The Problem With AI Art

In September of 2023, an X (formerly Twitter) user and self-proclaimed entrepreneur, Rufus, boldly declared that he planned to make an animated movie entirely using artificial intelligence (AI). An animated movie, normally developed after hundreds of hours of work by animators, directors, writers, and voice actors, could soon be created with nothing but the ones and zeros of a computer. He demonstrated this with a snippet of his new movie. It shows an AI-generated princess in front of a theater backdrop. "Hello, my name is Princess Jane. I would like to show you some tricks. I hope you enjoy it", she said in an AI-generated voice. It then cuts to a still frame where Princess Jane disappears into the ether using what amounts to a PowerPoint vortex transition. A stock audio of people cheering then plays.

As expected, this clip was subject to widespread ridicule, with the post currently having over 7000 reposts and replies mocking Rufus and his creation. Watching it, it is not surprising to see why the reception was so poor. It is, for lack of a better word, terrible. Rufus has continued to release new clips about his AI movie, each about as bad as the last. The animation has the same sterility and artificialness that plagues most AI art. Princess Jane's voice harbors the same uncanny cadence only a computer unsuccessfully attempting to imitate a human has. It predictably lacks everything that makes actual animated movies worth watching.

In a similar incident on X, an AI-generated singer-songwriter called Anna Indiana posted a song that was supposedly entirely AI-generated. Everything from the lyrics and the chord structure to the voice recording has been created from the "mind" of a machine. The song, "Betrayed By This Town", was similarly lambasted online for its shoddy songwriting, overly synthetic vocals, and off-putting video. Despite attempting to imitate the heart and soul of actual

humans, Anna Indiana managed to achieve the exact opposite, plainly displaying just how much generative AI falls short.

Of course, it is expected that generative AI in its current state can not perfectly replicate works done by real humans. Artificial intelligence as a concept was once only found in myths and science fiction novels. It was not thought of as a serious field of research until 1956 when several computer scientists organized a landmark research workshop at Dartmouth College. AI with the ability to create art also did not exist until around the 1960s, mainly creating abstract images (Kerner, 2023). Many popular generative AI models like Midjourney and DALL-E did not exist until the 2020s and were not widely used until 2023, corresponding with the rising popularity of Chat-GPT. With only 60 years of history, AI art is still very much in its developing stages.

While it can make fantastical and often amusing images based on whatever prompt the user inputs, its capabilities are still very much limited. However, this does not stifle its popularity, which grows at an ever-increasing rate, especially within corporations. Recently, entertainment titan Walt Disney sparked controversy over their use of AI art in a Thanksgiving post. They had also come under fire in June for using AI art in the opening credits of the Marvel show *Secret Invasion* (Reynolds, 2023). Just recently, the Writers Guild Association (WGA) and Screen Actors Guild went on strike, a major reason being the use of generative AI by major film studios to generate scripts and images of background actors, often at the expense of their wages (Coyle, 2023). It was only after hundreds of days of refusal to work that safeguards were finally put in place to protect the jobs and rights of writers and actors.

Generative AI can be an interesting tool to play with, but its current use by many large corporations is alarming. To maximize profits, they resolve to cut down on their biggest expense:

labor. In lieu of spending the extra money to hire real creatives to write scripts, generate ideas, or design graphics, they resolve to push these responsibilities onto the computer. A computer, with no humanity of its own, will always work at the user's behest. No need for salaries, insurance, or promises of a healthy work environment. They will grab whatever the AI spits out, perhaps tweak one or two aspects, declare it "good enough" and distribute it to us consumers.

From a financial standpoint, this business model is perfect. Why waste money on people when the machine can produce an adequate job? Unfortunately, this is at the expense of the rest of us. Generative AI, as far as it has advanced, will never truly reach the same level of quality that human art can achieve, and it is absurd to imply that they are anywhere near the same level. Art, by its definition, is the expression of the artist's creativity and imagination. The most famous works of art are admired not just because of aesthetic value, but also because of the skills and efforts of the artist, the stories they wish to express, and the emotions they elicit in the viewer. Take, for example, one of the most famous paintings, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. A woman screams as she holds the corpse of a child. A horse yells in agony with a gash on its side. A man lies dismembered on the floor. Picasso depicts horror and bloodshed with stunning clarity. The painting was inspired by the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, and Picasso meticulously planned its composition to evoke a visceral reaction in the viewer, warning of the violence and cruelty that inevitably comes from war. The level of dedication, thought, and artistic talent put into this painting will most likely never be replicated by AI. Using artificial intelligence to create art in place of people robs the art of one of its most essential aspects: its humanity. I can not look at AI art without feeling a sense of lifelessness. While it may be aesthetically pleasing, it evokes no emotion in me. It does not leave me with thoughts to ponder about. This is similar to music or even poetry generated with AI. I have not yet discovered a

work created by AI that I have not thought of as soulless and would prefer over art made by actual creatives. Corporations, in their never-ending quest to make as much money as possible, may believe that generative AI is an adequate replacement for the hard work of humans, but it is very clear that they are not equal at all.

This does not necessarily mean that generative AI should never be used again. AI can have some use in the creative process, such as generating ideas for scripts. Using AI in tandem with creatives can boost productivity and quality, but it should never be used instead of creatives. To truly create high-quality art or literature, ones that can connect with people, real people must be involved in its creation.

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