When AI Meets Anderson: The Fusion between Technology, Art, and Cinema in Blockbusters Stills

New Era: Meeting AI and Anderson

"There's no point in doing something if you're just going to replicate something else" affirms Wes Anderson's character from *Moonrise Kingdom* (Anderson, 2012), situated on the same tone as the reality happening now, of effortless replications. Wes Anderson is known for his pastels and meticulous attention to detail which makes him easily recognized. His way of making them look "fussy and mannered" is what stands out in his style since the amount of effort can be clearly seen on the screen (Lamont, 2014). Although his style is so unique, nowadays it has become even easier to replicate it with the help of AI. The following research paper shows AI's influence on the creative process, showing how easy it is to replicate a filmmaker's style in just seconds.

This fusion of Wes Anderson's artistic vision alongside the power and abilities that AI has nowadays managed to create effortless replications to which it is hard to differentiate the real vision from the one generated by algorithms. This research paper contextualizes the AI-generated images in Wes Anderson's style that went viral recently on different social media platforms in the context of a technologized world that puts human art and the process of creativity under risk. The purpose of this paper is to present the importance of creativity and the way AI threatens it since now it is easy to replicate an entire visual aspect. To support my statement, I will use viral AI-generated images with blockbuster franchises such as, *Harry Potter* (Chris Columbus, 2001), and *The White Lotus* (Mike White, 2020) which were created with Midjourney, and copy based on data and algorithms that follow Wes Anderson's unique and meticulous style. Midjourney is "an artificial intelligence art generation service", affirms McCue for Forbes, which is surprisingly having more than its "15 minutes of fame", marking the beginning of a new era: the one of AI art (2023).

From Mise-en-Scene to Algorithms: The Power of Replicability

"'Smart' has become a common short-hand for talking about the promises of automated, digital, and algorithmic systems" (Forlano, 2021) which normalized the idea of using AI in humans' daily lives. The following media objects represent the issue of narrowing down blockbusters to one small universe, more specifically Wes Anderson's. The creative process is significantly shrinking because of the use of AI, which could be summarized as 'Creative AI'. The term "comes from the technical community, which uses it to refer to the application of machine learning and other forms of AI for artistic purposes" (Bunz et al. 2023, 3). Throughout the chosen media pieces, it is broken down the "traditional disciplinary boundaries" (Bunz et al. 2023, 4) since they all represent AI art and break the rules in matters of tradition.

The images follow Wes Anderson's style with the use of blockbuster franchises introduced in Midjourney, creating possible "ethical issues around copyright and crediting" (Robinson, 2022). "We have become 'too smart'" affirms the New AI Lexicon journal which follows the creation of those programs capable of recreating in such short notice and based on an input, an output so real that it would put people in difficulty to recognize the real from the AI (Zeavin, 2021). The 'Artificial creativity', as Reddy names it in her paper, represents the amalgam of the human mind which is capable of creating programs that could later be creative "on their own terms" (2022, 296). The power of replicability could have never been possible without the human mind, which has been creative on its own and evolving since the beginning of time as everyone can see just by looking around.

The generated images attached in the paper follow the style of Wes Anderson while integrating blockbuster films which created their own aesthetic and style, just like the filmmaker's masterpieces have their own. Meanwhile, the power of replicability is evolving and creating new images out of already existing footage, "approaches like these aim for a repositioning of digital technology as a more open entity" (Bunz 2019, 267). However, the presence of AI integrates the 'fake' aspect of the image, ruining its originality and resuming it only to 'beautiful' and 'cool'.

But why Wes Anderson? People may ask; his very mannered style and control make it easier for AI to generate it from already existing footage because of the "symmetrical, mesmerizing, and garish" characteristics which are present in both Anderson's filmmaking and AI-generators as well (Zylinska 2020, 49). What makes it controversial is the fact that AI can replicate the stills from famous movies in a specific style just because of "what already exists" in its database (Zylinska 2020, 49). The filmmaker claims about his style in an interview with The Talks that "I don't want to have an invisible style, but I don't care about having a trademark" (2015). His trademarks represent one of the easiest ones for AI generators to replicate since symmetry, bright colors, and innocence have key roles in Anderson's films.

The following figures present a parallel between stills of real films directed by Wes Anderson such as, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (Anderson, 2014), and *The French Dispatch* (Anderson, 2021) and the AI-generated images of blockbusters franchises recreated in the filmmaker's style. Although the resemblances are present to the viewer's eye easily, the creative process behind it makes it less accurate, especially if the viewer knows the characters from the originals. The replica in this context is reduced to "the repetition of the same" (Zylniska 2020, 50). The four figures below represent one of the common shots present in Anderson's films: the medium close-ups. In his films, as shown in Figure 1 and 3, the symmetrical background is present which gives a sense of calmness and harmony, just like Anderson's films. However, the replicas offer the same impact through the "dazzling spectacle of colours and contrasts as well as the sheer volume of data" (Zylniska 2020, 76).

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Figure 2 and 4 represent the AI-generated images which at first glance occur as normal photographs, but not fully because their colors are too bright and almost too perfect, making them look *hyperreal* (Baudrillard 1981, 1). However, Tromble argues in her paper that having only intellect, lack of body and no emotions would be ideal since "we could endlessly pursue our thoughts" (2020, 5) which would encourage the use of AI in art since it would enhance the creative process.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

The use of AI in order to generate images in a filmmaker's style neglects the quality of his films and the creative process, "ignoring the situated, material, embodied experience of knowledge" (Forlano, 2021), which is not applicable with AI since its knowledge is based on algorithms.

A Copy of A Copy: Does Replication Mean The Loss of Meaning?

The concept of AI Art has formed a 'new aesthetic'; one that is "slightly uncanny and already boring" since it follows generative art based on the "banality of looking" (Zylniska 2020, 81). The banality is represented by the lack of personality this art has since it is constituted over already existing data and images whilst its incapability of creating videos. In Wes Anderson's case, the presence of images only generated in his style creates inaccuracy, but how far will AI-generators go?

The purpose of art, no matter its form, is to evoke a feeling, emotion or induce a state of mind to the viewer. In the case of films, especially Anderson's, they convey calmness, purity, innocence and harmony; and those emotions take place because of its way of portraying them and because of the actors which manage to beautifully evoke those feelings. The AI-generated images follow the same setting and stills as the filmmaker's trademark but they do not sense or convey any feeling or emotion since the persons presented in them does not exist. The AI New Lexicon mentions Ovetta Sampson which argues that "empathy is too frequently misdefined and therefore misdeveloped in technologies, resulting in the ubiquitous spread of 'false empathy'" (Zeavin, 2021). This phenomenon of 'false empathy' happens when seeing the AI-generated images because of the loss of reality and originality they have since they are created from already existing footage and styles. The loss of empathy "is understood to be a grave loss" since it stays at the base of human-kind and supposedly builds stronger emotions.

Meanwhile, the blockbusters used for AI-generated copies of Anderson's style lose their meaning and originality through the reinterpretation of it. Although they look innocent and bright, the originals were not supposed to be represented by these characteristics. The *Harry Potter* (Chris Columbus, 2001) franchise has nothing to do with the portrayal of pink and orange tones, while Hogwarts is not meant to look so children-like (Figure 2) even if it is children-appropriate, it is a Science-Fiction series that follows the wizard world and the adventures of young teenagers. The same applies for the original HBO series *The White Lotus* (Mike White, 2020) which exemplifies the lives of higher-social class people on vacation and the perks of profiling a perfect life to the outside world while exposing numerous psychological dysfunctions. The series is the opposite of Wes Anderson's films which never portray crimes, sexual intercourses, or blood-wrecking fights; destroying the 'untouchable' universes and narrowing them down only under the style of Wes Anderson which ruins their initial message.

Both series do not have anything in common with Anderson's films, making the stills generated by AI inferior and meaningless replicas. However, what the AI is replicating is the aesthetic of it, not the cinematic, making it insignificant. As Bunz claims, "this technology is one among many points that provides rationale for why it is sensible to approach machine learning" (2019, 265). The use of AI must be carefully done since such universes as huge as *Harry Potter* and *The White Lotus* create a meaning and evoke emotions which is visibly seen through the appearance of fandoms. Meanwhile, the same applies for a director itself, such as Anderson, who has fandoms thanks to his uniqueness and effort that is put in his projects taking in consideration he releases a movie once in five years time. The online comments to the Harry Potter image affirm that "it is insulting to the creative process" or "please do not use AI" which supports the loss of meaning and creativity in the making of it (@wesandersonofc, April 21, 2023). Hoffener claimed recently in Collider on the AI-generated images in Anderson's style that "a machine can learn what a craftsman does, but it can never learn why" (2023), which emphasizes the idea that a program could never reach the level of talent a human can.

The "AI imitation work" follows, as the name suggests, the repetition of an already existing piece of art which later is transformed into a new one by algorithms (Zylniska 2020, 50). The repetition of already existing footage in the context of art makes the output of the creative process, which in this case does not exist because it is generated, lacking signification and originality. Since "all humans [are] free to pursue their passions and exercise their creativity" the AI art makes it unfair to humankind to generate it in a couple seconds (Zylniska 2020, 148). The fear of using AI in order to copy someone's style of art, no matter its nature has been emphasized through the prior examples, which Hoffener affirms in Collides affirms that to use 'AI art' for the future, and especially Wes Anderson "is a terrible joke" (2023).

Beyond Replication: Understanding the Fear

AI has developed progressively fast in recent years, especially in the art field which could be considered controversial since it might affect future artists and their careers. The human fear of a program to replicate their art is perceived as dangerous for the future. The idea that people will never know how far the AI art can go is concerning as well, while if AI is actually art is somewhat still under the question mark. The use of different universes under the same style completely different to the originals is frightening taking in consideration the power replicability has nowadays. Its power is seen as alarming for the near future since it threatens artists that put lots of effort in their work and projects which now can be replicated as a 'new original' in just seconds by an individual with less experience and talent because of an AI program.

To conclude, in what concerns the blockbusters previously mentioned which were replicated with the help of Midjourney in Wes Anderson's style, some may say it is disrespectful to both the creators of the franchises and the filmmaker itself. The program reinvents the untouchable blockbusters in a completely opposite style in order to create new, original art out of already existing art based on algorithms and databases. Although it is frightening how far AI has come, the images replicate only the aesthetic not the cinematic, which evokes no meaning. The issue of AI art is still not entirely understood, which addresses the human fear of the unknown.

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