Abstract

“Liberate the possible from the tyranny of the probable.” (Dan McQuillan, Goldsmith University)

In this module, we will develop a critical perspective and some hands-on experience at the same time.

Our starting point is to consider «Artificial Intelligence» (AI) as a historical-material practice, i.e. shaped by the concrete conditions of its development and use. In particular, we want to look at the issue of “normalization”, the tendency of commercial generative AI to create very similar-looking content, drawn from a relatively narrow range of possibilities.

We will investigate the roots of this issue and its political and cultural consequences. We will look at artistic practices that break the mold of the normal and use it as a tool to interrogate the past and imagine different futures.

Course requirements:

- Attendance (80%)
- Participation in reading, discussions, and collaborative writing of position paper “AI and the Art School”
- **Pad for course notes**: https://pad.vmk.zhdk.ch/ai_breaking_the_mold

Monday

- Introduction
- Experiences with using AI
  - add tools to the pad
  - add positive and negative experience for each tool

Orientation

- Read together: McQuillan, Dan. 2022. Resisting AI: An Anti-Fascist Approach to Artificial Intelligence. Bristol University Press (read Chapter 1: Operations of AI, p.10-26) PDF in Paul
- Group 1: Stalder, Felix. 2025. “Das Generative der Künstlichen Intelligenz.” Geschichte der Gegenwart, January 19. https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/das-generative-der-kuenstlichen-intelligenz/
- Group 2: Bender, Emily M., Timnit Gebru, Angelina McMillan-Major, and Shmargaret Shmitchell. 2021. “On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big? .” Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, March 3, 610–23. https://doi.org/10.1145/3442188.3445922.
- Group 3: Steyerl, Hito. 2023. “Mean Images.” New Left Review, no. 140/141 (April): 82–97. (PDF in Paul)

Positions in Art Schools

ZHDK:

- Official Position: “Critical Curiosity” https://www.zhdk.ch/en/ki

- Morzateum Salzburg: Lehren und lernen mit KI, https://www.moz.ac.at/de/studium/service-support/lehren-und-lernen-mit-ki

Oberlin College (WP, Tuition)

- Official Position "2025-26: A Year of AI Exploration"
- Luddite Club Implores Oberlin to Opt Out of AI Oberlin Review, September 19, 2025, X
- Kate Martin. If Oberlin Won't Stand Up Against AI, Who Will?, Oberlin Review October 10, 2025

Tuesday

The Issue of Normalization

- Jenka Gurfinkel: AI and the American Smile. How AI misrepresents culture through a facial expression. Medium. Mar 27, 2023
- Eric Salvaggio: The Hypothetical Image. October 29, 2023
- Meyer, Roland. 2025. "'Platform Realism'. AI Image Synthesis and the Rise of Generic Visual Content." Transbordeur 9.

Sources of Normalization

- **Probability vs Possibility**
- **Bias in Data**
- Common Crawl Data Set
- Dodge, Jesse, Maarten Sap, Ana Marasović, William Agnew, Gabriel Ilharco, Dirk Groeneveld, Margaret Mitchell, and Matt Gardner. 2021. "Documenting Large Webtext Corpora: A Case Study on the Colossal Clean Crawled Corpus." arxiv.org
- Knowing Machines Analysis of the LAION-5B Data Set
- Adam Harvey Exposing.ai
- Mediengruppe Bitnik (2017) State of Reference
- Joy Boulamwini AI, Ain't I a Woman? (2019)
- Nikki Böhler, Céline Nauer, t8y, Poisoning Reality, 2026
- Holly Herndon/ Matt Dryhurst. xhairymutantx, Withney Biennial, 2024
- Herndon, Holly, and Mat Dryhurst. 2024. *All Media Is Training Data*. Edited by Eva Jäger and Caroline Busta. Serpentine.
- **Corporate Policy**
- OpenAI Guardrails
- Avoiding controversy (in the US)
- Reinforcement Learning

Group Work, part 1

What do we want from AI at an Art School?

Brain-storming session, list with as many possible points as you think of, not all of them need to be included in the next version.

Wednesday

Creativity & Homogenization

- OpenAI's Sam Altman talks ChatGPT, AI agents and superintelligence — live at TE D2025, April 2025
- REPORT, DIGITAL PUBLISHING. 2024. ""KI-Übersetzungen sind qualitativ minderwertig"." November 12. https://ai-at-media.de/de/ai-media/uebersetzer-ki.
- Chayka, Kyle. 2025. "A.I. Is Homogenizing Our Thoughts." Infinite Scroll. The New Yorker, June 25. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/infinite-scroll/ai-is-homogenizing-our-thoughts.
- Anderson, Barrett R., Jash Hemant Shah, and Max Kreminski. 2024. "Homogenization Effects of Large Language Models on Human Creative Ideation." Creativity and Cognition, June 23, 413–25. https://doi.org/10.1145/3635636.3656204.
- Shaw, Steven D., and Gideon Nave. 2026. "Thinking—Fast, Slow, and Artificial: How AI Is Reshaping Human Reasoning and the Rise of Cognitive Surrender." Preprint, PsyArXiv, January 12.
- Creation is Collective. In: Herndon, Holly, and Mat Dryhurst. 2024. *All Media Is Training Data*. Edited by Eva Jäger and Caroline Busta. Serpentine. p. 92/93

Group Work, part 2

What do we want from AI at an Art School?

Choose the points you agree, and write a statement, you can use any tools you like, but in the end, it's your statement.

Thursday

Start at 10:30, lunch break at 13:00, end at 19:00

Sources of Normalization, cont

- **Content Moderation**
- Andrew N. Wilson, Workers Leaving the Googleplex, 2011, 11:03
- Frank and Eva Mattes, Dark Continent, 2015 Episode One 4:50, http://jnhvqx5annuswmmh3mhfj4exvartelzftr4gdc5chucllqqljccg3fid.onion
- 'It's destroyed me completely': Kenyan moderators decry toll of training of AI models The Guardian, 2 Aug 2023
- Espinosa, H. (2026). "Working for the Machine – Fragments of life and death of a content moderator". In: M. Miceli, A. Dinika, K. Kauffman, C. Salim Wagner, and L. Sachenbacher (eds.)

Data Workers‘ Inquiry. Creative Commons BY 4.0.

- Gillespie, Tarleton. Custodians of the internet: platforms, content moderation, and the hidden decisions that shape social media. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.
- Gray, Mary L., und Siddharth Suri. Ghost work: how to stop Silicon Valley from building a new global underclass. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019. (read introduction, p. ix-xxiii)

Lateral Thinking

“Solving of problems by an indirect and creative approach, typically through viewing the problem in a new and unusual light.”

Oblique Strategies, by Peter Schmidt Brian Eno, 1975

- Brian Eno. How to Beat Creative Block. https://youtu.be/tURRSJ-q4bg
- Brian Eno. On Being Alert. https://youtu.be/HyprPnn0rHg

Group Work, part 3

Draw five cards from the deck, chose the one most productive for you and revise the statement following the strategy chosen.

— Kino Toni Toni Areal,

«Platform Brutality»

- Keynote, Q&A mit Geert Lovink
- 15:00 - 16:30 Uhr

Geert Lovink, a media theorist and internet critic from the Netherlands, will discuss the current projects of the “Institute of Network Cultures” in Amsterdam, which he directs, and present his new book, “Platform Brutality.” The keynote address will be delivered in English.

More Information:
https://cast.zhdk.ch/news/geert-lovink-from-platform-brutality-to-social-media-alternatives/

«Bilder aus dem Prompt: KI zwischen Markt, Kunst und Verantwortung»

- Panel, Q&A mit Tobias Fueter & Boris Eldagsen, Moderation Manuel Hendry
- 17:30 - 19:00 Uhr

Ab 17:30 Uhr sind Tobias Fueter und Boris Eldagsen «zu Gast bei Cast». An unserem Panel «Bilder aus dem Prompt: KI zwischen Markt, Kunst und Verantwortung» treffen die zwei profilierten, konträren Positionen aufeinander, um das Spannungsfeld zwischen kommerzieller Anwendung und künstlerischer Intervention auszuloten. Moderation: Filmemacher und Forscher Manuel Flurin Hendry.

More information:
https://cast.zhdk.ch/news/bilder-aus-dem-prompt-ki-zwischen-markt-kunst-und-verantwortung/

Friday

Piotr Winiewicz, About A Hero, 2024, 85 Minutes

https://thefilmverdict.com/about-a-hero/

Group Work, part 4

What do we want from AI at an Art School?

Finish and presentation.

Feedback & End

From:
https://wiki.zhdk.ch/fs/ - **Felix Stalder, Prof. DfA**

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