Paper Title: The Hegelian dialectic and its role in determining whether AI-generated art can be considered a form of visual art.
Description: Hegelian dialectic applied to a theory of AI-generated art

Hegel's dialectic offers a tantalising view on considering the possible position of AI-generated art in the future. A valid interpretation of Hegel could see traditional art as representing the thesis, computer science as the antithesis and AI-generated art as the synthesis of his dialectic. Is it therefore reasonable to argue that Hegel's dialectic supports the view that AI-generated art should be considered a form of visual art in its own right?

Before I begin, it is important to clarify how I have chosen to define visual art in general terms, AI-generated art and traditional art. AI-generated art is defined as art made with the assistance of generative AI, which uses patterns in big datasets to create new content ("What Is AI-Generated Art? — updated 2024 | IxDF"). Although the definition of visual art appears to be elastic, in that it is constantly evolving to keep up with new developments, and is highly contentious in many circles, for this essay, it will be defined loosely as the manifestation of creative skill and imagination. When I refer to traditional art, I mean art where only humans are involved in its creation (for example, paintings). This also includes the use of non-AI computer programs, like Photoshop. In addition, when we express that something is 'not art' or is 'art', in this essay, we are determining whether it falls into the category of art, rather than expressing a value judgement, to ascertain whether it is good or bad art.

I argue that Hegel's dialectic lends itself to the assertion that AI-generated art is a sublation of STEM disciplines, which embody our human capacity for reason and logic, and the Arts, which embody our human capacity for passion and creativity.

Traditional fine art might be considered the pinnacle of the arts, in this respect, because it manifests our creative potential by abstracting the natural world and creating something entirely separate. Whereas computer science might be considered the pinnacle of STEM, or the antithesis of traditional art, as in its base form, it is a question of quantifying and calculating the natural world to enhance it through the unnatural. In other words, in a sense, traditional art is about surrendering to the natural by trying to go beyond it, while computer science is about mastering and transforming the natural to enhance it. So, in many respects, traditional art and computer science appear to be opposed (or rather if traditional art is the thesis, computer science is the antithesis and vice versa). Thus, we may understand AI-generated art to be the synthesis or sublation (the cancellation and the preservation) of the two. Although Hegel himself does not use the terms thesis, antithesis and synthesis, it helps us to understand his thought.

However, it could be argued that on several levels my assertion is problematic. Firstly, Hegel's dialectic could also be used to argue that AI-generated art is not an improvement on traditional art. It could also support the argument that STEM and traditional art is not fundamentally opposed. In addition, it could also be said that there is insufficient evidence to make the case that AI-generated art sublates traditional art and computer science. Moreover, it could also be argued that Hegel's writings on other topics suggest that AI-generated art cannot hold the properties of art. However, these possible objections do not invalidate my argument.

Firstly, for Hegel, the sublation improves the prior condition ("Lacan: The Mirror Stage"). We might not consider AI-generated art to be an improvement on the prior

condition(s) of both traditional art and computer science. First, when faced with the serious existential threat of climate change, we might question the wisdom of diverting precious resources to training AI to generate art when those resources could be used instead to investigate climate solutions. Again, AI-generated art is controversial because some believe it devalues human skills and because it is trained on images of traditional art. These works are integral to the "creative process", but the artists are not credited, so we may consider it a particularly convoluted form of plagiarism. The eventual supremacy of AI-generated art appears to be a more dystopian result than an improvement. However, a measured response to both these criticisms is that AI-generated art is in its very early stages, so the discipline is still evolving. This means that it is too early to tell how, or whether, the issues around crediting artists will be solved, or what the potential technological benefits that may come from training AI to generate art will be, and whether these advancements can be later applied to resolving issues surrounding threats like climate change.

Another objection we may wish to consider is whether traditional arts and STEM are in fundamental opposition, in a similar way to how 'being' and 'nothingness' are. Above all, it appears to be a cultural phenomenon that the two are considered to have a wide gulf of difference. For example, mathematics and biology used to be considered branches of philosophy. Even now, semantically, there is more nuance than a complete separation of the two. We may consider what we mean when we state that "computer science is an art". I would respond to this that, although I concede that it is not as clear cut as some other examples, such as existence and non-existence, my argument holds because the two are different enough that we

could understand it to give rise to a sort of binary opposition. Although the opposition is not binary in the literal sense, very few things that we might understand to be binary are not, upon inspection, without meaningful nuance. For example, some consider that gender and sex are binary, that is to say that there is male and female and the two are opposites, but this is erroneous as some people are intersex, and some people identify as genders outside of the binary (Butler). Even though the apparent split might be a cultural phenomenon, language is an expression of culture and language shapes our understanding of the world. So, even though the division is cultural, it doesn't make it any less real.

Next, it is not clear that there is sufficient evidence to predict that AI-generated art will sublate traditional art or computer science. First, the artist is potentially irreplaceable in making artworks and their originality and creativity cannot be replaced by data-driven tools (Sarin). AI-generated art cannot sublate traditional art because we might still need 'human artists' to create human art, at least to train machine learning models. These models are not yet autonomous so cannot make decisions in the ways that humans can. To this, I would respond that AI-generated art is still in its infancy. There are many more developments to come, and AI models may become autonomous in this way in the future. However, the claim that AI-generated art will sublate computer science is extremely contentious because computer science is used for many things other than art, although perhaps it is coherent to argue that Generative AI will sublate computer science as we know it.

Finally, I will address the objection that Hegel's writings suggest that AI-generated art cannot hold the properties of art because it is neither abstract, living or spiritual. The

purpose of art *"is to allow us to contemplate and enjoy created images of our own spiritual freedom—images that are beautiful precisely because they give expression to our freedom.* (Houlgate)*"* So," *Art's purpose … is to enable us to bring to mind the truth about ourselves, and so to become aware of who we truly are."* (Houlgate) In summary, *Art should present the richness of human freedom and life and should allow us to feel at home in its depictions."* (Houlgate) So, perhaps, AI-generated art fails to even fit the definition of art because it is not an expression of human freedom and life. Maybe it cannot be a "*form of human self-expression and self-understanding"* (Houlgate) because it is dubious whether it is created by humans at all. Put more simply, we may question whether AI-generated art can be considered art as it appears it lacks the agency, in its current form, typically associated with art. To this, I would respond that whether AI-generated art embodies human freedom, or ever could embody human freedom, is a matter of opinion rather than empirical fact because we do not have sufficient information to answer this question. Although instinctually many of us would argue that AI-generated art does not express human freedom, I believe that we must empirically investigate this claim further and we lack the evidence, both because AI-generated art is still developing and because there has not been any empirical research into this area, for this to be anything other than a question of taste.

In addition, I would argue that Hegel's conditions are too stringent and even disqualify many works of traditional (human) art that we would generally agree to be art. For example, we may not consider art to be a manifestation of human freedom when created under a political dictatorship. If the artist does not have sufficient freedom of expression, we may still understand their artistic creations to be art.

Firstly, it is debatable whether propaganda is a form of art. There are many fringe cases, such as The future Demands Your Participation by Mark Titchner[1], and most if not all, artwork has a message that may be considered propaganda (*Orwell)*. So, since it is clear that propagandistic art, that is to say art that does not manifest human freedom, may be considered art, Hegel's conditions are too stringent to apply to contemporary art. Again, it is now widely accepted that Picasso's Guernica[2] is a work of art. While it is a reaction against a massacre that was painted whilst he was in occupied France, which suggests that it is a pure manifestation of human freedom, we do not consider his less overtly political works to be any less art. Finally, while we may consider it offensive, "Aryan art" ("Nazi control of culture and the arts - Terror and persuasion - WJEC - GCSE History Revision - WJEC") can fall into the category of art, even though there were extreme restrictions on freedom of expression at the time because modernism was forbidden, so art was not created freely. Similarly, we consider other art that conforms to the demands of a restrictive state to be art all the same. So, we might argue that being an expression of human freedom is not necessary for work to fall into the category of art.

In conclusion, in line with Hegel's dialectic, it is legitimate to consider AI-generated art to be the synthesis or sublation of the disciplines of STEM and the Arts. The opposing arguments around AI-generated art not being an improvement on the prior condition, surrounding computer science and traditional arts not necessarily being in opposition to each other, purporting that there is insufficient evidence to support this claim and those concerning the incompatibility of my argument with the rigidity of Hegel's other writings, are not proven. Overall, I would argue that it remains to be

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[1] Image 2
[2] Image 1

seen whether or not AI-generated art could sublate traditional art, but we do not have sufficient evidence to claim that it cannot. In fact, we may consider AI-generated art a third category that encompasses both not being art and being art, as Hegel's dialectic would suggest.

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Images

1. Picasso - Guernica (1937)

2. The future Demands Your Participation - Mark Titchner (2006)