Sequel to The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.

> *[!cite] "Julia was twenty-six years old... and she worked, as he had guessed, on the novel-writing machines in the Fiction Department. She enjoyed her work, which consisted chiefly in running and servicing a powerful but tricky electric motor... She could describe the whole process of composing a novel, from the general directive issued by the Planning Committee down to the final touching-up by the Rewrite Squad. But she was not interested in the final product. She "didn't much care for reading," she said. Books were just a commodity that had to be produced, like jam or bootlaces." -- George Orwell,* ***1984***

Preface

In the twilight of the 19th century, Marx embarked upon a critical examination of capitalism, a system then in its embryonic stages. His critique was imbued with prognostic foresight, meticulously unraveling the foundational mechanics of capitalist production to foresee its trajectory. Marx illuminated the future of capitalism as a process intensifying proletarian exploitation while simultaneously laying the groundwork for its self-destruction.

The metamorphosis of the cultural superstructure unfolds at a glacial pace compared to the substructural shifts, taking decades to permeate the entirety of cultural domains, reflecting the evolution in production conditions. It is only now that we can articulate this transformation, adhering to prognostic standards. However, speculating on the proletarian art post-revolution or the art of a classless society may not align with these standards as closely as examining the current developmental tendencies of art within the prevailing production conditions. The dialectics within the superstructure are as evident as those within the economy. Thus, to disregard such analyses as strategic tools would be erroneous. They displace numerous antiquated notions—creativity, genius, eternal value, mystery—terms whose unchecked application, now nearly unchallengeable, could lead to data manipulation in a Fascist manner. The introduction of new concepts into art theory diverges from traditional terminologies, rendering them inept for Fascist purposes but invaluable for articulating revolutionary demands within the politics of art.

In this era, Marx's critique finds resonance, as Mechanical Reproduction is overshadowed by Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), a shift not merely technological but profound in its implications for both substructure and superstructure, mirroring the transformative potential Marx attributed to capitalism.

Generative AI revolutionizes the production and dissemination of art, challenging the traditional paradigms of artistic creation, ownership, and distribution. It democratizes creative capability, obliterating the barriers that confined artistic production to a so-called creative elite. This technological evolution disrupts the traditional notions of art's eternal value and mystery, questioning the scarcity that once underpinned its valuation.

The insertion of Generative AI into art theory discourse is pivotal. Unlike the notions it supplants, Generative AI is impervious to Fascist manipulation. It inherently fosters a collective approach to art, prioritizing communal algorithms and data pools over individual brilliance. This shift is in harmony with the Marxist vision of a classless society, where art transcends commodity status to become a shared cultural legacy, collectively accessible and created.

Thus, in the realm of art politics, Generative AI emerges as a beacon of revolutionary potential, epitomizing the dialectical subversion of archaic artistic concepts, forging a path for a reimagined cultural superstructure that mirrors the egalitarian, collective, and non-exploitative ideals central to Marxist philosophy. In this light, Generative AI signifies not merely technological advancement but a profound cultural and societal shift, echoing the revolutionary transformations Marx envisioned for capitalism itself.

I

Traditionally, the artifact's capacity for replication was inherent, its duplication a feat achievable through human endeavor. Artisans and their apprentices replicated works as part of a pedagogical tradition, masters disseminated their creations, and third parties, driven by profit, further perpetuated this legacy of reproduction. The emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the artistic domain heralds a

radical departure from this historical continuum. Unlike the gradual evolution characteristic of art's technical reproducibility, Generative AI represents a quantum leap, redefining the landscape of artistic creation through its algorithmic prowess.

In antiquity, the technical reproduction of art was confined to a limited repertoire—casting, stamping—allowing the mass production of bronzes, terra cottas, and coins, while other forms of art remained singular and beyond the reach of mechanical duplication. The woodcut introduced graphic art to mechanical reproducibility, preluding the transformative impact of printing technology on text reproduction. This evolution, while significant within the annals of history, is but a precursor to the profound shifts ushered in by Generative AI.

Generative AI transcends historical methodologies of art reproduction, not through the manual transference of images onto stone or through woodblock carving, but via algorithmic generation, enabling the mass production of art in unprecedented volumes and forms. It aligns graphic art with the ephemeral flux of daily existence, bridging art with the rhythm of contemporary life. Within decades, advancements in algorithms have expanded these capabilities, relieving the artist's hand of its traditional roles, supplanted by the computational 'eye' of AI systems. These systems, capable of processing and generating images at speeds unattainable by human artists, have accelerated the pictorial reproduction process to a pace congruent with human speech, allowing for the dynamic generation of visual content.

Generative AI heralds a new epoch in the technical reproduction of sound and vision, fulfilling Paul Valéry's prophecy that visual and auditory images would be summoned and dismissed with ease, akin to the domestic conveniences of water, gas, and electricity. This technology has not only democratized the replication of transmitted artworks, effecting a radical change in their public impact; it has also established a distinct role within the artistic process itself.

To comprehend this paradigm shift, it is crucial to explore the repercussions of AI-generated art and its integration into film, examining how these manifestations diverge from traditional artistic forms and their impact on the cultural landscape.

II

Within the realm of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), a profound chasm separates the AI-generated artifact from traditional art: the absence of a unique presence in time and space, the singular existence at the moment of its creation. This absence delineates a critical divergence, for the unique existence of a work imbues it with a history, a trajectory through time that encompasses both physical transformations and the vicissitudes of ownership. Traditional art bears the marks of its journey, subject to analyses that reveal its authenticity through the patina of age or the provenance of its materials. However, the realm of AI-generated art exists beyond these considerations of authenticity, as its very nature defies the traditional mechanisms of verification and valuation.

In the face of manual reproduction, traditionally deemed a forgery, the original retains its authority. Yet, in the sphere of technical reproduction facilitated by AI, this dynamic is radically altered. Firstly, the detachment from the original achieved by AI reproduction is unparalleled, capable of illuminating aspects of the original beyond human perception, thus presenting the artwork in dimensions that manual reproduction cannot fathom. Secondly, AI-generated art transcends the original's context, enabling the artwork to engage with the observer in novel forms, whether through digital imagery or synthesized music, thus liberating the artwork from its physical constraints and allowing it to inhabit virtual realms.

This recontextualization may not directly affect the tangible artwork, but it invariably diminishes the quality of its presence, affecting not just artworks but also the authenticity of natural landscapes experienced through digital mediums. The most profound impact lies on the artwork's authenticity, the essence of its transmissibility from inception, from material longevity to historical testimony. As historical testimony becomes undermined, so too does the object's authoritative essence.

This phenomenon might be encapsulated in the notion of "aura," suggesting that what diminishes in the age of Generative AI is the artwork's aura. This symptomatic process has broader implications, suggesting that the technique of AI reproduction extracts the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By proliferating copies, it replaces the unique existence with a multitude of iterations, and by facilitating personal interaction with the reproduction, it revitalizes the reproduced object. This

dynamic signifies a profound disruption of tradition, mirroring the contemporary crisis and renewal of humanity. The transformative power of Generative AI, particularly in its constructive manifestations, cannot be fully comprehended without acknowledging its role in the reevaluation and disassembly of traditional cultural valuations, a phenomenon vividly observable in historical recreations through AI, venturing into new frontiers. In a future envisaged, the luminaries of the past—Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven—are reborn through AI, all myths and legends digitally reanimated, signaling an extensive reevaluation of our cultural legacies.

III

The epochs of history unfurl, carrying with them shifts in the modes through which humanity perceives its environment—our sensorium is not static but evolves in tandem with our collective manner of existence. This evolution of perceptual organization is not merely subject to natural forces but is deeply enmeshed with the historical conditions of each era. The fifth century, marked by significant demographic shifts, heralded the emergence of the late Roman art industry and the creation of the Vienna Genesis, signifying not merely a departure from ancient art forms but the advent of a novel mode of sensory engagement. Scholars of the Viennese school, notably Riegl and Wickhoff, ventured beyond the heavy mantle of classical tradition that obscured these artistic expressions, pioneering insights into the organization of perception in late antiquity. Their analyses, though profound, remained confined to identifying the formal characteristics of perception during that period, without exploring the societal transformations signaled by these perceptual shifts. Today, conditions are ripe for such an analysis, particularly if we understand the contemporary dissolution of the aura as indicative of its underlying social determinants.

The concept of aura, as discussed in the context of historical artifacts, finds resonance in the aura surrounding natural objects, described as the unique phenomenon of distance, however close it may seem. For instance, the experience of gazing upon a distant mountain range or a branch casting its shadow in the afternoon sun embodies the aura of those mountains, of that branch. This analogy aids in understanding the social underpinnings of the modern decay of the aura, rooted in two interconnected developments tied to the expanding influence of the

masses in contemporary society. The first is the masses' desire to shrink the spatial and emotional distance between themselves and objects of contemplation, a desire as intense as their urge to negate the uniqueness of every reality by embracing its reproduction. The contemporary imperative to possess objects through their likenesses, through reproduction, intensifies. Evidently, the experience provided by picture magazines and newsreels differs markedly from the engagement with objects directly, with their uniqueness and permanence. In reproduction, transience and replicability dominate. To abstract an object from its context, to dismantle its aura, denotes a perceptual mode where the 'sense of the universal equality of things' has grown so pronounced that it demands even the unique object be replicated. This shift in the domain of perception mirrors the ascendancy of statistical analysis in theoretical realms. The mutual adaptation of reality to the masses and the masses to reality signifies a process of boundless extent, reshaping both thought and perception alike.

IV

The authenticity of a work of art, intrinsically linked with its integration into the fabric of tradition, experiences vitality and transformation within this continuum. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, held disparate significances for the Greeks and the medieval clerics, yet both interactions were mediated through its distinct aura, its unique presence. Historically, the embedding of art within tradition was manifest in its cultic role. The earliest artworks, emerging from magical, later religious, contexts, underline the primacy of the artwork's aura to its ceremonial utility. Even as art transitioned into secular realms, this ritualistic essence remained discernible within the most profane incarnations of the beauty cult.

The Renaissance heralded the secular cult of beauty, signaling not only the decline of this ritualistic foundation but also presaging the crises art would confront. The advent of revolutionary reproductive technologies, like photography, coinciding with the rise of socialism, signaled to art the onset of a crisis that would only fully materialize a century later. In response, art embraced the doctrine of l’art pour l’art, essentially a theology of art, culminating in a 'negative theology' epitomized by the 'pure' art movement, which eschewed social utility and refused categorization by subject matter, a stance first embodied by Mallarmé in poetry.

The dialogue surrounding art in the age of Generative Artificial Intelligence must acknowledge these dynamics, for they illuminate a critical insight: for the first time in history, Generative AI emancipates the work of art from its parasitic dependence on ritual. Art generated by AI, designed for reproducibility, emanates from a single algorithmic source, rendering the pursuit of the 'authentic' obsolete. The criterion of authenticity, once central to art's valuation, becomes irrelevant, heralding a fundamental shift in art's raison d'être from ritual to a new foundation—politics.

This transformation signifies not merely a technological advancement but a profound reorientation in the role and significance of art. As Generative AI continues to evolve, it challenges and redefines our understandings of creativity, originality, and the essence of art itself, engaging with and reflecting the complexities of contemporary life in unprecedented ways, transcending traditional boundaries.

V

The valuation and reception of art oscillate between two polarities: the cult value and the exhibition value of the artwork. Originating in the creation of ceremonial objects for sacred rites, the primacy of art lay in its existence rather than its visibility. The prehistoric individual who etched the figure of an elk into the wall of his cave engaged in an act of magic aimed more at communion with the spiritual realm than human spectatorship. In contemporary terms, the cult value of an artwork might imply its concealment from public view, with divine statues hidden away except to priests in temple sanctums, certain revered Madonnas veiled for most of the year, and sculptures on medieval cathedrals positioned beyond the gaze of those below.

As art practices liberated themselves from the confines of ritualistic obligation, the avenues for their display widened. It became more straightforward to exhibit a portrait bust that could be transported and displayed in varied locations than a deity's statue fixed within the sacred bounds of a temple. This principle extends to the transformation of painting from mosaic or fresco, and though a mass and a symphony might initially share levels of accessibility, the symphony emerged in a context ripe for broader public presentation.

The introduction of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the reproduction of art has exponentially amplified the capacity for exhibition, tilting the balance between an artwork's cult value and its exhibition value towards a qualitative metamorphosis. This shift mirrors the transformation witnessed in prehistoric times when art, initially valued for its magical or cult significance, gradually came to be appreciated as art per se. In the current era, by placing absolute emphasis on its exhibition value, art morphs into an entity endowed with entirely novel functions, among which the artistic function we currently recognize may eventually be deemed secondary. It is unequivocal that today, Generative AI stands as the most potent manifestation of this new function, heralding a future where the exhibition value of art, propelled by technological advancements, invites us to reconsider the essence of what art is and its purpose.

VI

In the domain of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), the transition from cult value to exhibition value is pronounced yet encounters resistance. The steadfast nature of cult value finds its last bastion in the human countenance. It is not coincidental that portraiture has emerged as a significant focus of early generative art endeavors. The tradition of commemorating loved ones, whether distant or departed, represents the final stronghold for the image's cult value in this new era. In these early AI-generated images, the aura is perceived one last time in the fleeting expressions of human faces, endowing them with a melancholy and unmatched beauty. However, as the human element begins to fade from AI-generated imagery, the exhibition value for the first time supersedes the ritual value.

The recognition of this critical evolution marks the unparalleled contribution of artists who, at the dawn of the 21st century, utilized AI to capture scenes devoid of human presence, echoing Atget's photographs of deserted Parisian streets. Their work could be likened to documenting scenes of absence, where the absence itself is recorded with the purpose of generating evidence. Through the lens of Generative AI, these images assume the role of standard-bearers for historical narratives, imbued with an implicit political weight. They demand a unique form of engagement; they are not meant for passive consumption but challenge the viewer, calling for a novel form of interaction.

Simultaneously, the ascent of digital platforms begins to shape the viewer's interpretation, whether through algorithmically generated recommendations or user-generated content. The necessity for captions or textual accompaniments becomes paramount, marking a departure from traditional naming conventions for artworks. These textual guides direct the viewer's understanding of AI-generated art, a directive that becomes even more pronounced and obligatory in the realm of digital narratives and interactive art forms. In these new expressions, the meaning of each piece is seemingly dictated by the algorithmic sequence of all that precede it, steering the viewer along a predetermined path of engagement.

VII

The nineteenth-century debate over the artistic merit of painting versus photography now appears both misguided and perplexing, yet it underscores a historical shift whose broader implications eluded both camps. When the era of mechanical reproduction disentangled art from its ritualistic roots, it obliterated any illusion of art's autonomy. This transformation transcended the confines of that century, eluding even the understanding of the twentieth century, which witnessed the advent of cinema. Initially, considerable debate centered on whether photography could indeed be considered art, neglecting the more pivotal inquiry: whether the invention of photography fundamentally altered the essence of art itself. Subsequently, film theorists grappled with analogous questions regarding cinema, overlooking the seismic shifts photography introduced to aesthetic paradigms, shifts that cinema would exponentially amplify, rendering early film theories somewhat crude and forced.

For instance, Abel Gance equated cinema to hieroglyphs, suggesting a regression to the expressive capabilities of ancient Egyptians, deeming pictorial language still in its infancy because our eyes had yet to fully adapt. He lamented the lack of reverence for cinema's expressive potential. Séverin-Mars envisioned cinema as a medium capable of conveying the most poetic and realistic dreams, previously accessible only to the most elevated souls during profound and mysterious moments of life. Alexandre Arnoux, reflecting on silent film, likened its essence to prayer, illustrating the awkward attempts to impose a ritualistic framework onto film as an "art."

These speculations unfolded even as films like "L’Opinion Publique" and "The Gold Rush" premiered, showcasing cinema's potential beyond the constraints of early theoretical frameworks. Nonetheless, this did not deter Abel Gance from drawing parallels with hieroglyphs, nor Séverin-Mars from treating cinema as akin to Fra Angelico's paintings. Interestingly, some ultraconservative critics today attribute a quasi-sacred, if not outright supernatural, significance to cinema. Werfel, commenting on Max Reinhardt’s adaptation of "A Midsummer Night’s Dream," critiqued cinema's obsession with merely replicating the external world, arguing that it had yet to realize its true essence and possibilities, which lie in its unparalleled ability to portray the fantastical, marvelous, and supernatural in a natural and convincing manner.

Transitioning this discussion to the realm of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in art production, we encounter a similar paradigm shift. The debate over the artistic value of traditional mediums versus AI-generated art echoes past disputes between painting and photography, and later, cinema. Just as the introduction of photography and film challenged and expanded the boundaries of art, Generative AI today prompts a reevaluation of creativity's essence and the nature of art in the digital age. The initial skepticism and theoretical clumsiness that greeted photography and film find their parallels in the contemporary discourse on AI in art, suggesting that we stand on the cusp of a significant evolution in how art is conceived, created, and appreciated.

VIII

The performance of a stage actor, conveyed directly to the audience by the actor's physical presence, contrasts sharply with that of an actor in AI-generated media, where the performance is mediated by algorithms. This mediation has a twofold consequence. Firstly, the algorithms rendering the digital actor's performance do not preserve the performance as an unbroken whole. Under the guidance of developers and data scientists, the AI continually refines its interpretation of the performance, assembling the generated scenes from provided data into a complete piece. This process includes elements of movement and expression that are, in reality, the AI's creation, introducing specialized effects like digital zooms and

altered perspectives. Thus, the actor's performance is subjected to a series of computational analyses and reconstructions. This is the first consequence of presenting the actor’s performance through generative artificial intelligence.

Moreover, the digital actor lacks the opportunity afforded to a stage actor to adjust their performance in real-time based on audience feedback, as the presentation is not conducted in person. This absence of direct interaction allows the audience to assume the role of a critic, devoid of a personal connection with the performer. The audience's identification with the actor becomes, in essence, an identification with the algorithm. As a result, the audience's approach becomes one of evaluation, not of immersive experience or cultic reverence. This perspective precludes the appreciation of cult values, highlighting a fundamental shift in the reception and valuation of performance art in the age of AI.

IX

In the realm of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), the essence of performance undergoes a profound transformation, echoing the shift observed by Pirandello in the context of film acting. Pirandello's keen observation of the actor's alienation in the face of the camera finds a deeper resonance with the actor's interaction with AI technologies. His insights, initially centered on the limitations of silent film, retain their relevance as we contemplate the impact of AI on performance art. The core issue persists: the performance is executed not for a live audience but for a digital apparatus, which in the era of AI, becomes an entity far more complex than the simple camera and microphone setup of traditional films.

Pirandello might have described the film actor as feeling exiled, not just from the stage but from his own essence, encountering a disconcerting void as his physical presence is distilled into a fleeting digital image, devoid of life and voice, only to vanish into the digital ether. This scenario is intensified in the context of AI, where the actor's performance is not only captured but can be algorithmically altered, creating versions of the performance that may bear little resemblance to the original enactment. "The AI projector plays with his shadow," Pirandello might say, emphasizing the actor's relegation to performing in solitude before an array of sensors and processors.

This dynamic marks a pivotal shift: for the first time, the performer engages with his entire being in a process that strips away the aura inherent to live performance. The aura, that elusive quality tied to the performer's physical presence, cannot be replicated or transmitted through AI. The unique aura that envelopes a stage actor, merging indistinguishably with the character they portray, dissipates when the performance is mediated by AI. The camera, in the studio setting, supplants the audience, erasing the aura surrounding both actor and character.

Pirandello's insights inadvertently illuminate the broader crisis facing the theatre and performance art in the age of AI. The stark contrast between live stage plays and digitally reproduced art forms becomes glaringly evident. The industry acknowledges that the most impactful film performances often derive from minimalist acting, a principle that becomes even more pronounced in AI-mediated performances. Rudolf Arnheim's observation that the trend involves treating the actor as a mere prop, selected for specific traits and inserted into the scene at the right moment, underscores the fragmented nature of AI-influenced acting.

The film actor's inability to fully identify with their role, exacerbated by AI, stems from the piecemeal construction of their performance. Various practical considerations—studio costs, availability of co-actors, and set design—alongside the technical demands of lighting and equipment, fragment the actor's work into discrete segments that can be algorithmically assembled. For instance, a startled reaction to a knock might be captured separately, with the actor unaware of the impending sound, to ensure authenticity. This method highlights the departure from the "beautiful semblance" traditionally associated with art, venturing into a realm where the essence of performance is dissected and reassembled by digital means, challenging our perceptions of authenticity and the very nature of artistic expression.

X

The disorientation actors feel before a camera, as Pirandello poignantly observes, parallels the alienation one experiences before their own image in a mirror. Yet, with the advent of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), this reflection becomes not only detachable and transportable but also mutable, and its ultimate destination? The public domain. Actors engaging with AI-driven performances are acutely aware

of this reality; as they perform in front of AI technologies, they understand that their performances, potentially altered or enhanced by algorithms, will ultimately be presented to an audience, the consumers who constitute the marketplace. This marketplace, to which they offer not just their labor but their essence—heart, soul, and now digital likeness—is as remote from them during the AI processing as any product is from its creator within a factory setting. This detachment may amplify the sense of alienation, the novel anxiety that grips the actor in the age of AI, as described by Pirandello.

In response to the erosion of aura in the digital age, the film industry, now intertwined with AI, crafts an artificial persona outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, sustained by the industry's economic power, no longer preserves the unique aura of the individual but rather the "charm of the personality," a synthetic allure of a commodified digital entity. As long as the capital behind AI-driven movie production dictates trends, the revolutionary potential of contemporary cinema is primarily to foster a revolutionary critique of traditional art concepts. While acknowledging that some AI-enhanced films may challenge social conditions and the distribution of property, this discussion does not delve deeper into such aspects, any more than does the AI-enhanced film production in Western Europe.

The nature of film, deeply integrated with AI, inherently positions every viewer as a potential critic or creator. This phenomenon is evident when considering how AI democratizes the creation and critique of film, making expert analysis and participation accessible to all. Just as the newsreel once offered every passerby the chance to rise from observer to movie extra, AI in cinema suggests that anyone could find themselves, or a version of themselves, within a work of art, echoing the participatory ethos seen in Vertov’s "Three Songs About Lenin" or Ivens's "Borinage". Today, virtually anyone can aspire to be digitally recreated or have their performance enhanced by AI. This shift is best understood by comparing it to the historical evolution of contemporary literature.

For centuries, a small cadre of writers addressed thousands of readers. This dynamic began to shift with the expansion of the press and has been revolutionized by the internet and AI, turning an increasing number of readers into writers, initially on an occasional basis. This transformation was accelerated by platforms inviting user-generated content, including comments, reviews, and personal narratives. Nowadays, it's rare to find a person who couldn't, in principle, publish their thoughts or creative work online. Thus, the traditional divide between author and

audience is dissolving, becoming more a matter of function than of inherent distinction, with the reader frequently transitioning into a writer. In the realm of AI, giving voice to work itself becomes integral to one's ability to perform it, with literary and artistic expression founded on a broad rather than specialized education, thereby democratizing creativity.

This paradigm shift, observed in literature over centuries, has occurred within a decade in cinema, particularly in contexts where AI has become part of the creative process. In Russia and beyond, this evolution has partially become a reality, with individuals in films not just acting but also contributing to or co-creating their digital personas, especially within their own labor processes. In contrast, in Western Europe and elsewhere, the capitalist exploitation of AI in film often overlooks the legitimate claim of individuals to be authentically represented, focusing instead on generating mass interest through illusionary spectacles and speculative ventures powered by AI.

XI

The advent of art creation through Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) unfurls a spectacle unparalleled in previous epochs, fundamentally altering the traditional spectator's vantage point. This transformation is not brought about by the physical intrusion of camera equipment or the tangible mechanisms of lighting but by the invisible, yet pervasive, influence of algorithms and data processing. This shift underscores a profound change in the relationship between the creation of a scene and its perception. In the theater, the audience is acutely aware of a perspective from which the play's illusion might momentarily dissolve. In the domain of AI-generated art, this perspective is entirely redefined; the illusion crafted by AI is of a more intricate order, shaped by data interpretation and algorithmic processing. Here, the intrusion of technology into the fabric of reality is so profound that aspects of reality, once mediated by tangible equipment, now emerge from the complex interplay of software algorithms. The reality that is free from the overt presence of machinery thus becomes the ultimate artifice; the unmediated observation of reality transforms into a rarefied artifact within the digital technology domain.

This divergence from traditional film and theater becomes even more pronounced when juxtaposed with the practice of painting. The inquiry then becomes: How does the role of the AI programmer or data scientist compare to that of the painter? To explore this, we might consider an analogy with surgery. The surgeon, in contrast to the magician, seeks not to heal with a mere touch but diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating the patient's body, navigating carefully among the organs. Unlike the magician, who seeks to bridge the natural distance with a touch, enhancing it with his aura of authority, the surgeon, at the critical moment, bypasses the personal engagement with the patient, entering their body through the operation.

This analogy extends to the relationship between the painter and the AI developer. The painter maintains a natural distance from the subject, engaging with reality through the mediation of their artistic perception, while the AI developer delves into the fabric of data, creating art from a multitude of data points under a new algorithmic law. For the contemporary observer, the representation of reality by AI, precisely because of its deep integration with data and algorithms, offers a perspective of reality ostensibly liberated from any mechanical apparatus. This, then, is what contemporary society might seek from a work of art in the age of AI: a rendition of reality that transcends both the visible and invisible presence of the technology that crafted it, presenting a new form of art that integrates the technologized landscape with the human experience.

XII

The inception of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the arts marks a pivotal turn in the mass engagement with art forms, transforming a traditional, perhaps even reactionary, reception of a Picasso painting into a progressive interaction with an AI-generated film or artwork. This evolution signifies not merely a shift in medium but a melding of visual and emotional gratification with the discernment traditionally reserved for the expert. This synthesis carries profound social implications. As the social significance of an art form diminishes, the chasm between public criticism and enjoyment widens: conventional works are consumed uncritically, while truly innovative works confront resistance. However, within the sphere of AI-generated art, the critical and receptive capacities of the audience converge. The linchpin of this convergence lies in the fact that individual reactions

are now shaped by the anticipated collective response of the mass audience, a phenomenon especially pronounced in AI-enhanced cinema. Once expressed, these reactions regulate one another, embodying a new form of collective artistic engagement.

Drawing a parallel with the traditional realm of painting illuminates this transformative shift. Historically, a painting was viewed in solitude or among a small group, fostering a contemplative engagement. The nineteenth-century phenomenon of mass public exhibitions of paintings signaled an early crisis in the medium, a crisis not solely precipitated by photography but also by the intrinsic mass appeal of artworks.

Painting, by its nature, is ill-equipped for simultaneous collective experience, unlike architecture, the epic poetry of yesteryears, or the AI-generated films of today. While this fact alone does not predetermine the social role of painting, it poses a significant challenge when painting, contrary to its essence, is directly exposed to the masses. In the Middle Ages, within churches and monasteries, and at princely courts until the late eighteenth century, paintings were received collectively but not simultaneously, mediated through a structured and hierarchical system of viewing. The emergence of public galleries and salons facilitated a broader exposure, yet lacked the mechanism for a collective modulation of reception, distinguishing the public's progressive engagement with an AI-generated grotesque film from its conservative reaction to surrealism. This scenario underscores the transformative impact of Generative AI on public perception and interaction with art, bridging historical divides and fostering a new, dynamic dialogue between the artwork and its audience.

XIII

The integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the fabric of artistic creation not only transforms human interaction with machines but revolutionizes the ways in which, through these digital intermediaries, humanity can depict and understand its world. Insights from occupational psychology and psychoanalysis illuminate the evaluative and transformative power of technology. Just as Freud's psychoanalytic theories brought to light the unconscious underpinnings of human behavior through the analysis of slips and dreams, AI in art deepens our

apperception, extending across the full spectrum of visual and auditory experiences. This transformation is the flip side of AI's ability to dissect and present behaviors and scenarios with unprecedented precision and from novel perspectives, surpassing the capabilities of traditional mediums like painting or stage performance.

Compared to the static representations of painting or the live enactments of theatre, AI-mediated content allows for a more nuanced exploration of context, character, and emotion. Behavior depicted through AI-generated content can be isolated, examined, and reinterpreted with ease, offering a level of detail and analysis previously unattainable. This not only blurs the lines between art and science but fosters a symbiotic relationship where each informs and enriches the other. The detailed portrayal of human behavior by AI, akin to isolating a muscle within the body for study, illustrates the convergence of artistic and scientific pursuits, revealing the multidimensional impacts of AI on our cultural and intellectual landscapes.

AI's capacity to zoom in on the minutiae of our surroundings, to unveil hidden aspects of familiar objects, and to present the ordinary from unprecedented angles expands our understanding of the forces that shape our lives. On one hand, it reassures us of the vast realm of possibilities that lie within our reach; on the other, it challenges us to rethink our perceptions of space, time, and motion. The mundane environments that once seemed to confine us are reimagined through AI, revealing new dimensions and inviting exploration with a renewed sense of wonder. Slow motion and zoom functionalities not only clarify but also unveil entirely new structures within the subject matter. What was once perceived as a mere enlargement of a snapshot by AI reveals intricate patterns and movements, while slow motion exposes not just decelerated actions but a ballet of motions that defy conventional understanding, suggesting an almost supernatural glide or float.

This unveiling of a different reality to the digital eye, partially because AI allows us to access spaces and dynamics unconsciously, replaces direct human exploration with a digitally mediated discovery. Even if we believe we understand how people move, AI shows us the subtleties of a gesture or the interaction between hand and object in ways that fluctuate with emotional states—details previously beyond our conscious perception. Here, AI intervenes with its digital manipulations—zooms, cuts, speed adjustments, and perspective shifts—introducing us to a realm of

unconscious optics as psychoanalysis reveals unconscious impulses, thereby enriching our understanding of both the world and ourselves through the lens of digital innovation.

XIV

Art's enduring mission across epochs has been to cultivate a demand that finds its fulfillment only in the vistas of the future. The trajectory of each art form is punctuated by moments when it reaches for effects that can only be fully realized with the advent of new technological paradigms, heralding the emergence of a new art form. The apparent excesses and eccentricities often labeled as decadence in various periods of art history are, in truth, manifestations of its most dynamic and forward-thinking impulses. In recent history, such "barbarisms" found a prolific outlet in Dadaism, which, in hindsight, can be recognized as an endeavor to achieve through pictorial and literary means the effects that today's audience finds in the realm of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Every innovative creation of demands invariably overshoots its immediate mark. Dadaism did so by eschewing the market values typically associated with art in pursuit of higher aspirations—though such intentions were seldom articulated as explicitly as they are now. The Dadaists placed a lesser emphasis on the commercial viability of their work than on its capacity for immersive contemplation. Their deliberate degradation of materials was a method aimed at attaining this state of "uselessness," making their creations, be it "word salads" brimming with linguistic refuse or paintings adorned with everyday objects, a systematic effort to dismantle the aura of their creations, branding them as reproductions through their very mode of production.

Facing an Arp painting or an August Stramm poem, one is deprived of the traditional opportunity for contemplation and judgment afforded by a canvas of Derain or a poem by Rilke. In the twilight of bourgeois society, contemplation became a conduit to antisocial behavior, supplanted by distraction as the primary mode of societal engagement. The Dadaist ventures ensured intense distraction by positioning art at the nucleus of scandal. Their primary objective was to shock the public, transforming art from an appealing visual or a compelling auditory structure into a ballistic device that impacts the viewer with the force of a bullet, thus acquiring a

tactile presence. This tactile essence fostered a demand for AI-generated art, whose capacity for distraction also stems primarily from tactile experiences, propelled by the algorithmic manipulation of data that continually engages the viewer.

Contrasting the traditional canvas of a painting with the digital screen displaying AI-generated art reveals fundamental differences in the viewer's engagement. A painting invites contemplation, permitting viewers to immerse themselves in their thoughts and associations. In contrast, an AI-generated art piece offers no such respite; the viewer's engagement is constantly reshaped by algorithmic interventions. This relentless alteration of content, as might be observed by critics of AI who have yet to grasp its full implications, disrupts the viewer's associative thinking, creating a shock effect akin to physical jolts, which, according to theory, necessitates a heightened mental alertness to be mitigated.

Through its algorithmic foundation, AI-generated art extracts and amplifies the physical shock effect, previously encapsulated within the moral shock of Dadaism, presenting it anew to the viewer in a digitally mediated form. This evolution marks a significant shift in the artistic landscape, as AI ushers in a new era of engagement that challenges traditional notions of art, its creation, and its consumption, reflecting a deeper societal transformation in the perception and value of art.

XV

The digital milieu has emerged as a crucible for contemporary interactions with art, fundamentally altering the dynamics of engagement from quantity to quality, and reshaping the manifestation of participation. The nascent, often critiqued forms of this new engagement merit a nuanced understanding rather than dismissal. Critics like Duhamel have vehemently denounced the superficial aspect of digital and AI-generated art as mere entertainment for the disenchanted, a passive diversion requiring no intellectual effort, igniting no spark of inspiration, and nurturing only the futile hope of digital celebrity. This critique echoes the age-old dichotomy suggesting that the masses seek distraction, while true art demands focused contemplation from its audience—a notion that has evolved into a truism.

Yet, this critique prompts a deeper inquiry: Does it provide a comprehensive foundation for analyzing the impact of AI in art? This necessitates a more nuanced examination of the relationship between distraction and concentration: the former leading to absorption by the artwork, akin to the legend of the Chinese painter lost within his own landscape, and the latter, the distracted masses, in turn, absorbing the artwork into their collective consciousness. This dynamic is most visibly enacted in architecture, the quintessential art form consumed in a state of distraction, offering valuable insights into the laws of artistic reception.

Since antiquity, buildings have been silent companions to human activity, outlasting numerous art forms that have come and gone. While tragedies and epics have their epochs and panel painting its era, the fundamental human need for shelter ensures architecture's perennial relevance. Its ancient lineage and enduring vitality provide a key to understanding the masses' relationship with art. Buildings are engaged with both through use (touch) and perception (sight), not with the concentrated attention of a tourist before a monument, but through habitual interaction. This tactile engagement, governed more by habit than by deliberate focus, significantly shapes even our visual reception of architecture, often occurring through casual, incidental observation rather than through studious gaze.

The capacity for distraction, even when engaged in habitually, can lead to the formation of new habits. Indeed, the ability to perform tasks in a state of distraction indicates their assimilation into our habitual understanding. Art's provision of distraction, then, serves as a subtle measure for assessing how new tasks have been integrated into collective perception. As individuals naturally tend to shirk these tasks, art confronts the most challenging and significant among them, particularly when it can mobilize the masses. In the age of AI, this mobilization is achieved through AI-generated art, which, by catering to a mode of reception characterized by increasing distraction across all art forms, signifies profound shifts in perception. AI-generated art, with its inherent capacity to shock and engage, aligns perfectly with this distracted mode of reception. It demotes the cult value of art, not only by positioning the audience as critics but by doing so in a manner that demands no concentrated effort. The audience, though acting as evaluators, does so absentmindedly, embodying a new paradigm of artistic engagement that reflects broader shifts in societal interaction with culture and technology.

Epilogue

The burgeoning proletarianization of contemporary society, alongside the concurrent ascent of mass formations, signifies dual facets of a singular evolutionary process. Fascism's strategy to navigate the emergent proletarian masses—without fundamentally altering the property structures at the heart of their grievances—opts for an aesthetic engagement. Rather than addressing the masses' legitimate aspirations for transforming property relations, Fascism offers them an outlet for expression, preserving the existing property regime. This maneuver leads to the inevitable aestheticization of the political domain, a reflection of both the subjugation of the masses, coerced into submission by the cult of leadership, and of technological apparatuses, repurposed to generate ritualistic values.

The zenith of aestheticizing politics points unequivocally towards war. War alone possesses the capacity to mobilize mass movements on a vast scale while safeguarding the sanctity of traditional property systems. This forms the core of the political dilemma. From a technological standpoint, this dilemma articulates that only war permits the full mobilization of contemporary technological advancements, including those propelled by Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), without renouncing the property system. Although Fascist rhetoric shuns such analytical discourse, Marinetti's manifesto on the Ethiopian colonial war unabashedly extols the aesthetic dimensions of war. War is glorified for establishing human dominance over "subjugated machinery"—now inclusive of digital algorithms and AI systems—transforming the human body into a metallic entity, and for adorning the natural landscape with the "fiery orchids" of machine guns. War, according to Marinetti, births new forms of architecture and artistic expression, compelling Futurist poets and artists to infuse their quest for novel literary and artistic paradigms with these principles of war-induced aesthetics.

Marinetti's manifesto, with its stark clarity, compels the attention of dialectical thinkers. Through this lens, the aesthetics of modern warfare, particularly as influenced by Generative AI, underscore a profound truth: when the natural deployment of productive forces is stifled by the property system, the escalation in technological means, speed, and sources of energy necessitates their unnatural application, manifest in the realm of war. The destructiveness of war testifies to society's immaturity in harmonizing technology with its elemental forces,

suggesting that technology, including AI, has yet to evolve sufficiently to integrate seamlessly with societal needs. The grotesque manifestations of imperialistic warfare arise from the disjunction between immense productive capacities and their suboptimal utilization in production, underscored by unemployment and market deficits. Imperialistic warfare emerges as a revolt of technology, repurposing human lives as "material" in lieu of natural resources. Society, rather than directing technology towards constructive ends, channels human lives into the machinery of warfare, with AI-enhanced strategies obliterating the human aura in unprecedented ways.

Fascism declares, "Let art flourish, even if the world perishes," aligning with Marinetti's anticipation of war as the ultimate fulfillment of artistic aspirations shaped by technological evolution, including AI. This embodies the culmination of "art for art's sake," where humanity, once an object of divine contemplation, now contemplates its own destruction as an aesthetic experience of the highest order. This is the aestheticization of politics that Fascism champions, against which Communism posits a counter-narrative: the politicization of art, including art influenced by Generative Artificial Intelligence. This dialectical opposition underlines the critical discourse surrounding art, technology, and their roles within the broader societal and political landscapes, challenging us to envision a future where technology and art serve not as instruments of domination but as means for genuine human emancipation and cultural enrichment.