

Critical Explorations on the Socio-Ethical Implications of Creative AI for Artists

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Abstract

This extended abstract outlines my ongoing PhD project *Responsible AI and the Arts: Critical explorations on the socio-ethical impacts of Creative AI for artists*, conducted at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden, in 2021–2026.

Care Ethics in Creative AI for the Arts

The global market for generative AI in music and audio-visual content is projected to increase over twentyfold by 2028 (CISAC 2024). This gold rush to “democratise” artmaking paves the way for grave social, ethical and legal repercussions for artistic work, impacting both the individuals and the political economy of the entire industry. As cultural and creative sectors are traditionally open to technological innovation and subject to relatively fewer regulatory constraints, the race for novelty has largely outpaced societal norm-setting. Critically oriented empirical work is urgently needed to help balance the situation.

My PhD project examines the impacts of creative AI on the conditions of artistic work. In this context, the definition of creative AI includes not only data-driven, machine learning based technologies applied in creative and artistic contexts, but the entire *socio-technical system* in which they are embedded, comprising the different actors involved and the relations between them, as well as the practices and values of development, use, and deployment of such technologies. This perspective derives from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and critical scholarship, and it closely follows Lucy Suchman's recent call for the analysis to retreat from the “thingness” of AI systems in order to turn “a keener focus on their locations, politics, material-semiotic specificity and effects.” (Suchman 2023, p. 4).

The adoption of this wider perspective serves two purposes. Firstly, examining AI technologies through situated empirical case studies illustrates how AI technology is currently manifested in the creative and cultural sectors, including whose interests and politics get propagated, which perspectives are marginalised, and how various ethical

vulnerabilities emerge in the process (*cf.* Crawford 2021). Secondly, such critical accounts can guide us towards reconfigured paradigms for how creative AI could be conceptualised, developed, designed, used, and regulated *otherwise*, with the goal of cultivating artistic integrity and agency, and supporting fair market conditions for artistic activities. My work thus addresses the following two research questions:

- How are frictions of creative AI reconfiguring the conditions of artistic work?
- What role can *care* play in the practices of creative-AI development and deployment?

My compilation thesis consists of a series of case studies that focus (1) on the use of creative AI by professional artists in various aesthetic domains, and (2) on the practices of creative AI development specifically in the music domain. I approach these topics from the perspectives of care ethics (Held 2006), as well as critical data studies and data feminism (D'Ignazio and Klein 2020; Lindgren 2024). My work also contributes to the emerging interdisciplinary field of critical studies in AI music (Sturm et al. 2024). In the following, I outline the work conducted in the project so far.

Interviews with AI-artists

Our semi-structured interviews with 20 Nordic artists are among the first to examine the emerging practices of professional artmaking with AI. The results of this work have been so far analysed in two articles, which focus on 1) motivations for the artists to engage with AI tools in their creative work and how they relate to wider technology attitudes (article under review), and 2) the frictions artists have experienced in their creative interactions with AI (Kaila, Holzapfel, and Jääskeläinen 2024). The results connect the frictions to the artists' socio-material realities and explore how frictional ambivalence can be both a restrictive and productive factor in AI-artistry.

Ethically Aligned Stakeholder Elicitation

To address the widely acknowledged gap between high-level principle-based AI ethics and their implementation (e.g. Munn 2022), we introduce EASE, an ethical analysis tool that builds upon the Value Sensitive Design (VSD) framework, the relational perspective of care ethics, and stakeholder analysis (Kaila, Jääskeläinen, and Holzapfel 2023). Tested in a series of workshops with research groups that develop tools for AI music, the tool aims to increase awareness of the impacts of creative AI applications, support critical examination of power asymmetries embedded in the development practices and encourage the adoption of care-oriented framing for stakeholder relations.

Interrogating Frictions in AI Folk Music

These case studies (Kaila and Sturm 2024; Kanhov, Kaila, and Sturm 2024) examine two generative AI systems for music generation. Comparing a research-driven application for symbolic music generation in the style of traditional Irish dance music (*folk-rnn*) and a commercial service applicable for a range of styles (*Suno*), we interrogate how the development of AI applications for music can make meaningful contributions to existing musical practices and balance the inherent tensions between (datafied) tradition and innovation. Acknowledging the risk of data colonialist tendencies (Mejias and Couldry 2024) in these practices, we argue for the necessity of interdisciplinary engagements in computer science to deepen the ethical reflexivity towards the communities of practice impacted.

Examining Fairness in Synthetic Singing

In this project (under review), we study the Terms of Service (ToS) documents of ten commercial AI-based generative services for singing voice imitations and, given the lack of solid mechanisms in the EU law for protecting the human voice, how ToS articulate the conditions of fairness toward the vocal artist. Specifically, we contrast a group of SVS services that have adopted a profile of a “fair” market actor with five other services. Through an analysis of procedural and substantive fairness, we highlight roles the vocal artist can be awarded to restore control and agency in their voice.

Conclusions and Contributions

The case studies illustrate the limitations of high-level ethical principles in the situated considerations of creative AI development and deployment. Despite the methodological challenges of studying a highly dynamic field such as creative AI, it is imperative that these transitions are analysed critically in synchrony with the emerging market,

while norms are still open for negotiation. The thesis argues that the ethics of care can make the ethical impacts of AI technologies and practices visible, restore artistic agency and help navigate tensions on the road towards responsible creative AI.

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