



RESEARCH ARTICLE

LYOTARD AND FUTURISM: AESTHETIC PARALLELS BETWEEN FUTURIST ART AND AI-GENERATED IMAGERY

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Abstract

This article explores the aesthetic parallels between Futurist art and AI-generated imagery. It begins with Jean François Lyotard's "The Bias of the Figural" and examines the 1968 MoMA exhibition "The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age." The study highlights how both Futurism and generative art challenge traditional concepts of aesthetics, authorship, and experience. Futurism celebrated technological innovation and societal transformation, while AI generative art redefines these concepts through human-machine collaboration. The article discusses the implications of AI in art, emphasizing the post-human aesthetic that integrates processes, interactions, and unpredictability.

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Introduction:-

We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries! ... Why should we look back, when we want to break open the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, for we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed. (...) We want to glorify war – the world's only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the libertarians, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and contempt for women. (...) We want to destroy museums, libraries, and academies of every kind, and fight against moralism, feminism, and all opportunistic and utilitarian cowardice. (...) For the dying, the sick, the imprisoned – fine: the admirable past may well be a balm for their suffering, since the future is closed off to them... But we want nothing to do with the past, we, the young and strong Futurists! (Excerpts from the Futurist Manifesto, 1909). A hundred years separate the emergence of the Futurist movement in the arts and the introduction of Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs). Yet something—beyond the aesthetics of art itself—seems to recur.

In 1909, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wrote the Manifesto of Futurism and published it in the Parisian newspaper Le Figaro. This document defined the principles and aspirations of Futurist artists, proposing a radical break with the past and a celebration of technological innovations and the social transformations of its time. In 2014, Ian Goodfellow presented the paper Generative Adversarial Nets at the Neural Information Processing Systems conference in Montreal, introducing a new technological paradigm for generating synthetic data, which made it possible to create images indistinguishable from real samples. Although Harold Cohen had already developed the

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AARON program in the 1950s—a system capable of autonomously generating drawings and paintings—it was GANs that gave both artists and the general public the ability to create images from textual descriptions (Figure 1).

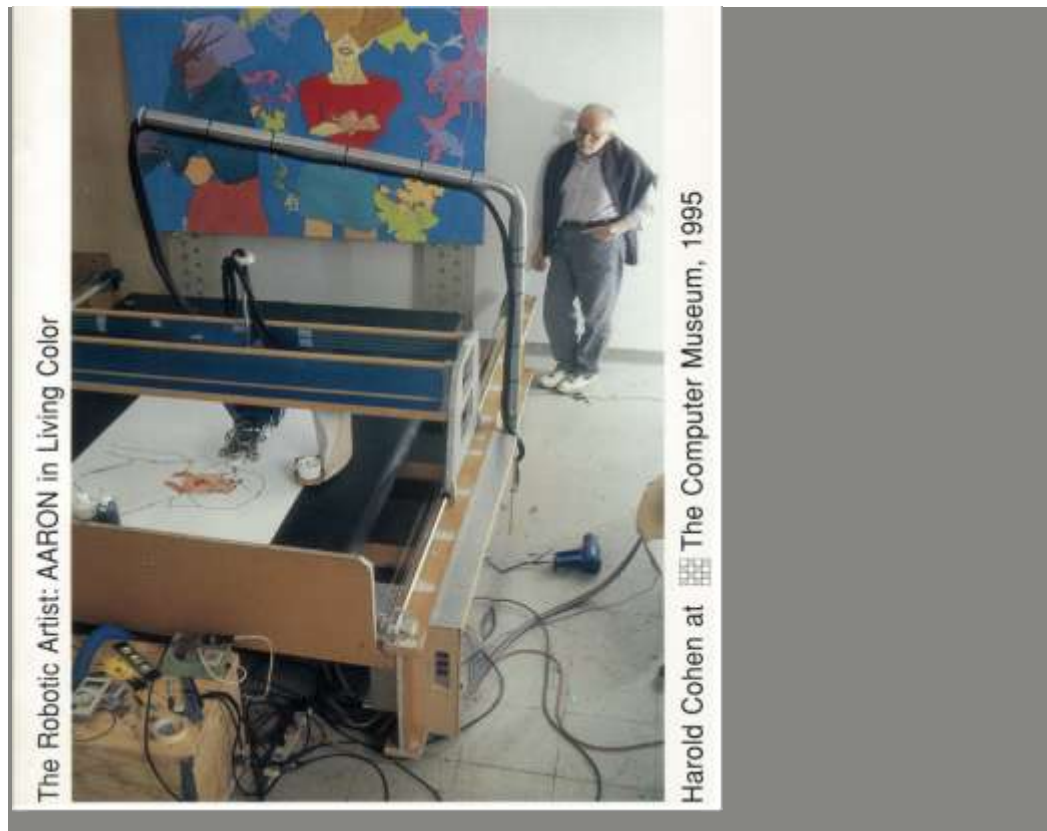


Figure 1: <https://www.katevassgalerie.com/blog/harold-cohen-aaron-computer-art>

Art, by nature a nostalgic experience, renders the representation of futures paradoxical. Comparing a movement like Futurism to a technological tool like AI is relevant, as both concern the relationship between human agency and technology.

Both Futurism—which reached its height before the First World War—and current generative AI systems seem to seek a visual redefinition of art and culture, grounded in the technological and social transformations of their respective eras. The aim of the Futurists was to discard past art and usher in a new era that rejected tradition and celebrated change, originality, and innovation in culture and society (Boccioni et al., 1909).

In 1909, Futurist ideals primarily served the interests of industrialists, entrepreneurs, and progressive intellectuals eager to promote and accelerate technological and urban development. The movement attracted those who viewed industrialization and mechanization as engines of economic and social progress. In Italy, the Futurists aligned with nationalist ambitions: Marinetti and his followers saw modernization as a means to revitalize national spirit and elevate the country's global status. Artists and writers drawn to Futurism were also motivated by a desire to innovate and experiment with new forms of expression, breaking away from traditional styles such as Classicism and Romanticism. Thus, Futurist ideas served both an aesthetic-cultural pursuit of renewal and concrete economic interests—perhaps not in that order.

Industries such as automotive, railroads, electric power, machinery and tools, telecommunications, architecture, and urban planning not only fueled the economy but also shaped the cultural and social landscape, providing the means for the realization of Futurist ideals. During the Second Industrial Revolution, electricity replaced coal, enabling the development of electric motors, public lighting, and household appliances. Subsequently, oil became essential for transportation with the advent of combustion engines and commercial aviation. Mass-produced steel made possible the construction of skyscrapers, bridges, and railways. Industrial chemistry introduced new products such as plastics,

paints, fertilizers, and explosives. Financial capitalism consolidated through the rise of large corporations and the expansion of global trade. In response to industrial working conditions, labor movements and unions emerged. These changes drove—or at least accompanied—the development of a new aesthetic in the arts. Incorporating new materials and techniques, artworks shaped public perception of technological progress and, most importantly for our discussion here, helped consolidate an optimistic and enthusiastic vision of modernity’s possibilities.

Generative AI artworks often employ the same visual elements that defined the Futurist aesthetic: representations of movement and speed through angular lines and fragmented forms; vivid, contrasting colors to convey vitality and energy; and technological themes such as machines and vehicles. Today, it is the industries of the Third Industrial Revolution—computing and digital technologies—that are economically aligned with this aesthetic. These include monopolies in IT and communications, aerospace, robotics, renewable energy, biotechnology, and fintech. As a result, products like autonomous vehicles, virtual assistants, collaborative robots, vacuum-tube transportation systems, reusable rockets, algorithmic recommendation engines, generative content platforms, digital payment solutions, blockchain technologies, and cryptocurrencies are all incorporated into computer-generated fictional realities.

...AI not only reshapes the human condition but also redefines the future of humanity, fostering a development that values both technological innovation and fundamental human values.” (ChatGPT-4, 2025)
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From the Future to the Post-Human:

Generative AI models, especially those based on Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), are trained on vast datasets of artworks, learning and replicating styles in the process (Gatys et al., 2015). Therefore, if these models are fed a substantial volume of Futurist artworks and guided by artists in adjusting the generation parameters, the final outcome will be shaped accordingly.

The contemporary context—marked by technological obsolescence, increasing digitization of everyday life, and the popularity of science fiction themes in the media—fuels artistic representations that explore utopian Futurist concepts. Imaginative architecture with its complex geometric forms and mechanical elements, depictions of immersive and dynamic environments, human or robotic figures with cybernetic implants, and above all, the harmonious blending of nature and technology reflect a vision of coexistence and transformation.

Posthumanism emerges as the latest reconfiguration of traditional conceptions of what it means to be human. It questions the boundaries between the biological and the technological, the natural and the artificial, promoting a perspective in which human identity and capabilities are expanded and transformed through technology. This concept addresses the deconstruction of anthropocentric hierarchies and the redefinition of relationships between humans and other forms of life. Through technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), biotechnology, Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and the Internet of Things (IoT), the boundaries between the human and the digital are becoming increasingly permeable (Gotlieb, 2018).

These posthuman interactions enable the enhancement of both physical and cognitive functions, and further, the transformation of subjective experience and social interaction. For instance, cybernetic implants and wearable devices allow us to monitor and optimize bodily movements, while neural interfaces enable direct communication between the human brain and computational systems—an expansion of human capacities. In doing so, they redefine concepts of identity and agency, challenging traditional notions of individuality. Through avatars, digital realities, and technologically mediated interactions, individuals can simultaneously explore multiple identities and experiences.

It may be, then, that it is precisely the sum of the technological capabilities of generative AIs—combined with data curation, creative collaboration between humans and machines, digital media, social networks, and the broader cultural context—that is producing the same Futurist aesthetic which, at the turn of the last century, conveyed the dynamic, modern essence we were told to desire: a colorful, radiant, low-density future accessible only to those who do not resist digital control.

Interestingly, the economic problems faced in Europe around 1909 and in the United States around 2014 reveal striking similarities, which help us understand the conditions that contribute to the rise of extremist political regimes amid rapid social and technological change. In both the late 19th century following the Industrial Revolution and in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, there was widespread social inequality and public discontent with a perception that the economic system benefited only the wealthy.

The labor market was similarly affected in both eras. Around 1900, mechanization was replacing manual labor, causing mass unemployment and insecurity among workers, along with social unrest like strikes and union protests (Hobsbawm, 1987 & 1994). In the 2000s, automation and digitalization began transforming entire sectors, displacing jobs and raising concerns about the future of work. Globalization further exacerbated job losses in industrial sectors as production moved to countries with lower labor costs.

Global conflicts also played a central role. Futurism arose during a period of European imperialism and growing nationalism, setting the stage for World War I. When generative AI became publicly known, the U.S. was engaged in international wars, facing tension with emerging powers (such as China), and navigating regional conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, Afghanistan, the Philippines, and Ukraine—creating an atmosphere of instability and fear. In both historical moments, we see a shared sense of crisis and uncertainty from dominant powers (Boggs & Pollard, 2006).

In a way, innovations like the combustion engine, the telegraph, and electricity—which transformed daily life and triggered social and cultural upheaval during the Second Industrial Revolution—mirror the changes of the digital era. Information technologies and new forms of communication, such as the internet and social media, now play a central role in political mobilization. Both eras are marked by industrial and governmental rhetoric with a pro-machine bias: new technologies are presented as potential solutions to economic crises and inequality. The idea of a digitalized future, driven by technological progress and infused with humanity, is actively promoted.

Beyond the visual arts, the relationship between the posthuman and the digital is also widely explored in cultural narratives, such as science fiction literature and cinema. These representations reflect both the hopes and fears associated with technological integration, serving as a mirror of emerging societal tensions and possibilities. They are also disseminated through personalized recommendation algorithms that influence our daily media consumption. Through films, games, music, and posts, cultural preferences are shaped—leading to either the homogenization or fragmentation of individual tastes.

The increasing integration of AI into domestic devices, autonomous vehicles, and personal assistants is redefining the relationship between humans and machines (Gotlieb, 2018). Yet these very systems—now becoming our digital companions—are programmed and engineered to deliver unpredictable yet pre-determined results. They only appear to interact intuitively. Discussions about technological dependence and the humanization of machines often obscure what lies behind the term “AI”: other humans and their corporations.

As we are no longer surrounded by nature, our experience and sentiments are also fabricated by capitalistic and techno-scientific surroundings. (HOSHINO, 2016)

Lyotard and Futurism: The Figure in Motion:

At the beginning of the 20th century, European nations—riddled with internal fissures and colonial conflicts in regions such as India, Africa, and Southeast Asia—sought to assert themselves as global powers through technological and industrial advancements. Naturally, this celebration of progress masked the era's deep social contradictions, including growing inequality and the alienation brought about by mechanization—elements often ignored or minimized by official discourse (Hobsbawm, 1994). At that time, European powers were preparing for an imminent war (WWI), investing heavily in armaments and military forces. Therefore, Futurism not only reflected governmental ideology but also amplified, aestheticized, and legitimized the notion of technological progress as a redemptive promise for the crises of modernity.

There appears to be a clear continuity between the Futurist aesthetic of the early 20th century and many forms of 21st-century digital art, particularly those that employ algorithms for image generation. Just as Futurism exalted the symbols of a new era, contemporary digital art frequently celebrates innovation, machine "intelligence," and

computational systems as means of exploring new aesthetic and conceptual frontiers. A fascination with algorithmic complexity, faith in mathematical precision, and the boundless creative potential of digital systems is evident. Interestingly, many artworks generated by artificial intelligence exhibit the same geometric, mechanical forms in motion (in formation, with temporal overlays) and, above all, a “dehumanized” quality—evoking the impression of autonomous machine authorship and the idea of a future constructed entirely through technology: seamless, harmonious, and polished (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014).

Often, technology is self-represented as a novel solution to long-standing economic, social, and cultural problems. In other cases, the very aesthetic of outdated technology present in some digital images reinforces the impression that analog problems have been left behind—that decay and the past are obsolete. Issues such as unequal access to these tools, the exploitation of images and personal data, and the alienation caused by hyperconnectivity are often underrepresented or aestheticized. Perhaps algorithm-based digital art can be seen as an update to the Futurist spirit: still reflecting the impulse to celebrate technology, but now adapted to the paradigms of the 21st century.

The convergence between Futurist and digital artistic practices and Jean-François Lyotard’s writings in *Discourse, Figure* emerges when we explore how the figural challenges the domain of logical and linear discourse—how both Futurist and digital aesthetics question or expand traditional categories of perception, discourse, and representation (Lyotard, 2002). In both historical moments, we observe the figural in operation—not merely as a mirror of hegemonic language, but as an attempt to access the unspeakable and the unrepresentable through artistic experience (see: *Iconoclash*, Latour, 2002). In the case of AI, this involves a rupture with conventional forms of representation, allowing for the exploration of new sensory and conceptual possibilities mediated by technology.

In this way, Futurism and algorithm-driven digital art embody the figural impulse by constructing visual worlds that privilege flow and discontinuity. In digital art, for instance, the use of algorithms does not simply reflect mathematical control over creation—it also evokes forms that escape the creator’s intentionality, bringing forth the strange and the unexpected: that which transcends and disrupts language. A single prompt (a text input written by the artist for the AI to generate an image) will produce different results depending on the tool or model used.

In Futurist works—such as Giacomo Balla’s paintings or Umberto Boccioni’s sculptures—movement is not portrayed as a rationally controlled object, but rather as a force that exceeds the limits of static representation (Figures 2 and 4). From Lyotard’s perspective, we might interpret these works as figural, insofar as visuality becomes a means of surpassing discursive logic and destabilizing the observing subject through the ambiguity and fragmentation it produces. Thus, Futurism, with its obsession with speed and dynamism, anticipates a moment when aesthetics becomes inseparable from the attempt to give form to what is always in flux within the virtual—what escapes and exceeds control. The idea of an underlying connectedness between all things had already been envisioned by Boccioni (Venturelli, 2010).

With generative AI, the rational development of a prompt does not correspond to any actual aesthetic control over the image that will be generated through the machine’s interpretation. The role of the author becomes destabilized, as they are simultaneously creator and observer. The algorithm operates within its programmed parameters, which are themselves in constant evolution—a dynamic we might call a self-sustaining generative flow.



Figure 2: <https://www.estorickcollection.com/exhibitions/boccioni-recreating-the-lost-sculptures>

AI-Generated Art: The Coded Figure?

Within this line of reasoning, AI-generated art can be understood as a contemporary unfolding of what Jean-François Lyotard would call the figural, now situated within a context of algorithmic codification. In this case, the figural does not emerge from a direct human gesture, but rather from mathematical, statistical, and computational patterns that exceed immediate comprehension, as we do not see the phases of the process—only the final image. AI, by processing data and producing images that often diverge from the creator's expectations, presents a coded form of the figural: something that manifests in the visual or sensory materiality of the work, while carrying the opacity of its technical genesis. Just as Lyotard's figural destabilizes logical discourse, AI-generated art strains the relationship between human control and technological autonomy, displacing authorship to a liminal zone where human and machine are entangled. Generative art exists in a state of pure tension between discourse—logical and systematic language, here represented by code—and the figure, or the sensory and visual experience produced by AI.

This coded figure also carries profound implications for aesthetic experience in the 21st century. Generative AI continues the Futurist rupture by representing the movement and energy of contemporary life in a hyper-accelerated and automated manner, now mediated by algorithms saturated with media fictions, real-time updates of power discourses, and new totalizing narratives. While Futurism celebrated the machine as a symbol of modernity, AI-generated art is situated in a context where technology not only represents, but also creates and interprets. Here, the figure is not merely visual but also processual, incorporating invisible layers of data and algorithms that both extend and obscure the reach of human perception.

In this context, the figural is that which escapes discursive control—where visual or procedural aspects of artistic creation destabilize traditional structures of meaning, revealing something that exceeds the limits of explicit representation (Figure 3). In AI-generated art, this dimension becomes especially relevant, as the works often reveal forms and relationships that were not anticipated by the creator. The figure, in this case, is not only coded; it is the

product of a dialogue between computational logic and the irruption of the unexpected, stretching the boundaries between technique and aesthetics.

It is important to note, however, that this unexpectedness arises not from a neutral or purely random process, but rather from a system that is already biased—domesticated, in Lyotard's terms. The “unforeseen” in AI-generated art is shaped by the tension between the artist's intentional control and the emergent behavior of the algorithmic system. On one hand, the artist sets parameters, chooses the dataset, and defines the rules that guide the AI; on the other hand, the result often escapes the artist's initial expectations, revealing forms, patterns, or associations that were not predicted. It is precisely this element of surprise that again brings AI-generated art closer to Lyotard's notion of the figural: something that exceeds the logic of language and challenges the boundaries of control—control that is now displaced from the artist to the machine.

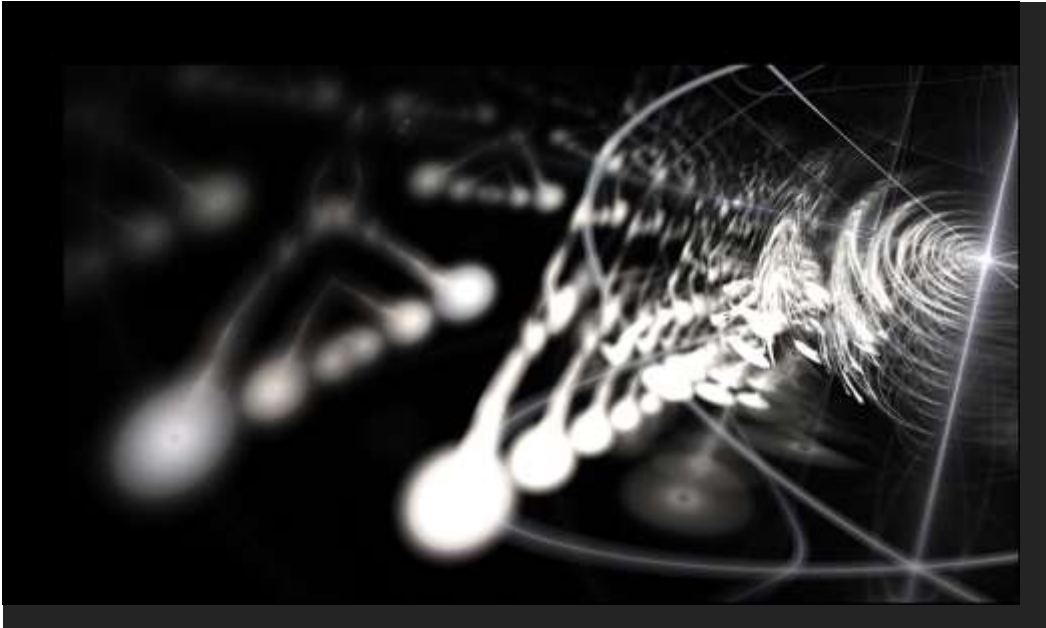


Figure 3: AI-generated image based on poetry written by the author, 2022.

AI's biases manifest both in the datasets (the artworks and images from which it learns) and in the implicit or explicit intentions of its programmers. These biases can be cultural, social, or aesthetic, influencing outcomes in ways the artist may not immediately perceive. Thus, the unexpected in AI-generated art is not entirely random or free of conditioning; it is mediated both by human intervention and by the limitations and potentials of the technological system itself. This tension—between artistic control, AI bias, and the emergence of the unforeseen—creates a complexity that redefines authorship and reconfigures the role of the figure in contemporary art.

Continuities and Ruptures: Futurism and AI through Lyotard's Perspective:

If it is in the interest of industries and governments for AI-generated algorithmic creations to produce artworks with a “Futurist” aesthetic, we may interpret this as part of a broader narrative that legitimizes and exalts technology as a symbol of inevitable progress. The aesthetic of the Futurist movement—with its celebration of speed, modernity, and rupture with the past—aligns perfectly with discourses that promote technology as an emancipatory and innovative force, while ignoring or minimizing its social, ethical, and environmental implications. In this way, steering algorithms to produce images aligned with such a vision may function as a means of reinforcing technological optimism and feeding a collective imaginary that supports the acceptance of new control technologies.

When algorithms are directed to operate within a specific aesthetic spectrum—such as the Futurist one—the disruptive and unexpected potential of AI is, in a sense, tamed—or rather, guided. Instead of allowing the machine to explore the full scope of the figural in Lyotardian terms, an aesthetic aligned with certain embedded interests is prioritized. This generates a paradox: while AI is promoted as an innovative and unpredictable technology, its

production can be steered by biases that sustain and perpetuate established visions of progress and power, thereby obstructing the emergence of truly innovative or critical alternatives.

Futurism and AI-generated art share a fascination with the creative potential of technology and with the subversion of traditional artistic paradigms. In Futurism, the machine and speed were exalted as renewing forces capable of redefining aesthetics and the role of the artist. In contemporary digital art, AI amplifies this notion by generating works that dematerialize the human gesture, shifting the creative process into a space of interaction between algorithms and data. Both contexts challenge the centrality of the human figure in artistic production, proposing new relationships between creativity, technology, and subjectivity.

Despite these similarities, there are fundamental differences in the materiality and the role of the creator in each historical moment. Futurism, with its practices grounded in painting, sculpture, and performance, was deeply anchored in the physical world, exploring how the figure could capture the displacement of mechanical energy. AI-generated art, by contrast, operates primarily in a virtual domain, where the figure is conceived as an algorithmic, immaterial, and processual manifestation. While in Futurism the artist was the mediator between the machine and the act of creation, in AI-based art this role is transferred to the algorithm itself, calling into question traditional notions of authorship and artistic intuition.



Figure 4: <https://www.castellodirivoli.org/en/opera/velocita-astratta-abstract-speed/>

The Post-Human Figure: Challenges and Possibilities:

Neural style refers to an artificial intelligence technique used to transfer the artistic style of one image onto another while preserving the original content (the input). This approach belongs to the broader field of deep learning and employs Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) to analyze and recombine visual features from different images. The neural style technique, studied by Gatys et al. (2015) in the article A Neural Algorithm of Artistic Style, involves two main components:

- Content: refers to the structure and visual elements of the original image, such as shapes, objects, and spatial arrangement.
- Style: encompasses the artistic aspects of the reference image, such as colors, textures, brushstrokes, and characteristic patterns.(Figure 4)

The neural style transfer process combines these two components to generate a new image that retains the structure of the original content while adopting the artistic style of the reference image. This allows, for example, a common photograph to be transformed into the style of Van Gogh, Picasso, or any other artist (or movement) used as reference.

In summary, the Futurist aesthetic in AI-generated images results from a convergence of historical, technological, and artistic factors. To understand the origins of this aesthetic, one must consider both the roots of the original Futurist movement and the inherent characteristics of the AI technologies used in image generation.

Generative algorithms—especially those based on Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs)—are capable of learning artistic styles. When exposed to datasets containing a substantial number of Futurist artworks, or datasets composed of images portraying utopian futures, the AI learns to generate new representations that reflect the characteristics of that style. These generated images are then often used to feed back into the training set—forming what we have previously referred to as a self-sustaining generative flow.

However, by combining data from the past to create new works, AI also deconstructs traditional narratives, opening up space for a new relationship between figure and discourse. Perhaps Lyotard would interpret generative art as a manifestation that does not emerge from human intuition, but from the latent potential of machines—thus expanding his conception of the figural to include the opacity of algorithmic logic. And perhaps, the generative algorithmic intelligence currently available for commercial use amplifies the Futurist rupture by transcending physicality and producing iconographies that exist solely within the domain of digital perception—for an indeterminate duration, across multiple simultaneous virtual spaces, and in constant transformation. Flow-images, highly unstable in their materiality.(Gotlieb, 2018; see also: Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 1991)



Figure 5: Image generated by a generative algorithm based on the prompt French Riviera, 2024.

Lyotard and the Aesthetics of the Expanded Future:

A machine generally means to us something with a practical purpose, a device that substitutes for or extends man's own forces. The word itself has the same root as "might". We take the machine's usefulness for granted; yesterday's new invention, no matter how amazing, becomes the commonplace of today. This limited concept however, is relatively recent. Historically, machines have often been regarded as toys, as the agents of magic, marvel, and fantasy. For philosophers, they have served as symbols and metaphors. Since the beginning of the mechanical age and the time of the Industrial Revolution, some have looked to machines to bring about progress toward utopia; others have feared them as the enemies of humanistic values, leading only to destruction. Most of these contradictory ideas persist, in one form or another in the twentieth century and find their reflection in art. (K.G. Pontus Hultén, MoMA, 1968)

Jean-François Lyotard, in *Le Parti Pris du Figural*, offers a compelling theoretical framework for interpreting both Futurism and AI-generated art as practices that destabilize the boundaries between discourse and figure. Futurism broke away from traditional discursive narratives by exploring dynamic and fragmented forms that sought to capture movement, transformation, and the intensity of modernity. Similarly, contemporary generative art uses algorithms to create images and forms that not only disrupt traditional modes of representation but also escape the constraints of conscious control. This technology generates new aesthetic reflections by expanding the concept of the figural into a virtual, processual, and mutable field (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). In this sense, AI deepens the rupture initiated by Futurism by replacing the visual impact of the human gesture with the flow of algorithms. While Futurism questioned the limits of perception and representation, generative art compels us to reimagine fundamental concepts such as aesthetics, authorship, and experience. The algorithmic figure emerges from a co-authorship between humans, machines, and data, challenging the central position of the artist and proposing a posthuman aesthetic that integrates processes, interactions, and unpredictability (Figure 5).

An interesting example through which to examine the connections between Futurism, AI-generated art, and Lyotard's theory in *Discours, Figure* is the exhibition *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, held at MoMA in 1968 (Figure 6). Curated by Pontus Hultén, the exhibition examined the relationship between art and technology, proposing a reflection on the transition from the mechanical age to an emerging technological era shaped by electronics and digitalization. This perspective creates a compelling parallel with our current discussion on the evolution of aesthetics and the destabilization between discourse and figure. Works such as *Knife Grinder* (Kazimir Malevich, 1912), *Airplane* (Max Ernst, 1920), and *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 3* (Marcel Duchamp, 1916) exemplify the attempt to capture movement and energy from the mechanical age, portraying the machine as both an extension of the human body and a source of aesthetic inspiration. In Hultén's exhibition, this celebration of technology is revisited with a more critical and historical lens, acknowledging both the fascination and the limitations of the machine in transforming art and society. The curatorial approach suggests that the transition highlighted in the exhibition—from the mechanical to the electronic—had already been anticipated in Futurist thought. This resonates with Lyotard's concept of the figural, which is always emergent, dynamic, and marked by tensions between materiality and abstraction.

The 1968 exhibition was pioneering in recognizing that the mechanical age was being surpassed by a new technological paradigm, a shift that directly echoes the impact of today's AI-generated art. Just as the exhibition addressed how the machine had become not only a tool but also a medium of expression, contemporary generative art extends this concept by replacing tangible mechanisms with invisible algorithms. As the artists presented at MoMA explored the expressive possibilities of machines, today's artists working with AI question the boundaries of authorship, creativity, and subjectivity. In this process, the figure—as understood by Lyotard—is once again reconfigured: it is no longer a direct extension of the human body or the mechanical apparatus but becomes the product of a hybrid system of collaboration between humans and algorithms.



Figure 6: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2776?#installation-images>

This trajectory—linking Futurism, the 1968 exhibition, and contemporary generative art—reveals a continuum in which the machine, whether mechanical or digital, acts as a mediator of aesthetic experiences that challenge our traditional conceptions of art. In this sense, *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* not only documents a historical moment of transition—when the United States was asserting itself as a global military and cultural power following a period of European dominance—but also anticipates key debates around materiality, image, and technology that continue to shape artistic practices today.

Conclusion: ImageMachine – Machined Image:

Both Futurism and generativeAI respond to the technological and cultural transformations of their respective eras, proposing aesthetic ruptures and challenging traditional perceptions of art. The economic contexts of Europe in 1909 and the United States in 2014 share a common feature: instability driven by rapid structural changes that deeply impacted society. In early 20th-century Europe, the advancement of industrialization, the arms race, and subsequent economic crises exacerbated social inequalities and created tensions between the working classes and the economic elites. The concentration of wealth and the inability of traditional institutions to adapt to the demands of a changing society fueled widespread discontent. This environment gave rise to radical ideologies that promised immediate and effective solutions to economic and social crises, such as fascism and extreme nationalism.

The United States in 2014 experienced a highly uneven economic recovery following the 2008 financial crisis. Income and wealth disparities deepened. The growing automation of labor, combined with technological change and globalization, destabilized industrial sectors and left the middle class feeling increasingly insecure about its economic future. Additionally, a growing sense of disconnection from political and financial elites—perceived as indifferent to the population's struggles—fueled frustration and polarization. As in Europe in 1909, this distrust in traditional structures opened the door to populist and extremist narratives, promising to address economic and technological challenges through simplistic and radical solutions.

In both periods, an industrial discourse emerged with a pro-technology bias, presenting new innovations as potential solutions to economic crises and inequality. In Europe in 1909, the Second Industrial Revolution introduced technologies such as electricity, combustion engines, and communication systems like the telegraph. Industries and governments often promoted the idea that these innovations would drive economic progress, increase productivity, and create jobs—although in practice, the initial impact was largely concentrated in the accumulation of wealth by the same industrial elites, while creating new challenges for workers displaced into urban centers. This technological optimism, though grounded in real advances, largely overlooked the immediate social consequences, such as labor tensions and rising inequality.

In the United States in 2014, the pro-technology discourse was central to the expansion of the digital economy and automation. Tech companies promoted the digital revolution as an inevitable path toward economic growth and the resolution of inequalities, advancing narratives around the "knowledge economy" and the "opportunities" enabled by digital platforms and artificial intelligence. However, just as during the industrial era, the benefits were unequally distributed, with wealth increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few large tech corporations, alongside growing precariousness in the labor market. It's worth noting that during this same period, the automotive and oil industries faced some of their most severe crises to date.

Thus, it becomes possible to draw parallels between the Futurist movement in the arts and the use of generative AI in contemporary image-making, since both are grounded in pro-innovation discourse and produce visual responses to the technological transformations of their times—through what could be described as a machinic-technological aesthetic. However, while Futurism was driven by a top-down discourse of power, disseminating a human-centered vision of progress by reimagining the future of modernity, generative AI introduces a collaborative dynamic between human and machine, in which creative horizons are multiplied through the use of computation.

Artists who engage with this global network may become unwitting agents in the propagation of ideological operations embedded within it. There appears to be a kind of ode to the machine imagined by the machine itself, within very human parameters—yet governed by variables beyond our field of vision. At the same time, the opposite is also possible: artists using these same networks have the potential to destabilize the comfort of representation, forcing us to confront what lies beyond the reach of discourse. In this way, the figural may once again come into operation—not in a pure or original form, but as a derived, distorted mode, expressed through the very aesthetic manifestations produced by technology.

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