

# The Resistance Aesthetics of Algorithms:

## Exploring the Ambiguity in AI-generative Art

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### Abstract

The research plan is inspired by my encounter with AI-generated art. According to my experience as a digital activist, human beings interact with AI art while they also intra-act with the collective subconscious to a certain extent, since the training data set are collected from the public search on the Internet. By training the algorithm with image datasets of controversial social-political issues (some defined by the forbidden terms under the surveillance of specific governance), I realize a significant difference between my complex affection for AI art and the visual rhetoric that relied on a language framework, which the linear logic might have a risk to polarize our perception.

Therefore, I hope to challenge the hegemony of language/signification structure from the philosophical and aesthetic perspective which concerns a nonlinear relationship, and understand the enlightening influence on AI art ontology.

### Introduction

My academic training background is based on visual study and art education, but the experience of participating in cultural interventions in global social movements in 2019 unexpectedly started my journey to use AI art as a performance tool. According to the description of the purpose of interdisciplinary development of computational creativity (or CC), roots in "Artificial Intelligence, Cognitive Science, Engineering, Design, Psychology and Philosophy that explores the potential for computers to be autonomous creators in their own right." (

<https://computationalcreativity.net/iccc22/short-paper-and-demos/>

I suggest that we should ignore the binary trap of how machines can escape human control and gain "autonomy", and focus on the challenge of conventional thinking behind creativity. How can computers challenge the logic of the human world? This is similar to the challenge advocated by post-humanism, which is to escape the linear dualistic logical thinking of language hegemony. According to my experience in cultural intervention, its core strategies include appropriating the meaning of images and symbols in semantics in different contexts and creating different meanings through ambiguity to create reading distance.

### Research question(s)/problem(s)

Since the capability of machines nowadays has already outreached human beings as collective intelligence, our cultural memories are, to a certain extent, visually constructed by the algorithm. However, it does not mean that AI-generative art substitutes human creativity, but might challenge the binary logic of the human-dominated worldview. Hence, the research question of my project is raised as the following:

- How we could learn from what AI learns from us?

It could be elaborated in two sub-questions:

- How Would affective-turn influence AI ontologically, on how to look and think critically?
- How the ambiguity in AI-generative art as an agent evoke an intra-action on controversial issues?

## Theoretical background

Based on my practice as a culture jammer to create a supportive visual message for the social-political issue with a context-appropriate strategy to raise public awareness, there's a bottleneck that human-oriented communication patterns could not break through. Thus, I tried to subvert the perspective from human to post-human, simultaneously challenging the existing cultural/emotional framework, by creating a distance when reading ambiguous art. In other words, I attempt to implement AI-generated abstract images as my creation to respond to the world's controversial phenomena and explore the speculative reality. Humanism, not transhuman empowerment, is all that remains of posthumanist thought, in my opinion. That echoes what Wolfe (2010) distinguishes posthumanism from transhumanism (the biotechnological augmentation of humans), concentrating on its knowledge of ethical and just issues, language and interspecies communication, social systems, and their inclusion and exclusion.

## What has not been researched yet and why it should be researched

As a massive, ubiquitous machine, AI is now built into the devices and services used by billions of people, and industrial-scale "cultural AI" Manovich (2019) is no longer a tool of a single artistic imagination, but a tool that affects the imagination of billions of people. Mechanisms, that is, the collection and data on cognitive behavior in a popular culture used to model our collective visual memory. However, the current power relationship in AI technology is full of human-orientation hegemony that intends to create a machine with a better understanding mimicking our language system. A specific example is the generative adversarial network (GAN) where the role of unsupervised algorithms is based on the point of view of technicians, using generators and discriminators to fight each other in pursuit of realistic results (Google Developers, n.d.). In short, I would like to argue that discourse nowadays around AI arts in social justice is too narrow, and the challenge of de-centering the human in contemporary art is quite daunting due to diverse definitions of post-human meaning (Widewalls Editorial, 2016). More importantly, from the political dynamics and ethical conscience of generative art history (Caplan, 2020), there is still a lack of discussion in the field of visual culture and aesthetic philosophy. In addition, from the perspective of posthuman media studies, JJ Sylvia IV (2021) also proposed that "posthuman paradigm explores methods that include counter-actualization, modulation, and counter-memory." (pp.139) If we look at the entangled visuals, symbols, and audience emotions in AI art, I think it is possible to respond to my research question that breaks

the dualism and explores an altered level of social justice. Next, I would like to suggest some topics related to my plan with a close reading approach, including:

**Ambiguity in art.** It could help to create the distance and space for the emotional dialogue between reading and inner memory, allowing the audience to create one or multiple answers from their own life experience, memory, perception, desire, imagination, and knowledge, and there is no correct answer. For a related theory, I plan to take Bollas's (2017) *Unthought Known* which in psychoanalysis and art therapy means preverbal, unrecognized memories that may influence one's behavior patterns without awareness (Gussie Klorer, 2017), it not only expands our understanding of the unconscious aesthetics, also forms an experience with enormous transformative potential when the unthought becomes visible. This has the potential to be further explored in relation to AI-generated images and the audience.

**Affect theory.** Influential work from the likes of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Gregg & Seigworth (2010) illustrates how affect theory sheds light on the intertwined fields of aesthetics, ethics, and politics, as it emphasizes the role of non-linguistic and non/(hyper)cognitive forces at work in humans and non-humans. Consequently, it is "a theory of power." (Schaefer, 2019, p.1) Which is closely related to my inquiries about the posthuman perspective. Furthermore, in the field of literary criticism, when Proust describes his work as a "machine" for generating signs, Deleuze (2000) read Proust's entire work and pointed out the phenomenon of "involuntary memory". That is, memory intervenes as a means of search and investigation, a process of symbolic experience, interpretation, and decoding, that is, the sensory experience can suddenly bring back the possibility of hidden memories, Pluralism in the System of Signs will lead to a new understanding of symbols constitute.

**Algorithms on the Possibility of Breaking Semantics' Symbolic Frames.** Yevin (2006) suggests that "Ambiguity in art is an important tool for keeping the brain close to this unstable, critical point." (p.81) The human brain functions near an unstable point because it can only produce new kinds of behavior when it is close to criticality. He analyses the phenomenon of ambiguity as it pertains to art, and demonstrates the mathematical models that describe how people perceive ambiguous patterns.

## Methods and data

In terms of the methods and data collection, I have built up a web application for the audience to add their annotation to the artwork, which will also serve as a platform for expanding critical narrative analysis in the further steps during the study. In regard to the theme of AI-generative arts, I plan to mainly focus on human rights issues based on Human Rights Watch annual reports, which conduct investigations and publish reports on human rights abuses

occurring worldwide. Next, I will analyze the power structure behind the theme, to identify the controversial idea network, then collect the visual data set from Google image search to create experimental training on the RunwayML platform, a code-free AI tool designed for media artists.

### Summary

This research plan attempts to explore the phenomenon of how the ambiguity in AI art could break through the communication framework between opposing ideologies with sensitive issues, originating from the spirits of culture jammers who try to bypass the hegemony of surveillance. I intend to conduct a Critical Resistance analysis on a series of human rights events, decipher the non-linear symbolic correlation hidden in group memory, and then reinterpret it using AI as an artistic tool to present a post-humanistic perspective of media archaeology.

As an agent of human society, AI will not only help us become more creative, but more likely to become assistants in the oppression and surveillance of human beings. I wonder if we could make an "artivism-turn" in the progress of training the visual ability of machines? I assume that there is a gap between our intractions to these ambiguous images and the training images datasets, a combination of collaborative memory and affection.

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