1) What are your views on the potential benefits and risks of Generative AI systems? How is the use of this technology currently affecting or likely to affect creators, copyright owners, and the public?

As a digital artist who makes illustrations/comics and anthropologist, my views on AI will be limited to discussions on "AI art" and in particular, generated images.

Even aside from the economic impacts of AI art, an algorithm-mediated art production process produces new art practices, artistic identities, and beliefs about art. We can compare this to another case study of the Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT) in Lilly Irani's anthropological work Difference and Dependence among Digital Workers (2015). The AMT is a labour management service that allows clients – who present themselves as entrepreneurs and creatives – to outsource a large volume of tasks to a large volume of workers through the use of algorithms; what Irani describes as 'massively mediated microlabor' (Irani 2015, 225). To summarise Irani's findings: the AMT does 'boundary work' defining and separating the role of the client (who is presented as creative) while rendering invisible the AMT workers the client hires. This produces an asymmetry of power and agency between the two jobs.

Generating art via machine learning can also be viewed as a similar kind of process. For users of "AI art" who want to present themselves as creators; their position as creative individuals depends on the aglorithm's affordances (as a 'black box' with no accountability) to make artists who form its datasets invisible, and stripping away their agency (to decide whether or not to contribute to the dataset, or have their works converted to a new means of production, etc).

For this 'boundary work' to be done, lots of rhetoric is deployed by "AI artists" that fundamentally misepresent how the algorithm works, or how the process of art production works. Here's some examples of the kind of attitudes held by "AI artists" floating around in current discourse:

1) Downplay the involvement of generative algorithms entirely, allowing client to claim ownership of product and position the algorithm (and the artists in its dataset) as an extension of the client's own skills, abilities, capacities.

2) Frame art poduction as a two-step process (concept, then execution), and then portray 'execution' as menial, non-artistic, and thus worth automating. A value dichotomy is created to prop up "AI art" at the expense of other artists (who are then portrayed as "anti-progress", "old fashioned", anti-technology"). This parallels Irani's observation of the value dichotomy established between 'menial' and 'non-menial work' (2015, 232).

"AI artists" who have little experience with art-making outside of using algorithms are keen on framing 'execution' as inimportant, but because they want to skip over the 'execution stage', they are typically unaware of the tacit skills they lack when creating generated art -- which another artist would have learnt while practicing more traditional forms of 'execution' (eg. colour theory, knowledge of art history and aesthetic standards, anatomical knowledge, etc). If anything, most "AI artists" are not aware that "art-as-concept" was already a stance taken by Conceptual artists in the 60s that has not stood the test of time.

In a sense, public discourse has already irreversibly shifted to accept AI images, which, in my opinion, has misrepresented greatly what is involved in the art process and what kind of tacit skills one would need as a digital artist. This will make it harder for artists to practice art.

Irani, Lilly. "Difference and Dependence among Digital Workers: The Case of mazon Mechanical Turk" SOUTH ATLANTIC QUARTERLY, 114(1), 2015, 225-234.

2) Does the increasing use or distribution of AI-generated material raise any unique issues for your sector or industry as compared to other copyright stakeholders?

With respect to art and the economy, many rights of artists are being violated. Many artworks in the datasets of algorithms were never bought by algorithm developers. Artists producing these works did not view themselves as performing some kind of labour – they are often involved in the production of these datasets unknowingly (and unwillingly). Lastly, they are not paid when their work is used for image generation. We can view this process as one that retroactively transforms these images – which were once social or public properties circulating outside the market – into a new means of production; this transformation creates a far more extreme version of exploitation since these artists have not consented and are not compensated. This process is what certain scholars describe as “playbour”; or how “the play of users [is converted] into a form of unremunerated labour […] by generating value for big tech organisations” (Terranova, 2000; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010; Goggin 2011; in Taylor 2023, 217). Artworks that are already commodities (eg. work done for a client scraped into an algorithm) have their use-value increased because it now is both the means in the production by which the original image is produced, as well as a new means of production for this generated image. And yet, these artists do not receive increased compensation either. In a sense, generative art will lead to more exploitative industry practices. The physical requirements of AI development themselves (energy, computing power, storage for data) will also lead to increasing centralisation of the means of production of industry art in the hands of a small number of tech companies, which focus on profit instead of artists rights or welfare.

Taylor, A.R.E. “Cloudwork: Data Centre Labour and the Maintenance of Media Infrastructure.” The Routledge Companion to Media Anthropology, 2023, 213-228.