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The Future of Art?

1.

Is art making still meaningful or even necessary when AI can often do it as well as or better than humans? Perhaps this type of human behavior has fulfilled its function in our cognitive and social evolutions. As a result, it may gradually fade from our lives, replaced by new activities we can't yet imagine. Although we may have difficulty imagining this new world today, it is logically conceivable given AI's rapid progress.

This potential transformation will not be without precedent in art history. Consider how modern art reinvented itself between the 1860s, 1910s, 1960s and 2000s. Abstract art, unimaginable in 1860, materialized by 1913. Installation, performance, land art, and multimedia, inconceivable in 1913, flourished in the 1960s. The next transformation was equally dramatic—thousands of new museums and biennials around the world turned modern art from a Western-centric practice into a global phenomenon by the 2000s.

Given these dramatic shifts in what constitutes 'art' and how it's created, another major transformation in coming decades is entirely plausible—but unlike previous shifts that expanded artistic possibilities, this one may make most forms of human art-making obsolete.

Previous shifts in the history of modern art radically changed what art is—evolving from representational to abstract art across all media, then moving from abstract images to objects, performances, installations, and projects. Contemporary art appropriated forms of communication from other fields (questionnaires, diagrams, statistical data, journalism, documentary filmmaking), becoming a kind of meta-discourse of modern society.

But through these transformations, what remained constant was that art was authored by humans—even if they used various media technologies and later computers. Perhaps the next transformation will be more radical?

After all, "art" — as a single concept encompassing diverse activities, artifacts, and behaviors across many thousands of years — is itself a recent invention, generated by the rise of museums, mass education, and photographic reproduction. Whether all these activities indeed have enough in common to justify placing them under a single conceptual umbrella is far from obvious. It is even possible that a transformation is already underway — but we have not noticed it, because our concepts and intellectual frameworks lag behind social reality. "Art" today may be happening in very different places than we normally associate with it, created by new actors.

2.

One likely response to my suggestion that art may become marginal in the future goes like this. Art making is not only about the results (which AI can generate increasingly well) but the process of making. And humans will continue to engage in this process for various reasons even if AI can create better outputs.

So let's think about art making as a process as opposed to the results. Creation of objects / media we categorize as "art," or doing activities we also put in this category — drawing, singing, taking photos, dancing, etc. — is apparently very pleasurable for humans.

For example, consider such a simple activity as capturing a photo with your phone. Today we take endless photos and often we never look at them later - but the activity of taking them itself is meaningful, enjoyable, and apparently psychologically important.

Another example of the importance of process is art therapy.

This is all true - but let's continue to question the seemingly obvious. What if in the future this type of human behavior (i.e., a process of art creating with its

psychological benefits) loses its importance and gradually disappears? After all, we can see that in human history, some behaviors that used to be very important mostly disappeared in the modern period. Ritual and religion are obvious examples.

We also see dramatic changes in gender norms and women's access to professions once closed to them. Communal storytelling, honor codes, and extended family structures are other examples of once important behaviors and social forms that have largely faded or lost their significance in modernity.

Given such dramatic examples, it is quite conceivable that despite its psychological benefits, the activities we call artistic will also lose their value at some point in the future. As societies modernized, they already gave up many traditional practices — even though they had very important psychological benefits for people.

So I can also certainly conceive that in the future art making (both as a social activity, and as individual pursuit) may become very marginal or simply disappear.

3.

When we think of "creative activities," we typically think of singing, playing music, drawing, taking photos — not playing chess, fishing, or cooking dinner. This reflects the strong association between creativity and art-making that developed during the Romantic period in Europe, which most people today take for granted without realizing how recent it is.

So let's ask: do most people engage in these artistic activities? What proportion of people enjoys drawing, singing, or playing musical instruments? The answer: not many. The only truly popular "artistic" activity today is taking photos — and this is largely because people now use mobile phones with built-in cameras. Until the 2010s, the numbers of amateur photographers were much smaller. And anyway, given that cameras now automate nearly every aspect of the capture process, does taking photos really require much creativity? If we still think of it as a creative activity, this is only because making pictures traditionally required specialized skills.

If surprisingly few of us engage in any 'art' activities, this does not mean we are not creative. We are. We solve problems at work, design our social media presence, curate our living spaces, assemble outfits, plan trips, choose what to cook and how to present it. We remix, customize, and personalize everything around us. These activities involve the same cognitive processes as art-making — selection, composition, experimentation, judgment. This everyday creativity is far more widespread than artistic production. It is just not where the Romantic tradition taught us to look for it.

The main difference between most everyday creativity and professional art-making is not necessarily the nature of the activity itself, but its visibility and circulation. Works produced by artists may become visible through exhibitions, reviews, books, and video documentaries - thus influencing other artists and art professionals. They can also influence how some people think about certain issues.

Most everyday creative acts do not circulate in this way. Yet sometimes they do. For example, young people may experiment with new ways of dressing that are later adopted by the fashion industry and transformed into widely recognized styles. Or social media influencers may develop distinctive visual aesthetics or behavioral styles that are imitated by millions of followers.

And here is the key difference between earlier historical periods and the 21st century. In the past, everyday creativity was usually invisible beyond a small local circle. Today, however, social media platforms allow individuals to reach very large audiences. As a result, some everyday creative practices circulate widely, shaping aesthetic preferences, values, and behaviors on a scale that few artists achieve.

It is possible to argue that many of these everyday creative acts are not on the same level as true artistic creation - because they usually involve choosing from already existing parts (e.g., assembling an outfit from all the items in your wardrobe). But artists also never start from a blank state. They have learned (or are aware of) various techniques, iconography, aesthetics, intellectual ideas, and historical references. So their new creations are made from this repertoire. This, in fact, is similar to how Lévi-Strauss described the bricoleur who works with whatever is at hand, combining pre-existing elements. (While image generation with AI tools

involves calling on such elements explicitly — naming artists, aesthetics, photographic styles in a prompt — traditional artists draw on the same repertoire, whether consciously or intuitively.)¹ I believe that a systematic analysis of all such elements and their appearances across the contemporary art field may show that most of the artworks are combinations of existing elements, and that they rarely introduce something genuinely new. In this sense, the difference between artistic creation and everyday creativity — selecting, combining, arranging — may be small or even non-existent.

Which brings us back to AI. Most people today are creative in countless ways in their everyday life — they just don't do things we identify as 'art.' Yet many believe that art represents the highest expression of human creativity.

So when AI proves capable of making art, this leads to a fear that AI will "take away" something fundamental to humanity. But this fear rests on a false premise. What AI threatens is not a universal human practice — but the special status we have given to art.

4.

Many thinkers assumed that in the future most work will be automated, with machines doing it for us. We will be liberated from work. Free from necessity, we will devote ourselves to constant play or creative activities.

This vision draws on a long tradition. Aristotle recognized making among the components of a good life, but as one activity among many, alongside contemplation, friendship, and civic participation, with no single pursuit crowned as sovereign. The modern tradition narrowed this vision. For Schiller, the *Spieltrieb* — the play drive — was the highest expression of human freedom, the activity that defined us at our best. Huizinga went further: civilization itself, he argued, emerges

¹ Creativity researchers, most notably Margaret Boden, distinguish between combinatorial creativity — generating new ideas by combining existing ones — and transformational creativity, which restructures the very rules and constraints of a domain. What we typically celebrate as artistic 'creativity' is mostly combinatorial: new arrangements of familiar techniques, styles, and references. Transformational creativity — the invention of entirely new conceptual spaces, as when Picasso and Braque developed Cubism or as when Cage composed 4'33" — is extremely rare.

from play, not the other way around. And Marx imagined a future where people were freed from fixed roles — free to create as much as to labor.²

In some versions of this vision, we all become artists. Consider Constant's *New Babylon*, conceived in the late 1950s. Its labyrinthine, ever-shifting interior spaces were designed to have no fixed function and no permanent form — reconfigured continuously by their own inhabitants. Its inhabitants spent their time wandering through spaces designed entirely for improvisation and play.

What if we question the premise of this intellectual tradition: that freedom from labor leads necessarily to play and art, which constitute the ideal life? What if the future looks completely different? In recent years we have seen AI systems become genuinely capable at making art — not merely automating routine tasks, but generating images and films, composing music, writing fiction, designing spaces. These are not simulations of creativity; by many measures they produce outputs that humans find aesthetically meaningful — and difficult to distinguish from human-made work.

So what if in the future the machines do our creative work (and not only physical and knowledge work)? What if they also play for us?

Then — what do we do?

Why would we continue making images, composing music, writing fiction? As I already suggested above, just because artistic activities give us pleasure and create meanings, this is not sufficient to assume that they will continue indefinitely. Religion too was once pleasurable and psychologically sustaining, yet it has gradually faded from importance in many societies as its larger cultural meaning collapsed. But the human impulse to make and mark may be different in kind. Decorating objects and spaces, adorning the body, creating symbols — these activities have accompanied our species throughout its entire history, across every known culture, long before anyone theorized them as the highest human ideal.

² We can also mention William Morris argued that industrial capitalism had stolen creative making from ordinary people, and that a better society would restore it. Here the ideal is not play exactly, but craft: the dignified, self-directed making of things.

They predate civilization, let alone modernity. Today we refer to such activities as 'design' — but in fact they predate the modern concept of art. So what I think will continue to exist are in fact such design practices, which are more fundamental to the human species than the historically specific, modern idea of art.

And while 'art' may still continue as well, what will change is not the practice but the status we assign to art. We will stop thinking of art as the uniquely human occupation, the ultimate expression of freedom, the activity that defines what we most essentially are. In this sense AI may return us to something closer to Aristotle — a more pluralistic vision of the good life, where making and playing are among many worthwhile human activities, rather than the single sovereign ideal that the modern tradition elevated them into. Not a loss, but a correction.

5.

This text explored what may seem very unlikely to us today — that in the future, "art" may disappear. Note that this concept refers to two very different things. One is the broad range of activities that have accompanied our species throughout its history — storytelling, dancing, singing, making marks, decorating objects and spaces. The other is the specific modern institution that took shape during the Romantic period: the elevated figure of the artist, the ideology of creativity and genius, the global infrastructure of museums, biennials, and art market.

I believe these two will have very different futures. The first — these everyday acts of making and expression — is far more ancient and may well persist, even if its forms change. The second is historically specific, barely two centuries old, and far more fragile than it appears.

Considered historically, the modern concept of 'art' was always only a temporary frame placed around something much older and more diverse. But it will not disappear in the next five or ten years. Indeed, in the last three decades contemporary art has only become more valuable, symbolically important, and popular. But in fifty or seventy? It is quite conceivable. And this shift may not be caused by AI alone — after all, neither photography nor the web "killed" art. But the development of AI may contribute in a decisive way.

And what comes after 'art' may be something we do not yet have a name for.

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