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Commodity or Artwork: Understanding AI-Based Aesthetic Products with Philosophy

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The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into everyday life is one of the most impactful events in the early 21st century. Users encounter AI either through personalised recommendations from various apps or by directly interacting with it to request tasks or final products. These final products often include aesthetic creations. However, recognising AI-generated aesthetic products as genuine works of art raises several issues for discussion.

In this article, I will claim that the assumption that AI can create artworks has overlooked a significant shift in the history of aesthetics. Since the 18th century, there has been a clear distinction between artisan and artist. The following century brought both the Industrial Revolution and the rise of designers into the scene. In the same century we also witnessed the invention of the camera and the decline of Alberti's principles. Art freed itself from rules and principles that had to be followed. These changes led to art moving away from absolute beauty. Nevertheless, design must adhere those principles to create aesthetic products. This resembles what AI does when generating new images.

The generation of new images clearly follows certain aesthetic rules that are recognisable in a certain society. This turns the final product, generated by AI, into a commodity for people. In these products, people's perspective is directed exclusively towards the object. However, Merleau-Ponty (1993, p. 126) clearly shows that our gaze goes beyond the canvas when we look at a work of art. Thus, if we accept the goods of AI as artworks, we confine perspective to existing aesthetic rules that are merely reproduced by AI. This also leads to a loss of politics ('la politique'), as per Rancière's (2010, p. 36) concept. As a result, I argue that accepting AI-based products as artworks appears to limit both politics and art, potentially leading to the loss of the aesthetic rules that have existed since the 19th century.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Aesthetics, Design, Art, Artisan.

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