

DECENTRALISED CREATIVITY: TRACING AURA'S FOOTSTEPS IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ART*

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ABSTRACT

This study interrogates the evaluative frameworks applicable to artworks generated by artificial intelligence through the theoretical lens of Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'aura'. Irrespective of ongoing debates regarding the classification of AI-generated images as art, artificial intelligence has become deeply embedded in contemporary visual production practices. While questions surrounding creativity and artistic merit remain contested, the pervasive presence of AI-generated imagery in contemporary culture can no longer be dismissed. The capacity of artificial intelligence to produce artworks independent of human creative agency has necessarily reopened fundamental debates concerning originality, creativity, and aesthetic value. Benjamin's argument that mechanical reproduction stripped artworks of their uniqueness and auratic qualities is critically reexamined here within the context of artificial intelligence. This study explores the decentralization of artistic creativity and the subsequent transformations within the art market, posing the question of whether AI-generated art constitutes a novel form of post-auratic production. The analysis argues that artificial intelligence functions not merely as a tool, but as an active agent that fundamentally reconfigures the production and perception of art.

Keywords: Generative artificial intelligence, Aura of art, Walter Benjamin, Art and technology, Contemporary art criticism.

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MERKEZİYETSİZ YARATICILIK: YAPAY ZEKÂ SANATINDA AURA'NIN İZİNİ SÜRMEK*

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ÖZET

*Bu çalışma, Walter Benjamin'in "aura" kavramının teorik merceğinden, yapay zekâ tarafından üretilen sanat eserlerine uygulanabilir değerlendirme çerçevelerini sorgulamaktadır. Yapay zekâ tarafından üretilen görüntülerin sanat olarak sınıflandırılmasına ilişkin süregelen tartışmalardan bağımsız olarak, yapay zekâ çağdaş görsel üretim pratiklerine derinlemesine yerleşmiştir. Yaratıcılık ve sanatsal değerle ilgili sorular tartışmalı olmaya devam ederken, çağdaş kültürde yapay zekâ tarafından üretilen görüntülerin yaygın varlığı artık göz ardı edilemez. Yapay zekânın, insanın yaratıcı müdahalesinden bağımsız olarak sanat eserleri üretme kapasitesi, özgünlük, yaratıcılık ve estetik değer ile ilgili temel tartışmaları yeniden gündeme getirmiştir. Benjamin'in, mekanik reproduksiyonun sanat eserlerinin benzersizliğini ve auralarını ortadan kaldırdığı yönündeki argümanı, yapay zekâ bağlamında eleştirel bir şekilde yeniden incelenmektedir. Bu çalışma, sanatsal yaratıcılığın ademi merkeziyetçiliğini ve bunun sanat piyasasında yol açtığı dönüşümleri araştırarak, yapay zekâ tarafından üretilen sanatın post-auratik üretimin yeni bir biçimi olup olmadığı sorusunu gündeme getirmektedir. Analiz, yapay zekânın yalnızca bir araç olarak değil, sanatın üretimini ve algılamasını temelden yeniden yapılandıran aktif bir etken olarak işlev gördüğünü savunmaktadır. **Anahtar Kelimeler:** Üretken yapay zekâ, Sanatın aurası, Walter Benjamin, Sanat ve teknoloji, Çağdaş sanat eleştirisi.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Art produced by artificial intelligence (AI) is an autonomous creation that emerges as the output of data-driven processes. As works of art created by AI find more space in the art market, museums and digital platforms, fundamental questions about creativity, originality and artistic value are becoming increasingly important. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the widespread availability of AI models and tools has revealed their capacity to generate sophisticated visual compositions that are virtually indistinguishable from human-created artworks. Yet this technological development provokes fundamental philosophical and aesthetic questions regarding the nature of art, creativity, and originality in the digital era. Among the most pressing concerns is how AI—as an autonomous creative agent capable of producing artworks without direct human labour, creativity, or intelligence—will influence the aura of art and the identity of the artist, particularly in light of Walter Benjamin’s argument that mechanical reproduction diminished the “aura” of traditional artworks by facilitating mass duplication.

This study aims to develop a theoretical framework that critically reinterprets Walter Benjamin’s concept of aura within the context of AI-assisted art, and to revisit and expand Benjamin’s ideas on artworks in the age of mechanical reproduction through the lens of AI technologies. Furthermore, it questions whether art produced by AI can possess a new kind of aura and whether AI represents a continuation of the mechanization of artistic production. Rather than treating AI merely as an advanced tool for artistic reproduction, this study investigates whether AI signifies a deeper transformation in the ways art is conceived, produced, and experienced.

This study specifically aims to address the following questions:

- Q1:** How does art produced by AI challenge conventional notions of originality?
- Q2:** Can the concept of aura be redefined or restructured in the age of AI?
- Q3:** Does AI merely represent an extension of mechanical reproduction, or does it offer a fundamentally new paradigm in artistic creation?
- Q4:** Can a new “post-aura” theory be developed to explain the impact of AI on digital aesthetics?

In light of the growing significance of AI in creative fields, this research seeking answers to the above questions aims to provide a foundational text for future academic inquiries at the intersection of AI and artistic production.

2. AI AS A NEW ACTOR IN ART PRODUCTION

Although text-to-image AI tools appear to generate entirely novel visuals, they depend fundamentally upon extensive visual datasets to execute this process. Consequently, AI systems capable of producing images across virtually any aesthetic register draw upon a diverse array of visual sources accessible through the internet. Irrespective of ongoing debates concerning whether AI-generated imagery constitutes legitimate art, such content has become deeply embedded in everyday practice. Notwithstanding persistent questions regarding its creative or artistic merit, its pervasive presence in contemporary life represents an incontrovertible reality (Maerten & Soydaner, 2023). Franchi and Güzeldere (2005: 1) contend that the three most significant events in human history are, in order, the creation of the universe, the emergence of life, and the advent of AI. What proves particularly striking about this formulation is the placement of AI on an epistemological plane equivalent to cosmological and biological origins. This classification, however, should be interpreted not as scientific taxonomy but rather as a conceptual framework mapping the progressive development of consciousness coming to understand itself. Whereas the creation of the universe and the origin of life constitute phenomena independent of humanity, AI represents, by contrast, a product of human consciousness itself. AI may therefore be understood as the outcome of systematic, deliberate engineering capable of rendering the universe intelligible.

Visual artworks produced through AI, much like photography and cinematography, materialize through the translation of momentary images into analogue or digital media. Unlike conventional methodologies, however, AI-generated content does not document a physically extant scene; instead, it constructs an instantaneous image derived from patterns identified through datasets compiled and analyzed throughout the generative process. Similar to human artists, AI integrates knowledge and creativity within its productions; yet unlike human creators, it acquires knowledge through datasets, and its artistic output depends upon processes of synthesizing and interpreting these data. Algorithms powered by extensive datasets and executed via sophisticated neural networks now produce artworks that destabilize established boundaries between human and machine agency (Santos et al., 2021: 127). In recent years, advances in generative adversarial networks (GANs) have facilitated the increasingly active deployment of AI in artistic production (Schneider & Rea, 2018).

Wolfe (2022) posits that generative adversarial networks (GANs) currently represent the computational systems most closely approximating the function of human artists. GANs were initially developed by researcher Ian Goodfellow, presently affiliated with Google (Aggarwal et al., 2021: 1). The operational logic of GANs rests upon a model wherein

the generator network learns to produce analogous images through the analysis of visual material from a designated period or corpus. Through this mechanism, as the model's generative capabilities advance, it enables data reproduction via specific probabilistic representations (Liu & Tuzel, 2016: 1). GANs comprise two discrete neural networks: one functioning as a critic (the discriminator) and the other as a generator. The generator network synthesizes novel visuals predicated upon learned data, whilst the critic network endeavours to differentiate generated imagery from authentic sources. Within each iterative cycle, the generator seeks to deceive the critic, thereby enhancing its performance—a process that directly shapes the ultimate output.

In traditional algorithmic art, the artist must compose detailed code by predefining rules in order to establish a particular aesthetic framework. In next-generation algorithmic art, however, artists can train algorithms through machine learning technologies. Within this process, the algorithm analyzes diverse visual material, assimilates a specific aesthetic sensibility, and generates novel imagery accordingly. Contemporary AI tools are thus equipped with algorithms designed to acquire particular aesthetic understandings not through adherence to predetermined rules but rather through the analysis of thousands of images. Upon completion of the training process, these algorithms attempt to produce new images grounded in the aesthetic framework they have internalized (Elgammal, 2019: 18).



Image 1. *The painting “Portrait of Edmond Bellamy” (Christie’s, 2018).*

The song titled “Break Free” released on YouTube in 2017, was produced by AI. In 2018, the AI-generated painting “Portrait of Edmond de Belamy” was sold for 432,000 US dollars at an auction held in New York (Image 1). The algorithm belonging to the AI succeeded in producing its own painting after analyzing approximately fifteen thousand artworks created between the fourteenth and twentieth centuries, using these works as reference (Christie’s, 2018; Goenaga, 2020: 52). In the creative process of the first painting produced by AI, the algorithm’s primary source consisted solely of fifteen thousand paintings, each a product of human intelligence and aesthetic sensibility. Therefore, it can be argued that AI has no option but to take the human as its primary reference.

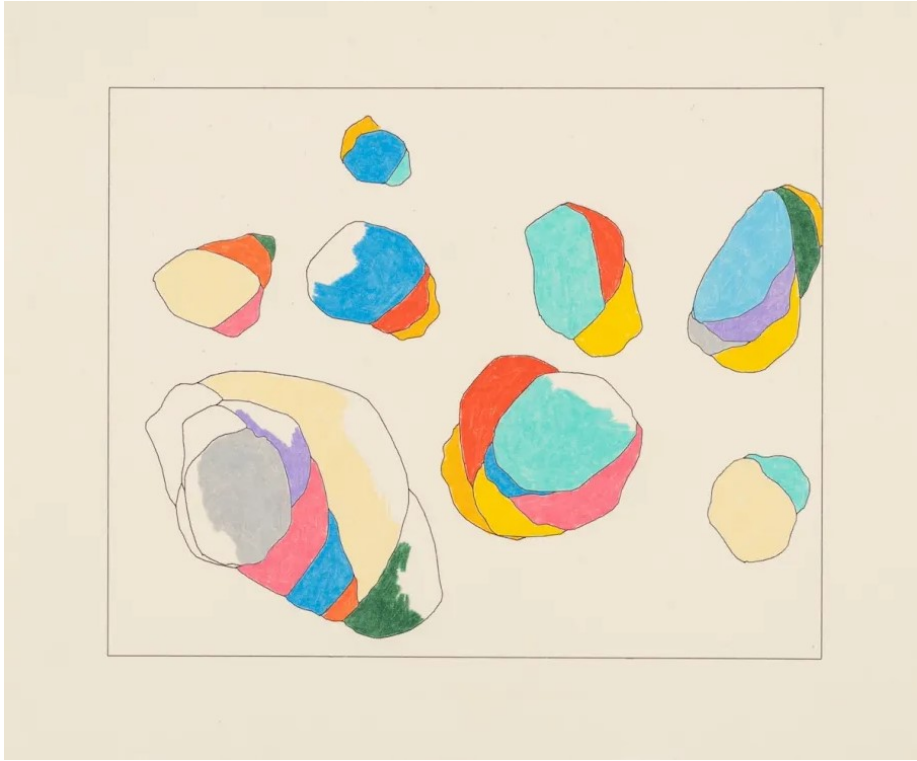


Image 2. *Untitled artwork commissioned by Harold Cohen for Aaron (Greenberger, 2024).*

When examining the history of AI-based artistic production, we find that in 1973, Harold Cohen developed a computer software named Aaron that could produce original and artistic visuals (Grba, 2022: 4) (Image 2). Initially, Aaron could only create black lines, but through Cohen’s efforts, a coloring process was also added to the software (Malina, 1991: 628-629). Over time, Aaron began to work independently without requiring Cohen’s intervention and produced works that were distinctly different from the artist’s style. With this initiative, Cohen pioneered AI discussions by putting forward the claim

that a technological creation, in his own words, could exhibit “the behavior of creating artworks produced by humans” (Greenberger, 2024). Cohen allowed Aaron to give live performances, accompanied at times by the intense interest of museum visitors (Greenberger, 2024). Unlike today’s AI tools that can generate visuals, it was programmed based on strict rules rather than datasets and required continuous human intervention for the system to operate. Nevertheless, Cohen’s Aaron project is considered a fundamental reference point for many subsequent studies in the field of AI, as it presented a new model of collaboration between humans and machines.



Image 3. Mike Tyka, “Portraits of Imaginary People” (Greenberger, 2024).

Mike Tyka, in 2017, began producing an AI-assisted portrait series featuring non-existent human figures. During that period, the use of generative AI technology to create realistic human visuals was not yet as widespread an application as it is today. For this work, photographs collected through the visual archive platform Flickr were transferred to the AI model. The figures in the exhibited works possess anatomically inconsistent

cheek structures, irregular hairlines, and disproportionate eye features (Greenberger, 2024) (Image 3). Today, numerous AI tools—most notably *DALL·E* and *Midjourney*—enable users to generate images via textual commands, regardless of their level of artistic expertise or knowledge (Roose, 2022: 1). Moreover, advanced AI tools have reached a level of sophistication where they can produce artworks that are indistinguishable from those created by human artists (Elgammal et al., 2017: 2; Gangadharbatla, 2022: 14; Mazzone & Elgammal, 2019: 3).

3. THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", composed between 1935 and 1936, represents a seminal and contentious contribution to twentieth-century art theory and aesthetic philosophy. In this work, Benjamin undertakes a groundbreaking examination of how technological advancement has fundamentally altered the nature, function, and social status of the artwork. The essay emerged during a period of acute political and social upheaval in Europe. The mid-1930s marked a critical historical moment characterized by the ascendancy of fascism, the entrenchment of Nazi power in Germany, and growing threats to established democratic institutions. During this time, Benjamin maintained affiliations with the Frankfurt School and participated in ongoing intellectual exchanges with figures including Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer. His perspective on technology and mass culture, however, departed markedly from prevailing Frankfurt School orthodoxy.

The technological developments that began in the mid-nineteenth century with photography's invention and reached a culmination with cinema's emergence at the turn of the twentieth century effected radical transformations in how artworks were produced, distributed, and consumed. Benjamin was among the earliest theorists to grapple seriously with the implications of these technological shifts for our conception of art itself. Cinema—as an inherently mass-produced art form designed for popular audiences and dependent upon mechanical reproduction—assumes a pivotal role in Benjamin's theoretical framework.

From a Benjaminian perspective, classical works of art derive their principal value from their uniqueness and singularity, as their political and cultural significance confers upon them an almost sacred status. With the advent of mechanical reproduction technologies—most notably photography and cinema—Benjamin (2002: 256-257) contended that the aura of the artwork diminished, underwent transformation, and in certain instances disappeared altogether. This shift bore profound implications for both

the production and reception of art, signalling a transition from ritual-based, singular artworks to mass-produced and widely accessible images. Following the rise of photographic and cinematic technologies, Benjamin (2002: 254-256) maintained that art was no longer circumscribed by a singular and unique existence. Whilst acknowledging that mechanical reproduction rendered art more accessible to the masses and carried certain democratizing cultural benefits, he emphasized that artworks nonetheless underwent an erosion of aura as they forfeited their originality and uniqueness. A photograph of a Rembrandt painting, for instance, may appear visually identical to the original in compositional terms, yet it lacks the material authenticity of the source work. It thus becomes severed from the historical presence of the authentic object through the proliferation of infinitely reproducible copies that may be viewed at any time and in any location. Cinema, as a similarly reproducible medium, likewise transformed the artistic experience by displacing it from an individualized, spatially bounded encounter to a technologically mediated form of mass consumption.

Artworks produced by AI differ from mechanically reproduced works in several significant respects. AI outputs do not constitute copies of extant works but rather compositions that imitate or reinterpret established artistic styles. They lack an authentic, material presence in physical space; instead, they exist as digital outputs subject to infinite reproduction and modification. They obscure the boundaries between human and machine production, thereby challenging conventional conceptions of originality. In AI-generated artworks, the erosion of aura represents not merely a continuation of mechanical reproduction but potentially signals a new phase in the evolution of artistic production.

Traditionally, the originality of an artwork was predicated upon its processes of production and material existence. In pre-industrial societies, the uniqueness of an artwork derived from craftsmanship and singularity. During this period, every work of art emerged through the direct intervention of the artist, thereby reinforcing the concept of originality. Whilst all handmade artworks drew upon existing models, none were precisely identical. Scientific and technological advances, however, fundamentally transformed artistic originality. A photograph of a painting or a printed reproduction enabled identical copies to exist across multiple locations. Prior to the emergence of mechanical reproduction, the spatial reach of art remained confined to elite institutions, places of worship, and aristocratic collections. Accessing significant works of art necessitated physical presence at specific locations, which elevated art to a culturally privileged status. The invention of photography and cinema, however, altered this paradigm by rendering art widely reproducible, thereby dismantling conventional barriers between art and the broader public. Benjamin perceived this transformation as embodying both loss and gain.

For him, the erosion of the uniqueness and historical authenticity of the original artwork represented a considerable loss. Mechanical reproduction, however, enabled the masses to access works previously restricted to privileged circles. Cinema—as a mechanically reproducible medium—not only transformed the modes of artistic consumption by reaching unprecedented audiences but also reconfigured the processes of artistic creation. This shift indicated that art was no longer bound to ritualistic contemplation but had evolved into an interactive and participatory sphere, resulting in the massification of artistic experience.

With the digital revolution, a digital file has become instantly reproducible, modifiable, and shareable across global networks. As it can exist simultaneously in multiple copies without any degradation in quality, digital artworks do not possess a fixed, authentic version. The proliferation of the internet and network-based services has enabled individuals to access and interact with artworks regardless of their geographical location or economic status. The transition from mechanical to digital reproduction has not only accelerated the democratization of art but also rendered artistic expression more participatory. Unlike previous technologies that merely replicated existing works, AI is capable of creating new ones. By analyzing large datasets of human-made works, AI models challenge orthodox conceptions of originality. While Benjamin's analysis was limited to the reproduction of pre-existing works, AI operates on a different ontological level of artistic production. Thus, unlike mechanical reproduction techniques, AI-generated art does not merely represent a continuation of past technologies but signifies a radical transformation in artistic production. The algorithmic processes that generate images based on extensive datasets inevitably raise questions about the nature of creativity and whether authorship of AI-generated works should be attributed to the human who entered the prompt, the creators of the dataset, or the AI itself.

AI synthesizes and recombines existing artistic styles and patterns within the production of art. It can therefore be argued that AI represents not simply an extension of mechanical reproduction but rather a new paradigm in which art emerges through computational synthesis rather than human intention. If AI possesses the capacity to autonomously generate aesthetic works, then art can no longer be understood exclusively as a human activity. The advent of AI-generated art signals a shift from humanist to posthuman aesthetics, wherein artistic meaning is co-created by humans and machines. In place of individual creators, we now encounter algorithmic systems capable of producing artistic outputs in perpetuity. This novel form of artistic production—characterized by decentralized, collective, and automated creation—challenges conventional understandings of art by foregrounding algorithmic aesthetics and creativity. Yet unlike traditional artists,

AI models and tools are owned by a small number of corporations—principally OpenAI, Google, X, DeepSeek, and Adobe—raising pressing questions about who controls creative expression. With works generated by AI remaining under the control of monopolistic companies, the future of artists’ labor and livelihoods is increasingly precarious. AI models are frequently trained on massive datasets that contain biased, copyrighted, or ethically problematic content. This compels us to ask whether AI art truly represents a democratization of creativity or whether it merely reinforces existing inequalities in the digital sphere.

4. METHOD

This study seeks to critically examine the impact of AI’s capacity to produce artworks on artistic creativity, originality, and aesthetic value within the framework of Walter Benjamin’s concept of the aura. As the research focuses on developing a theoretical framework, a qualitative approach has been adopted. The study aims to reinterpret Benjamin’s notion of the aura, as articulated in “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Reproducibility” (2002), through the lens of the new dynamics introduced by AI-assisted artistic production. To this end, theoretical inquiry and critical analysis have been employed in tandem. In order to understand how AI transforms processes of artistic production, a comparative framework has been constructed that considers both a historical perspective (the era of mechanical reproduction) and the contemporary context (the age of AI). The study concentrates on the theoretical and philosophical dimensions of AI art and does not include experimental artistic production or quantitative data analysis. Since the research is built primarily upon the Western art tradition and Benjamin’s theoretical framework, it does not encompass understandings of art from other cultural contexts. Moreover, while the artistic capabilities of the AI tools examined are current as of late 2024, future technological developments may necessitate revisions to this framework.

5. THE AURA OF AI ART

Authentic works are original because they possess an irreplaceable and non-reproducible existence. As artworks represent specific cultural and historical events and moments, they also carry historical context. Furthermore, prior to the advent of mechanical reproduction, artworks often bore religious narratives, thereby embodying ritual value. Benjamin’s (2002: 255-256) concept of the aura rests on the premise that traditional artworks derive their uniqueness from their singular existence in time and space. According to Hansen (2008: 354), Benjamin defined “aura” as the experience afforded by singular,

beautiful, carefully crafted objects. This condition, which may also be described as “singularity,” depends upon the artwork’s originality, historical context, and ritual value. For Benjamin, mechanical reproduction destroys the aura by rendering art infinitely reproducible and accessible to the masses, thereby shifting its function from ritualistic significance to exhibition value. The critical difference, however, lies in the fact that while photography and film still require human intervention, works generated by AI can be produced without direct human control. This raises the question of whether AI precipitates a further erosion of the aura or introduces a new kind of digital aura detached from traditional artistic authenticity.

Artworks produced by AI diverge fundamentally from traditional ones in three principal respects. First, while classical works of art exist as unique and singular objects, AI-generated works are inherently reproducible and modifiable. An AI-generated artwork therefore lacks a singular and definitive version—that is, it possesses no authentic form. Second, whereas artists convey their emotions, experiences, and political perspectives through their work, AI operates through pattern recognition and computational logic, raising the question of whether it can genuinely generate meaning. Finally, AI-generated artworks are not only infinitely reproducible but also capable of being endlessly renewed through variations, thereby undermining the notion of a fixed and authentic work. Consequently, a fluid aesthetic experience has emerged in which artworks no longer possess a stable historical or cultural context.

From a Benjaminian perspective (2002), these distinctions suggest that artworks produced by AI lack an aura in the traditional sense, as they are detached from historical continuity, physical authenticity, and the intention to convey meaning. Nevertheless, despite this apparent loss of aura, it can be argued that AI-generated artworks may possess a new and different kind of aura, one distinct from the conventional notion of originality. While AI-generated images can be infinitely reproduced, each image is created according to a specific computational framework, rendering the creative process unique. AI-generated artworks can be customized and personalized according to user input, thereby producing a sense of individualized authenticity. Unlike traditional art consumption, AI enables users to participate actively in the creative process by shaping and modifying artworks based on their input. Furthermore, AI-generated works are often transient and exist only at the moment of their creation. Some AI tools produce real-time artworks that are never replicated, thereby imbuing them with a form of aura. In such cases, AI art possesses a temporal and event-based aura rather than a fixed, spatial one. If one adheres strictly to Benjamin’s thesis, AI-generated artworks possess no aura. However, if the concept of the aura is expanded to encompass algorithmic singularity, interactive

participation, and digital authenticity, one could argue that AI-generated works give rise to a new form of aura—one that is networked, computational, and participatory rather than grounded in physical originality.

6. THE TRANSFORMATION OF ART IN THE AGE OF AI

While AI tools can generate impressive visuals, they do so within a socially detached and isolated framework. By contrast, artists draw inspiration from society, lived experience, culture, and politics, using art as a means of making sense of the world (Elgammal, 2019: 21). Traditional artistic production demands considerable time and intensive labour, whereas AI-powered tools that generate images from text prompts enable even individuals without technical expertise to create digital artworks in seconds. It is precisely here that debates intensify concerning AI's impact on creativity and the evolving role of the artist. As AI tools and models learn through deep learning mechanisms and refine their outputs, they begin producing increasingly creative results, thereby blurring the boundary between human and machine creativity. Nevertheless, AI-generated art does not constitute a new ontological category but represents, instead, an advanced form of stylistic imitation. The absence of subjective consciousness means that AI cannot produce meaningful artistic expression; its function remains that of an imitator rather than an autonomous creative agent.

AI tools that generate visuals from text enable both artists and individuals with no professional involvement in art to obtain high-quality images using textual inputs alone (Lyu et al., 2022: 2). Whilst this development might suggest that anyone can produce artworks or assume an artistic identity through such tools, closer examination of the essence of artistic creation and artists' production processes reveals that the matter is far from straightforward. Machines now function not merely as art objects or tools but also as direct creators or co-creators (Smith & Leymarie, 2017). Consequently, as the boundaries between art and technology grow increasingly blurred, it may be argued that AI tools have become extensions of human creativity. Yet rather than seeking to surpass human creativity or cognitive intelligence in art, AI focuses on imitating human-like learning, behaviour, and decision-making processes (Soddu, 2018: 71-72).

AI, which lacks human-like consciousness, can generate a wide variety of visuals by calculating the most probable outcomes based on given inputs. From this perspective, it cannot be said that AI directly produces artworks. It can, however, create visual forms that viewers may perceive as artworks. Therefore, according to Hertzmann (2018: 2), the true creator of art is not the computer but the human who employs it. Although

computer-mediated AI tools are used in artistic production, attributing the resulting works directly to the computer or AI as artist has not gained acceptance (Hertzmann, 2018: 2). For this reason, Hertzmann (2018) emphasises that the fundamental creative force behind art is invariably human, regarding the computer merely as a tool and the artist as the rightful author of the work.

The effective use of AI in artistic production has given rise to an AI-centred aesthetic paradigm. This paradigm may be explained as follows:

AI challenges the traditional understanding of art, which is grounded in human labour and extended production timeframes, by enabling the creation of art at a considerably faster pace. The remarkable speed of AI-driven production raises concerns regarding the commodification and devaluation of artistic labour, as well as the saturation of aesthetic experience in digital spaces.

AI-based social networks, notably Instagram and Pinterest, present visual content to users based on their preferences and data-driven predictions. Consequently, as viewers engage with algorithmically curated content, art consumption becomes increasingly personalised. At this juncture, users' encounters with artworks are dynamically shaped by algorithmic processes.

Whereas conventional art movements such as the Renaissance and Modernism emerged under collective historical and cultural conditions, AI produces artworks that blend, rearrange, and dissolve formal boundaries, giving rise to a hyper-hybrid aesthetic sensibility. This phenomenon signals the end of conventional art movements and the emergence of a post-stylistic era, in which aesthetics are highly fluid and algorithmically determined.

The emergence of AI as a creative force has profoundly impacted the institutional, economic, and cultural structures that govern artistic production, distribution, and consumption. Traditionally, art institutions, galleries, and museums operated within a framework that valued authenticity and curation. However, in recent years, some pioneering institutions have begun to incorporate AI-generated works into their collections and exhibitions. The Barbican Centre in London became one of the first institutions to formally recognize algorithmic creativity and exhibit artworks produced by AI (Compton, 2022). Major museums such as MoMA and Tate Modern have started acquiring digital works and NFTs¹, acknowledging the significance of AI-generated aesthetics in contemporary art history.

¹ NFT stands for "Non-Fungible Token". NFTs are cryptographic tokens that represent unique digital assets. This means that each NFT is distinct from others and cannot be exchanged on a one-to-one basis.

As AI begins to play a decisive role in artistic production, the aura, as theorised by Benjamin, has not disappeared entirely but has instead transformed into a fragmented, fluid, and algorithmically mediated hybrid form. The loss of aura in AI-generated works is, however, more complex and multilayered than in orthodox modes of art production. Unlike classical reproduction techniques, AI synthesises new images from vast datasets, blurring the distinction between originality and derivation. The aura in AI art is neither wholly lost nor does it retain its classical meaning and significance. Rather, the aura in AI-generated works is dispersed across multiple sources: the algorithm, user input, and the resulting image.

Benjamin (2002: 264-265) argues that the aura stems from the historical and cultural meanings embedded in the artwork, and that mechanical reproduction severs this connection. AI, however, introduces a new temporality in which artworks exist in a continuously fluid state. Works produced by AI can be infinitely altered, rearranged, and reproduced. It may thus be argued that the aura is no longer anchored in the past but instead emerges in real time, dynamically shaped by user interaction, algorithmic choices, and evolving datasets. Consequently, to comprehend AI-generated works, the concept of 'post-aura' may be proposed as a new theoretical paradigm. Post-aura can be characterised by the following fundamental features:

In the post-aura, originality is not bound to a single object, artist, or moment in time. Rather, it is distributed across multiple factors, including the algorithm, dataset, user, and the artwork itself. Works produced by AI acquire meaning through their relational existence rather than through orthodox singularity.

Unlike mechanical reproduction, which merely copies existing artworks, AI actively participates in the creative process by generating new compositions. Creativity can no longer be attributed solely to the artist—that is, to the limits of the human mind and imagination. With AI, human-machine collaboration has emerged, transforming the classical understanding of creativity in art. Post-aura acknowledges non-human agency as a central component of artistic production and redefines the role of the artist not as sole creator but as collaborator with curators, programmers, or AI itself.

Whilst mechanical reproduction detaches art from its historical context, AI art exists in a state of continuous production and transformation. This renders it ostensibly timeless, whereas post-aura embraces infinite reproducibility as a fundamental characteristic rather than a limitation, accepting that AI-generated works can be endlessly reinterpreted and rearranged without a fixed final form.

Although Benjamin viewed the aura as something lost through reproduction, post-aura

rests on the premise that a new form of aura emerges within digital and algorithmic contexts. Contrary to the notion that traditional aura is entirely lost, it may be argued that digital art and media practices produce a distinctive ‘presence effect’. Digital aura does not depend on physical existence but on the interaction between human perception, machine learning models, and data-driven aesthetics. It can be defined as a new form of originality and impact inherent in works produced, shared, and consumed within digital environments.

7. CONCLUSION

While Benjamin argues that mechanical reproduction erodes the aura of the artwork by eliminating its uniqueness and authenticity, this study has questioned the assumption that AI follows a similar trajectory. In the theoretical discussion of the study, the concept of ‘post-aura’ is prominent in redefining the artistic authenticity and aura of works produced by AI. Contrary to Benjamin’s view that the aura is lost due to mechanical reproduction, the concept of post-aura posits that the aura does not disappear; on the contrary, it is distributed and reshaped through digital and algorithmic processes. The traditional, human-centered understanding of artistic creativity has been fundamentally questioned by AI. Furthermore, the study discusses the impact of AI generated works on art institutions, the art market, and the economy of artistic value, thereby addressing the changing structure of cultural production in the age of AI.

In conclusion, Benjamin’s conceptualization of the aura has not been eliminated by the role of AI in artistic production; rather, it has been restructured through digital and algorithmic processes. The study suggests that a decentralized creative process may emerge in AI generated art, and that this could transform the traditional understanding of the singular creator. This study has the potential to serve as a source of discussion and reference for future research that focuses on AI as a tool for artistic production.

For future studies, it is suggested that research explore questions such as: whether AI generated works will devalue traditional art forms by leading to an overproduction of digital art; how these works will be priced and commodified in the future; how museums, galleries, and other traditional art institutions will adapt to the rise of AI generated works and whether they can develop new curatorial frameworks that recognize AI as a legitimate creative force; and furthermore, whether AI can pioneer entirely new art movements, just as it has given rise to new avant-garde forms in digital media.

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