

The Marcel Duchamp Case in, against, or after Artificial Creativity

Jan Løhmann Stephensen

In the introductory chapter entitled “Even an AI could do that” of the book *Artificial Aesthetics: A Critical Guide to AI, Media and Design* (2021–23), which is currently being published chapter-by-chapter on digital culture theorist Lev Manovich’s homepage, Emanuele Arielli, Manovich’s co-author, notes that while some sorts of art with more ‘traditional’ or ‘classical’ characteristics seem quite straightforward for an AI to reproduce, the oeuvre of Marcel Duchamp poses a set of perhaps unresolvable problems. In this paper, I will discuss how this argument on some levels makes good sense, whilst on other levels less so. In extension of this, I want to reflect on what the logic underlying Arielli’s argument might tell us about how the ‘project’ of artificial creativity and artmaking is currently being perceived and pursued.

Marcel Duchamp, the proto-post-conceptual contemporary artist?

If artmaking performed by an autonomously working artificial intelligence has come to stand as ‘the final frontier’ of artificial creativity research (Colton & Wiggins 2012), the successful reproduction of Marcel Duchamp, given his status as arguably the most important artists of the 20th Century, would be the pinnacle of such endeavours. But it actually would so for a number of other reasons than the ones Arielli suggests. As I will argue below, when I dive into the actual passage in “Even an AI could do that”, Arielli extends his proposition concerning Duchamp to include contemporary art in general, thereby suggesting – quite reasonably, I would argue – that Duchamp should be considered some kind of proto-conceptual artist and hence also a precursor to contemporary art as so-called ‘post-conceptual art’. This is for instance in accord with the perspective of Juliane Rebentisch,¹ who notes that contemporary art no longer seeks to conform to genres or traditions, and in this connection credits both the readymade and conceptual art for this ‘turn’, that has left (or enriched) us with an “unfathomable diversity of artworks” (2013:

1 All quotes from Rebentisch (2013) are my translation.

111) as well as with a lot of philosophical and art-theoretical issues to deal with. So, the problems Duchamp might pose to AI-art are quite similar to the ones much contemporary art would pose, Duchamp just happens to be a good paradigmatic example.

Those familiar with Duchamp scholarship would know that this kind of proposition seems to indicate that I am taking sides in quite heated debates (cf. Buchloh et al. 1994; Lund / Wamberg 2019); that I am more or less saying that this particular reading – Duchamp as a ‘practical philosopher’ of (pre- and post-)conceptual art – should be regarded as ‘the true meaning’ of Duchamp. In my opinion, I am not. I am simply referring to the mainstream dominant reception history of Duchamp. Which, of course – and here comes an important point of this paper – is not really just a process in which the oeuvre of Duchamp has been received or interpreted in this or that way, right or wrong. It is rather a process of co-production, that is, of making the person Marcel Duchamp and his oeuvre into *that* ‘Duchamp’, which over the decades – beginning in the post-war decades when he was rediscovered (cf. Crow 1996: 81–87) – has been taking place between artists, critics, academics, philosophers of art, etc., that is, within the institution which sociologist of art Howard Becker (1982) refers to as the ‘art world’. So, perhaps it is just as meaningful to think of ‘Duchamp’ as a product than purely as a producer (or even creator).

In fact, to jump to the conclusion of this paper, it is really the complicated nature of these kinds of inherently social and often also political and / or ideological processes of co-production within the art world (including Academia), which all entail the co-production of art works and their ‘meanings’, as well as of artists’ oeuvres and (the conception) of artists’ ‘creativity’, that is so difficult for an AI to grasp. So, the problem for an AI is not these formalistic aspects concerning what an artificial Duchampian artwork might ‘look like’, but all the fuzzy social stuff that surrounds it.

‘Art’ and ‘creativity’ as social categories – and their un-artificial Others

Secondly, this perspective on the socio-historical character of making Duchamp into ‘Duchamp’ is much broader than just related to this particular artist, his oeuvre and his ‘brand’. It is also applicable to the categories of *art* and *creativity* in general terms. Thus, I would argue, we should never speak of these phenomena as things that just *are*, in essentialist terms. ‘Art-ness’ or ‘creativity’ is a status that is conferred upon artefacts, practices or people – or for that sake: technologies – and in this way ‘art’ or ‘creative’ / ‘creativity’ are co-produced through social actions, which, to make matters even more complicated, are embedded in material, technological and ideological contexts. Hence, at least in principle, anything (or anyone) could become ‘art’,

‘creative’, or both.² Yet, this does not happen; and certainly not randomly. It always happens as a part of a complicated social game within the art world (cf. Becker) or within the so-called ‘creativity complex’ (cf. Reckwitz 2017), and typically in ways that are entangled with other concerns such as ideology, politics, and economy.³

All of this raises a host of discussions, which are impossible to cover in full detail here. Most important is the following: insisting on thinking about both creativity and art as socially becoming phenomena will enable us to problematize the problematic assumption persistently resonating throughout much discourse on artificial creativity and artmaking, namely, that these phenomena *pre-exist* in an *un-artificial* form. In short: the idea that creativity and art exist in ‘natural’ forms that we can get to know more about and then reproduce, which is the fundamental logic underlying so much artificial creativity research within academia, software-engineering, the art world(s), and the zones in which all these meet.

This logic might of course simply be a bi-product of the word ‘artificial’, since it mostly bends towards the connotation ‘emulation’, which according to Jensen (2018) means “to reproduce [...] in a way that is causally identical to the thing being emulated”, rather than towards ‘simulation’, which means to merely “pretend” or “give the appearance of” something pre-existing), which is what the Turing-test measures (which is not without its own set of problems either, but that is another paper). But it probably also has to do with a lack of historical awareness, perhaps even interest. Regardless of why this might be, the point is this: dominant discourses on artificial creativity and / or art often end up reinforcing a historically inherited conception of some pre-existing, natural, or un-artificial human creativity (for instance as a capacity to make art). This point has also been pointed out by Joanna Zylińska in her book *AI Art*. “The frequently posed question ‘Can computers be creative?’”, she notes, “reveals itself to be rather reductive because it is premised on a pre-technological idea of the human as a self-contained subject of decision and action” (2020: 55). So, these notions of ‘artificial art’ / ‘creativity’ are often based in and reproduce, or even reinforce, the assumption of the pre-existence of an autonomous, purely human creativity that is not always already socially, culturally, technologically, and politically / ideologically entangled. Which is quite paradoxical since it contradicts the often-repeated claims that AI will fundamentally challenge the human monopoly on being *the* creative species, the only being making art.

-
- 2 Creativity is often, as anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011: 215) puts it, “read backwards”, that is inferred from the canonized artworks as the product of the artists’ (inherent) creative ability/creativity. In other words: the outcome of social negotiation processes (often containing cultural and material aspect as well) are typically being naturalized as essential, inherent, sometimes even innate, individual characteristics.
 - 3 Various *creativities* (both concepts and practices) have emerged in intimate entanglement with broader socio-politically and ideologically loaded debates and struggles especially since WW2 (cf. Stephensen 2016; 2020; 2022).

So, the problem, I would argue, is *not*, as it is so often claimed, that we have not yet figured out what creativity (or art) *is* (and subsequently: how to reproduce it). It is rather, that we have forgotten *that* we have, in fact, invented it, as well as *how* and *why* (Stephensen 2022). And we have forgotten that it for instance at some point would have been unthinkable – to paraphrase both Andreas Reckwitz and Michel Foucault (2003) – to think of ourselves as *the* creative being; to expect and evaluate your workplace as the natural venue for the actualization of your creative nature and aspirations; or for that sake: to think of creativity as being so pivotal to our socio-economic structures that it is crucial to automate it the form of artificial creativity. As Donna Haraway seminally notes, “it matters what ideas we use to think other ideas with”, “it matters what concepts we think to think other concepts with”. (2016: 12 and 118). Hence, as a minimum, it would be a good starting point to recognize the fact that we are, in fact, thinking with ideas.

“Even an AI could do that!”

So, let us dive into the actual passage by Emanuele Arielli on the problems Duchamp poses to an AI. As already mentioned, Arielli starts by claiming that

it seems particularly straightforward to produce traditional or classical artworks as they tend to display a clear, recognizable style and follow the specific patterns of an artist, school, or tradition. Machine learning systems are ideally suited to analyze numerous occurrences of an object type with slight variations and extract the relevant features and patterns. (2021: 7)

Examples of this from visual art / painting could be (1) features ‘style transfer’, (2) attempts to train a GAN-algorithm to make genre-paintings like portraits from a specific period (cf. Obvious’ much debated *Portrait of Edmund de Belamy* (2018)), or (3) the different attempts to “add” more works to the oeuvre of specific artists (i.e., *The Next Rembrandt*-project). Within the field of music *Sony Flow Music* has in a similar vein experimented with making new compositions “by” Bach and the Beatles (albeit the latter recorded by other performers). In contrast to these quite doable examples, Arielli continues, it would, however,

be very difficult to reproduce something like a Duchamp-style body of work, since the AI would have to start with the very heterogeneous dataset of this artist’s oeuvre, encompassing *Fountain*, *Bottle Rack*, the *Large Glass*, the late *Étant donnés*, and so on. (7–8)

It is worth noting that Arielli even leaves out both the more conventional pictorial works at one end of the morphological spectrum of Duchamp's oeuvre (e.g., *L.H.O.O.Q.* and *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*); and at the other end his 'architectural interventions' (e.g., *Door: 11 Rue Larrey*; and not least: *40 miles of string*). Two extremes, which would make it even more difficult for the AI to deal with (and hence strengthen his argument), given that the material and stylistic dataset would become even more heterogeneous. Whatever the reason for this omission, Arielli continues by noting that

Typically, conservative views on art consider technical mastery as a criterion for "real art", and many people still don't consider something that doesn't require technical ability to be art. However, technical ability means procedural knowledge, and AI are designed to deal with precisely this kind of knowledge. Clearly recognizable styles are well-defined problems that can be reduced to computational tasks, while the generation of variants that don't follow compositional rules (like Duchamp's works) results in ill-defined tasks that have no easy procedural solution. **"My kid could have done that!"**, the popular cliché directed at contemporary art, seems now, in an ironic reversal, to turn against the great and stylistically complex— but computationally scalable— art of cultural tradition: **even an AI could do that**. It is the Duchamp that remains outside of AI's creative abilities [...] (8, author's emphasis)

And then he adds the promise of future success, which, as Marx (1969/1856) would say, all discourses on AI in our days seem pregnant with: "at least for now". (Arielli: 8)

Duchamp in, after and against artificial art

So, what is it exactly, that an AI cannot do? There seems to be four things to consider regarding Duchamp in, against or after artificial art:

The impossibilities of form

First, there is Arielli's argument concerning the impossibility (at least for now), namely that it is the sheer heterogeneity of the oeuvre on the formalistic level, which would make Duchamp a tough case, since the task of emulating (or simulating) Duchamp's oeuvre would leave the AI with a very diffuse set of data to condense and learn from. Here, you could probably object: in comparison to what? Certainly, Arielli's argument might intuitively seem true if we compare Duchamp with what Arielli calls 'traditional' / 'classical' artworks. But on second thought, is not even

this category and dataset already much too broad? A too vaguely defined task? Too ‘wicked’ a problem? (cf. Buchanan 1992). No matter what, if the task is defined narrowly enough, then reproducing the past, perhaps with a twist of novelty and surprise (cf. the so-called ‘standard definition of creativity’ (Runco / Jaeger 2012)), poses no big challenge. But despite following all the conventions of how to make art / creativity – novelty, surprise, domain-specific relevance, etc. – you would not really be making art *per se*. You would just be making (pretty) pictures. Either way, Arielli has a valid point. Since Duchamp is, in fact, all over the place, Arielli’s argument does have some merit: on the stylistic or morphological level alone, Duchamp would pose a huge challenge and does in that sense fit in badly with the current AI-art / creativity agenda.

The historical inevitability of Duchamp: by anyone (or anything)

On the other hand, Duchamp is historically vital, perhaps even unavoidable. In fact, it is really hard to imagine that we would even be discussing artificial art-making ‘as Art’ (or ‘as creativity’), had it not been for the for “absolute permissiveness”, as Thierry de Duve (1996: 291) puts it, which was instigated by Duchamp (and, of course, picked up by other artists, critics, theoreticians, philosophers, etc., who have all co-produced the Duchampian legacy of and within contemporary art), and which has blessed (or marred) essentially all art-making *after* Duchamp.⁴

This permissiveness has a number of faces. First, as emphasised by Arielli, it is related to how post-Duchampian art can look and what materials it can be made of, and so on. In fact, as many have pointed out, it really does not look like anything specific, sometimes perhaps even nothing at all. Indeed, if post-conceptual contemporary art after Duchamp has a certain ‘look’, it might actually be “the look of thought” as Donald Kuspit (1975) famously phrased it. Art after Duchamp increasingly – but not univocally, of course – becomes a “quest for a nonretinal art” (or a ‘cerebral art’) through a “strategy of ‘perceptual withdrawal’”, as Benjamin Buchloh described it (1990: 116). Following this, art after Duchamp no longer seems obligated to conform to more or less rigid genres, traditions, or even specific media either, which according to Rebentisch means that “a given object’s status-as-art can no longer be deferred by specific qualities of the object”. (104)

4 A brief comment on this “after” (which also figures in the title of de Duve’s book *Art After Duchamp*): this morphological, and general, permissiveness is not something Duchamp *invents* (or his followers for that sake). His oeuvre, especially the readymade and all their analytical and philosophical paratexts, “only reveals it” (290–1), de Duve notes, as a “fact” about how art is made; or how things are made into “Art” (cf. below on Greenberg’s hesitant appraisal of Duchamp’s “theoretical services” as well).

This both has to do with the fact, that these inherited categories deliberately have been undermined throughout the 20th Century, for instance as part of the so-called ‘centrifugal gestures’ of the (anti)-artistic avant-gardes (Reckwitz 2017: 57–84), which sought to dissolve the boundaries of art practices and “free” creativity from the restraints of Art, thereby echoing Peter Bürger’s seminal point that these gestures were art-internal political attempts to “sublate” the so-called institution of art (1984: 49). The historical effect of this, Bürger elaborates, is that:

The availability of and mastery over artistic techniques of past epochs [...] owed to the avant-garde movements make it virtually impossible to determine a historical level of artistic procedures. Through the avant-garde movements, the historical succession of techniques and styles has been transformed into a simultaneity of the radically disparate. The consequence is that no movement in the arts today can legitimately claim to be historically more advanced as art than any other. (63)

Any material, from any period can – at least in principle – in the contemporary condition become part of an artwork. That being said, and in contrast to Bürger’s last sentence, it is interesting to observe how most within the fields of AI-art / creativity obviously did not get the memo on the irrelevance of being historically most advanced. Even though from the observer’s point of view it has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to determine the contemporaneity-status of a given artwork, there is no shortage of attempts to highlight the futuristic up-to-date-ness among the producers of AI-based art themselves, who often quite blatantly insist on the inherent novelty-value of their own endeavours. Contemporary art in general has become increasingly preoccupied with the assimilation of new technologies and modes of production into the artistic practice (Lund 2022: 146–7). But the tendency to fetishize new technologies certainly is most notable within AI-related artmaking and experimentation; sometimes in the form of critical artistic experiments, other times less critically inclined (for instance the bulk of AI art which currently seems to oscillate between sheer technological fascination and the historically blind, or at least: disinterested, ambition to do research into the (supposed) “true nature of creativity”).

In this sense, the very concept of a non-human-made art on a computer hinges on this premise, which is very much tied up with ‘Duchamp’ (that is, what this artist has come to signify): that the material categories of artworks have become so permissive, perhaps even promiscuous. But it also hinges on the point about Duchamp made by the art historian John Roberts, who reads Duchamp as a theorist of artistic labour. Drawing on Harry Braverman, Roberts thus claims that Duchamp with the readymade instigates “the redefinition of skill” – that is: the reskilling of the artist – “with a socially expanded understanding of the circuits of authorship” (2007:

5), hereby also in the long run introducing the possibility of non-human creators as producers (or co-producers). By re-posing “what artistic skills might look like” (81) the demarcations concerning whom (or what) might be considered an artistic producer is forever re-defined beyond recognition. This reskilling thus entails 1) the reconceptualization of the artist as a (partial) philosopher / theoretician of art (as I will elaborate below); 2) (fairly new) compositional principles (i.e., juxtapositional forms like montage); and 3) expanded and more explicit collaborations with non-artists in the production of art.

In sum, all these components are the necessary philosophical, theoretical, and practical preconditions for the project of AI-art to even begin to make sense.⁵ But it is actually also the issue of *making sense of* that is pivotal to this discussion, since it is the understanding of the social, cultural and historical contexts of how things become art or creative / creativity that poses the most pertinent problem for the AI to deal with.

Art-as-idea vs. no idea about art

Following the above, one could probably argue that if it was only about how things look (materiality, style, form, etc.), the post-Duchampian turn makes AI-art really easy. Just do something! Anything. Anywhere. Whatever. Whomever. But it is, of course, not that simple. There is more to it. Returning to Arielli, I argue that he would be mistaken if he were to interpret all this permissiveness and all of these openings as other than merely morphological “symptoms” of what is at stake (in contemporary art) after Duchamp, which he sadly seems to do, at least in the quoted passage. Because it is important to emphasize that these trajectories emanating from Duchamp (and all those artists, critics, theoreticians, philosophers, etc., who subsequently were part of making Duchamp into ‘that Duchamp’) are not preoccupied with the emancipation of the artistic means in and off themselves. Instead, it all pivots around especially one crucial question: “What is art (or creativity)?”; or perhaps in a more constructivist phrasing: “How does stuff become ‘art’ (or ‘creative’)?” What I am hinting at here is the fact which conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth with specific reference to Duchamp insisted on, namely that what becomes important within art is the *idea* of art itself, not its concrete realization:

5 It is worth noting that these ‘turns’ within the art world actually run parallel to many conceptual shifts within the fields of creativity (both on the level of practices and within creativity research/studies). Yet, as I will elaborate below, especially the field(s) of AI-Art/Creativity actually come across as quite belated on many levels, since both the *producer*-oriented perspective on creativity/art-making (rather than a structural perspective) and the *product*-oriented perspective (in contrast to the so-called ‘processual turn’ within art as well as creativity (studies)) are maintained in parallax forms (for instance in the search for the ‘stand-alone AI-Artist’ making ‘Art Works’).

what holds true for Duchamp's work applies as well to most the art after him. In other words, the value of Cubism is its idea in the realm of art, not the physical or visual qualities seen in a specific painting, or the particularization of certain colors or shapes. For these colors or shapes are the art's 'language', not its meaning conceptually as art. (1991/1969: 19)

Hence, Kosuth claims – perhaps too exuberantly – “all art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually”. (18) Echoing this, Reben-tisch notes that “art after Duchamp is [...] an ‘art after philosophy’, which now on its own terms struggles with the philosophical issue of the nature of art” (136). Art no longer leaves it up to philosophy to settle the score. Instead, such philosophical reflections have become integral to the artistic practices, processes and products (if any) themselves.

The material, stylistic and morphological consequences of this is also summed up by Lucy Lippard with her notion of the ‘dematerialization of art’. A kind of Conceptual art (“with a capital C”) in which “the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and / or ‘dematerialized’”. (1973: vii)⁶ This explains why art after Duchamp does not really have a specific style and can look like anything – or nothing – specific at all. It can be any material, “anywhere and at any time by anybody” (5), as even the formalist art critic Clement Greenberg, who strongly disliked Duchamp but still felt obliged to acknowledge his “theoretical services”, noted (cf. de Duve: 286–8). Because these kinds of questions – “What is art (or creativity)?”, “How does something become art (or creativity)?”, etc. – can be asked in any materiality, or for that sake in none at all; or as we today, post-Actor Network Theory / New Materialism, would be prone to say: by any *actant* and in (or through) any *matter* (cf. Latour 2005; Fox 2015).

All this is in stark contrast to what most AI-assisted art-making focusses on, including that which Arielli makes reference to, namely *end products* (styles, oeuvres, periods, etc.) and similar computationally easy / *easier* aspects. Whereas the fuzzy and quite dizzying socio-material processes that go into making something into ‘art’ (or deserving the label ‘creative’), which so often seem to be at the back of the mind of much contemporary art as well as those theories that take an interest in this (like Institutional Theory), rarely seem to be of much interest. Paradoxically, given the topic of this paper, what is lost in this incessant focus on style, genre, morphology, etc. is what seems to be *the core* of Duchamp's practice (and not least the trajectories

6 The “and/or” emphasizes the point: ‘dematerialization’ is *not* to say that all art becomes immaterial, that its materiality melts into air. The specificity of materials simply loses their pivotal position as “gateways” into art-ness, since it is the idea – especially the reflection upon the idea-ness of art itself – that is important, not adherence to (or negations of) inherited genres and traditions.

that both follow and (co-)produce him): namely the focus on the question of the status of art itself (and for that sake his take on creativity as well (cf. Duchamp 1973)). A kind of pondering, asking, and suggesting that becomes crucial to so much art after Duchamp, and not only to philosophers or sociologists of art, but to artistic practice itself, as a constitutive part of the artistic practice, often *on the inside* of the works themselves.

Counter Critiques

So, one might object, is this perspective completely absent in all AI-art / creativity-making? No. In all fairness, this critique of the lack of sociological awareness towards art and creativity has also occasionally, but rarely, been voiced within the AI-art and creativity community itself. Artist-researcher Oliver Bown has for instance critically observed that AI-art producing engineers, who are mostly preoccupied with designing the functional application of these technologies, quite often make radical simplifications of the ‘wicked’ complex social embeddedness of creative processes and artmaking. Drawing on the sociology of art, especially those of Howard Becker and Pierre Bourdieu, as well as theoretician of design Richard Buchanan (1992), Bown thus emphasizes that “[if] all of this culturally grounded activity is part of being an artist, then the full hand-over of being an artist to a machine becomes unimaginably complex and beyond the scope of anyone’s capability”. (2021: 4) In that sense, Bown’s point on many levels echoes those of this article, namely that the difficulty or perhaps even impossibility of ‘reproducing’ Duchamp – or for that sake: those substantial parts of contemporary art that are ‘after’ him – does not stem from formalistic / stylistic complexities, but from social and cultural ones.⁷

Another objection that might be raised is whether all these questions concerning the status of art are pivotal to *all* contemporary art? Of course not. But for those who frequent places like Documenta in Kassel, the various Biennales, or even just local art-scenes, they do pop up quite frequently, and they are always part of the backdrop. Even all the so-called traditional or classical media formats, which Arielli refers to, seem to be raising questions such as: “What does it mean that there’s a painting in this context?”, “Why this media?”, and so on. Because in art after Duchamp, media are never just media (cf. Apprigh et al. 2013). The choice (or inclusion) of a specific media (or media piece) as an artistic means (or in the curatorial process) in an artwork (or exhibition) is always a reflexive choice. As an artist or curator, you are

7 Unfortunately, however, Bown also inherits the mostly anthropocentric perspective of the traditional sociology of art (Becker and Bourdieu) in which the human and non-human is sharply divided (cf. Zylinska above) and materiality mostly is either something we fight over or simply props.

no longer simply just born into an art-medium specific tradition. And regardless of whether this pertains to *all* art (after Duchamp) or not, it certainly holds true of ‘Duchamp’ / Duchamp.

The case of Marcel Duchamp in the age of accidental reproduction and untimely monsters

There is, however, some irony to it all. Because in a roundabout way artificial art-making and creativity nonetheless occasionally does raise a set of seemingly quite Duchampian / (post)-conceptual questions: “Is this Art?”, “What is Art?”, “Could an automated artificial creativity replace the artist?”, “What is the future of the artist?”, etc. Questions like these are whirling all over the place, especially with the recent surge of so-called ‘Generative AI’ such as large language model-based AI like Bard, ChatGPT, GPT-4 and word-to-image generators like Midjourney, Stable Diffusion and Dall-E 2. Yet, the crucial difference is that these issues and reflections are rarely raised from the inside of the artistic practices (or the artworks), but on the outside, mostly in the epitextual part of the paratext (cf. Genette 1997). It is for instance part of the joint hype and marketing campaigns by artists and auctioning houses, like in the case of the much-discussed GAN-generated work *Portrait of Edmond de Belamy* by Obvious from 2018 (cf. Christie’s 2018; Solly 2018; Bogost 2019, Stephensen 2019). Similar ponderings are also pivotal to the popular press’ coverage of AI-based experimentations and innovations, which mostly focuses on the novelty-oriented, sensational aspects as well as the market-side of things. “How will this disrupt the art markets?”, they ask with breaking news-titles like “Who needs artists? Rise in works made by artificial intelligence raises real questions for the art market” (Shaw 2018), and “What will the future of the Cultural and Creative Industries be like?” (Benedikter 2021). Finally, these exultant prospects of a future with all-encompassing AI also seem to be part of the venture capital-attracting business models of companies like OpenAI (e.g., GPT-4, ChatGPT and Dall-E2), who according to their CEO Sam Altman are “here to make AGI, not image generators” (Heaven 2023: 45).

Yet, despite the futuristic dimensions of the popular media coverage – regularly even evoking Kurzweilian ‘singularity’-prospects of surpassing our supposedly innate human ability to be creative (1999; 2005) – it is worth noting, how these discussions typically are raised in a terminology that evokes the most conservative, heroic categories of ‘the Work of Art’ (in terms of style, genre, media, finitude, etc.) and ‘the Artist as Creator’ (including his (sic!) individual ownership to the works), anxiously discussing whether these might be in danger of withering away at the hands of AI. Whereas more complicated questions concerning the very contingency of these allegedly endangered categories are rarely integrated into AI-art itself. It is as if Duchamp, conceptual art, and so on has never existed other than as a reser-

voir (or dataset) of looks and styles, to which AI-making only contributes with minor variations – often in the hands of the new heroic figure, the ‘Prompt Engineering Artist’. Hence, in most writings about AI-art and artificial creativity, the thorny issues of how the supposedly simulated phenomena ‘art’ and ‘creativity’ have come about, how they have changed, under what circumstances (politics, ideology, power, economy, etc.), and what this all means, are rarely, if ever, mentioned.

This leads us to another way in which the Duchampian gesture accidentally re-emerges in these fields. Many peripheral commentators, but also a lot of the practitioners within the fields of AI art / creativity, seem to assume that these products have the status of artworks, thereby overlooking the fundamental theoretical (and artistic) ‘services’ of the Duchampian legacy. Because the AI does not make ‘Art’ or even artworks *per se*; it simply makes texts, sounds, still and moving pictures, etc. Or, if we were to translate it into the terminology of the Duchampian tradition, we could perhaps label these *art-like readymades* – that is, automated stuff that could be inserted into and become part of artistic projects..

In this sense, especially the art projects that circulate in the popular press, at exhibitions in galleries and art halls, and on various social media platforms in online groups and communities under labels such as ‘AI-generated art’ or with reference to ‘artificial creativity’ simply come across as weird, untimely monsters, being sold to us as the ‘future of art’, with one foot in an imagined future of a much-hyped technology of artificial / automated creativity; and with the other foot in a quite anachronistic, perhaps even outdated, aesthetic past. So, Arielli is in some ways correct that *even an AI cannot do Duchamp*. But it is not really the heterogeneity of formats in Duchamp’s oeuvre that is problematic. It is all the thinking about social and historical contexts and concepts that is problematic. All this complicated, wicked, sticky, social stuff that makes things ‘art’ and ‘creative’.

Bibliography

- Apprich, Clemens / Josephine B. Slater / Anthony Iles / Oliver L. Schultz (eds.) (2013): *Provocative Alloys: A Post-Media Anthology*. Lüneburg: PML Books/Mute.
- Becker, Howard S. (1982): *Art Worlds*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Benedikter, Roland (2021): “Can Machines Create Art?: A ‘Hot’ Topic for the Future of Commodified Art Markets”. *Challenge* 64(1): 75–86.
- Bogost, Ian (2019) “The AI-art gold rush is here” 6 March. <https://medium.com/abovethefold/the-ai-art-gold-rush-is-here-a3dda143563> (21 January, 2024).
- Bown, Oliver (2021): “Sociocultural and Design Perspectives on AI-Based Music Production”. Eduardo Reck Miranda (ed.) *Handbook of Artificial Intelligence for Music*. Cham: Springer, 1–20.

- Buchanan, Richard (1992): "Wicked problems in design thinking". *Design Issues* 8(2): 5–21.
- Buchloh, Benjamin (1990): "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions". *October* 55: 105–143.
- Buchloh, Benjamin / Rosalind Krauss / Alexander Alberro / Thierry de Duve / Martha Buskirk / Yve-Alain Bois (1994): "Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp". *October* 70 (Special issue on "The Duchamp Effect"): 126–146.
- Bürger, Peter (1984): *Theory of the Avant-garde*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Christie's (2018): "Is artificial intelligence set to become art's next medium?", 12 Dec. <https://www.christies.com/features/A-collaboration-between-two-artists-one-human-one-a-machine-9332-1.aspx> (21 January, 2024).
- Crow, Thomas (1996): *The Rise of the Sixties*. London: Laurence King Publishing.
- de Duve, Thierry (1996): *Kant after Duchamp*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Duchamp, Marcel (1973): "The Creative Act". Gregory Battcock (ed.) *The New Art*. New York: E.P. Dutton. 46–48.
- Foucault, Michel (2003): *The Essential Foucault* (Paul Rabinow / Nikolas Rose eds.). New York: The New Press.
- Fox, Nick (2015): "Creativity, anti-humanism and the 'new sociology of art'". *Journal of Sociology* 51(3): 522–536.
- Genette, Gérard (1997): *Paratexts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Greenberg, Clement (1973) "Seminar One". *Arts Magazine* 48: 44–45.
- Haraway, Donna (2016): *Staying with the Trouble*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Heaven, Will Douglas (2023): "The Year Creativity Exploded". *MIT Technology Review* 126(1): 40–47.
- Ingold, Tim (2011): *Being Alive*. New York: Routledge.
- Jensen, Gavin (2018): "AI: Simulation vs. Emulation". <http://www.gavinjensen.com/blog/2018/ai-simulation-emulation> (21 January, 2024).
- Kosuth, Joseph (1991/1969): "Art after Philosophy". *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. 13–32.
- Kurzweil, Ray (1999): *The Age of Spiritual Machines*. New York: Viking.
- Kurzweil, Ray (2005): *The Singularity is Near*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Kuspit, Donald (1975): "Sol LeWitt: The Look of Thought". *Art in America* 63: 42–49.
- Latour, Bruno (2005): *Reassembling the Social*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lippard, Lucy (1997/1973): *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lund, Jacob (2022): *The Changing Constitution of the Present*. London: Sternberg Press.
- Lund, Jacob / Jacob Wamberg (eds.) (2022): Special issue on Duchamp's Readymades, *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 28: 57–58.

- Manovich, Lev / Emanuele Arielli (2021–23): *Artificial Aesthetics: A Critical Guide to AI, Media and Design*. <http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/artificial-aesthetics> (21 January 2024).
- Marx, Karl (1969/1856): “Speech at anniversary of the People’s Paper”. Marx/Engels *Selected Works: Vol. 1 (1845–59)*. Moscow: Progress Publishers. 500–502.
- Rebentisch, Juliane (2013): *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst*. Hamburg: Junius Verlag GmbH.
- Reckwitz, Andreas (2017): *The Invention of Creativity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Roberts, John (2007): *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade*. London: Verso.
- Runco, Mark A. / Garrett J. Jaeger (2012): “The Standard Definition of Creativity”. *Creativity Research Journal* 24(1): 92–96.
- Shaw, Anny (2018): “Who needs artists? Rise in works made by artificial intelligence raises real questions for the art market”. *The Art Newspaper*, 22 Oct. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2018/10/22/who-needs-artists-rise-in-works-made-by-artificial-intelligence-raises-real-questions-for-the-art-market> (21 January, 2024).
- Solly, Meilan (2018): “Christie’s Will Be the First Auction House to Sell Art Made by Artificial Intelligence”. *Smithsonian Magazine*, 21 Aug. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/christies-will-be-first-auction-house-sell-art-made-artificial-intelligence-180970086/-pf1hccwSoPI1TC1d.99> (21 January, 2024).
- Stephensen, Jan Løhmann (2016): “Talking the Creative Economy into Being”. Mikkel Thorup (ed.) *Intellectual History of Economic Normativities*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 201–215.
- Stephensen, Jan Løhmann (2019): “Towards a Philosophy of Post-creative Practices? Reading Obvious Portrait of Edmond de Belamy”. Morten Søndergaard et al. (eds.) *Politics of the Machines: Art/Conflict*. Beirut: Science Open. 21–30.
- Stephensen, Jan Løhmann (2020): “Post-creativity and AI: Reverse-engineering our Conceptual Landscapes of Creativity”. F. Amílcar Cardoso et al. (eds.) *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Computational Creativity*. Coimbra: Association for Computational Creativity, 326–333.
- Stephensen, Jan Løhmann (2022): “Artificial creativity: Beyond the human, or beyond definition?”. *Transformations* 36: 19–37.
- Zylinska, Joanna (2020): *AI Art*. London: Open Humanities Press.