea, Sontag, much like Adorno, critiques the way we constantly want to give meaning to artworks. She argues that where art consists of form and content, we tend to overvalue content, a work always has to say something. To the point now, where even if an artwork does not relate anything, this itself is still a statement. Sontag discusses how interpretation of art has become like a translation, reconciling the work, giving it a new meaning: “The modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs “behind” the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one” (p. 6). She continues by arguing that we must evaluate this need to interpret, and concludes that it helps make art manageable, the work is tamed and becomes comfortable. However thereby interpretation violates art: “It makes art into an article of use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories” (p. 10). Sontag instead argues for immediately experiencing works of art as they are without looking for anything more. Put differently, the merit of works of art lies elsewhere than in their interpretation.

Sontag is aware that artists too have realised this and have made attempts to avoid being interpreted. To avoid interpretation an artwork could become parody, or abstract, or simply decorative. Abstract art attempts to flee from interpretation by avoiding the ordinary sense of content. Pop art, she says, does the opposite, making the content so to the point and blatant that there is nothing more to interpret. Arguably though even these movements have not escaped some sort of historical meaning precisely because of their attempts to avoid interpretation. However, Sontag discusses one more way to avoid interpretation: “By making works of art whose surface is so unified and clean, whose momentum is so rapid, whose address is so direct that the work can be... just what it is” (p. 11). Sontag argues that this can be done especially well in film. I would like to argue that it also happens with most AI artworks. There is always a directness to AI art even if the result is more abstract. Because no matter how much of its own artistry an AI brings, it always follows a clear instruction, something very direct. It is even said that AI art is most distinguishable from any human art due to its too-clean look (although this might change as the software develops and learns how to be messier). So, an increase in AI art might lead to moving away from the need to interpret and contextualize art.

Now, while Sontag argues against interpretation, she does not argue against art commentary altogether. Rather, she pleads for this commentary to not get lost in finding content, but instead to focus more on form, on accurately describing appearance. Sontag asserts that “transparency is the highest, most liberating value in art- and in criticism- today. Transparency means experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are” (p. 13). To put it bluntly, an artwork should be an artwork regardless of the context, the intended meaning or the artist being image generating AI.

So, following Sontag, when looking at a work of art the artist does not matter, and so it should not matter if the artist is image generating AI. While this is certainly important to consider when confronted with any image, AI generated or not, it does not yet answer the question if image generating AI should be considered artists. As a matter of fact, there might not be one simple answer to this question.

Conclusion

In this text I have shown that image generating AI can justifiably be considered artists. I have also shown that, while image generating AI can be artists, whether they should be considered artists is dependent on many different factors. Moreover, I have concluded that, for a work of art, it should not have to matter if the artist is an image generating AI.

When I set out to answer if image generating AI should be artists, I did not expect to find one clear answer. Rather, I hoped to discuss the different factors to be considered in determining if an image generating AI should be an artist, to be able to carefully consider the question when confronted with a specific AI generated image. In doing so I attempted firstly to define image generating AI, and specifically what makes it different from technology in a general sense from the way humans create images. To which I concluded that image generating AI is best defined by its capability, which is creating unique images. Whether an image generating AI should be defined as an artist depends on whether it can create art. Since art is difficult to define, I set out to define an artist instead, and thereby if image generating AI can be artists. I discussed if it is possible to view an image generating AI as having artistic intentionality, and while it is indeed possible to consider an image generating AI as having some form of intentionality, it is also difficult to say this for certain, or to compare this to human intentionality. Therefore, this is another factor to consider in deciding if image generating AI should be considered artists.

The other element to consider in deciding the artistry of image generating AI, is if an image generating AI can reflect its own experience of reality in the art it creates. Again, while I concluded that image generating AI are indeed capable of doing this and therefore can be artists, they do not necessarily have to be considered artists. It can also be argued that image generating AI can only reflect the imaginary, or that any reflection of reality present in the images it creates is due to how it is influenced and instructed by humans. Now the final factor to consider in deciding if an image generating AI should be an artist is how this affects the way art and artworks are viewed. And here too a valid argument can be made for that it should matter whether an image generating AI is the artist of an artwork, as this changes the intended meaning, and even more so the social and historical interpretation of the artwork. Nevertheless, an equally good point can be made that it should not matter at all whether image generating AI are artists, because an image can be viewed without being interpreted and without knowing anything about the artist.

Finally, when confronted with image generating AI, I urge to be aware and mindful of whether to consider an image generating AI as an artist, and moreover to question why, or why not to do so. By questioning this, one can consider everything which has been discussed in this text and I hope this will be helpful in concluding if an image generating AI should be an artist.

Still, I can in no way pretend this text is an exhaustive guide on everything to consider when deciding if image generating AI should be artists, it is merely a basis. As the topics of both art and AI are incredibly broad, there is much more to be said about their intersection. For one, I have only discussed a handful of philosophers and I have no doubt that there might be additional insights to be found in discussing each of them in further detail, as well as in discussing other philosophies on both art and on AI. I especially think there is something to be gained in considering AI images as compared to non-western conceptions of artists. I have

also largely avoided the topic of ethics, despite it being ingrained in AI discourse. And while I have not discussed it, I do want to stress the value of, and arguably the need for, a thorough ethical research of image generating AI, especially regarding aspects of copyright and plagiarism.

I also want to note that while the focus of this text was specifically on image generating AI, much of it should also be applicable to other forms of AI. Especially other AI able to generate things related to art and creativity, for example AI that can generate, poems, essays, music, or videos. I also think it could be worthwhile to examine how exactly the question of being an artist relates to these different AI forms and these different forms of art.

In the end I hope, no matter what the future of image generating AI and art brings, that this text proves itself to be useful in determining if image generating AI should be considered artists. As a result of which, when confronted with an AI image, the feeling of uncertainty is gone and instead one can find meaning or otherwise enjoyment.

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