

Welcome to all of you.

About a month ago the well-known digital designer and artist Lev Manovich posted his “letter to a young artist”. In it, he asks a question frequently discussed in the era of AI. What is the sense of making art today? The question could be interpreted as questioning the necessity of creating art when AI can potentially do it as well or even better than humans. The good news is that Manovich does not only pose the question, he also answers it. He does this by drawing our attention to the difference between ourselves as human beings and AI as a mechanism.

I paraphrase Manovich. The artist, supposedly a human being, should focus on his limits and obsessions. As a human being his skills, knowledge, and evolution are heavily limited compared to those of AI. A human artist cannot just adopt any style at random, like AI can. He cannot learn as quickly as AI can. The human artist simply cannot compete with the digital abilities, as they are endless. So, Manovich thinks that we should embrace our constraints, and that by doing that our art will have its own very peculiar characteristics and value.

I sympathise with Manovich, and I agree we need to take into account the differences between the human functioning and the functioning of AI. Nevertheless, when Manovich argues that making art with AI-tools is a meaningless idea, I cannot follow him. Then it seems as though Manovich is discussing the human being and art as existing separately, capable of standing alone and withdrawing from AI-practices. That surprises me because I think that is not feasible.

Now, let me introduce the position developed by the Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris as an alternative to Manovich’s.

Ferraris also searches for differences between the human being and AI. E.g. He stresses that a mechanism, in opposition to a human organism, can be switched on and off almost endlessly. A human organism, on the contrary, dies and cannot be switched on again. Ferraris is well aware of the limited, time-dependent condition of the human being. So far, this matches with Manovich’s position. However, Ferraris also remarks that the human always needs a supplement, he always needs mechanisms. This said, it is clear that we differ in many respects from AI, but also that we cannot behave otherwise than to reach out for mechanisms, and today that mechanism is AI, to practice our human organism.

Therefore, I think, if we want to return to ourselves, as artistic beings, we will have to pose the question how we will use today’s supplements, the AI-tools and make art with it. Hence, we need to ask “how to see, talk, fantasize, and collaborate with AI.” Given that our environment is thoroughly permeated by AI, escaping or isolating ourselves from it becomes impossible. We essentially become the constraints of artificial intelligence. As if AI has become our ventriloquist puppet.

To avoid misunderstandings, I want to add the following. Although we cannot free ourselves from technology, this does not mean we become identical to it. E.g. I share my life with my glasses; they feel like a part of me. Wherever I go, I feel lost without them. But it does not mean I am my glasses. I am glad my glasses have been developed to accord with my constraints. In the same way, I hope AI-tools will be created to continue my existence in its limited edition.

In fact, what I propose aligns more with a technical romanticist position. It suggests that we begin with an awareness of our limitations and, from within that context, explore and reconsider the seemingly boundless possibilities offered by AI.

I do think all works in this exhibition testify in one way or the other from this romanticism. Each time the artist looked for a confrontation between its highly constrained personal experience and the way AI is distorting, transforming, helping, or reacting to that in another way. In that sense, it is much more about taking responsibility for the features that AI make possible. Artists and human beings in general need to explore the possibilities of AI to be able to renew and review their constraints.

I hope the exhibition will act as an invitation to take up that challenge.