Artificial, Artificial Intelligence (AAi)

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Abstract

This paper examines the epistemological crisis surrounding artificial intelligence through a practice-based investigation that deliberately conflates algorithmic and arbitrary processes. By presenting sonified image data as neural network compositions, this work interrogates the "black box" phenomenon Flusser identified in technological apparatuses and proposes a "reverse Turing test" wherein audiences cannot distinguish between genuinely AI-generated content and carefully constructed simulacra. Drawing upon Cage's indeterminacy, Partch's corporeality, and Youngblood's concept of expanded cinema, the work re-materialises visual information through sound, creating what might be termed "cinema by other means" (Levi, 2012) a synaesthetic translation that exposes the mythological dimensions of contemporary AI discourse.

1. Introduction

In 2019, artificial intelligence has become simultaneously ubiquitous and incomprehensible. The proliferation of machine learning applications across creative domains was accompanied by an explanatory vacuum: “the algorithm does its thing and we have an answer.” This tautological opacity recalls Flusser’s (1983) concept of the technological black box, wherein users of apparatuses become functionaries rather than agents, manipulating inputs and outputs without comprehending the transformative processes within. Flusser identified this condition as inaugurating a “second magic”, a return to pre-literate modes of engagement with inscrutable forces, albeit mediated through post-industrial technology rather than animistic belief.

This paper documents a provocation being staged during the 2019 Research Pavilion #3, that deliberately exploits this opacity. By creating what I term “artificial, artificial intelligence” (AAI) understood here as manually constructed processes presented as neural network outputs. The work proposes a reverse Turing test: rather than asking whether machines can convince humans they are human, it asks whether humans can distinguish between genuinely algorithmic processes and their carefully constructed simulacra.

2. Theoretical Framework

Flusser’s analysis of the photographic apparatus provides a crucial framework for understanding contemporary AI anxiety. He argued that technical images fundamentally differ from traditional images because they are produced by apparatuses whose operational logic remains hidden from their users (Flusser, 1983). The photographer does not create images but rather manipulates an apparatus programmed to produce certain kinds of images. This produces what Flusser termed “the functionary”: one who operates without comprehending. The current AI moment represents an intensification of this condition. When neural networks generate images, compose music, or write text, even their creators often cannot fully articulate how specific outputs emerge from specific inputs. The training process involves adjusting millions or billions of parameters through processes that resist human-scale comprehension. We have, in effect, constructed oracles whose pronouncements we accept without understanding their logic. This is essentially a return to what

Flusser identified as magical thinking, wherein causality becomes obscure and results appear miraculous.

John Cage's work provides an alternative genealogy for thinking about algorithmic creativity, one that precedes digital computation but anticipates many of its aesthetic strategies. Cage's use of chance operations, from the I Ching consultations informing Music of Changes (1951) to the imperfections in paper used for Music for Piano (1952-56), established procedures that generated results the composer could not fully predict or control (Cage, 1961). Crucially, Cage's indeterminate methods were explicitly designed to circumvent taste and habit, to produce sounds he would not have consciously chosen. Contemporary AI-generated music follows remarkably similar logics: training a model on a corpus and allowing it to interpolate and extrapolate produces results the human operator might not have conceived. The key difference lies in complexity and opacity. Cage's chance operations remained fundamentally transparent. One could, with patience, trace exactly how each coin toss or imperfection translated into musical material. Neural networks occlude such transparency, their internal states too numerous and interconnected for human comprehension. Harry Partch's insistence on the corporeal, physical dimensions of music-making provides a necessary counterweight to discussions of algorithmic abstraction. Partch built his own instruments, for instance, the Cloud Chamber Bowls, the Chromelodeon, the Quadrangularis Reversum because existing instruments could not realise his 43-tone just intonation system (Partch, 1974). His work insisted that musical thought cannot be separated from the material means of its realisation; that timbre, touch, and physical gesture constitute rather than merely convey musical meaning. Similarly, Harry Bertoia's Sonambient sculptures demonstrated how sound could emerge from material properties and physical interaction rather than conventional instrumental technique (Bertoia, 2000). His sounding sculptures responded to environmental forces, such as, air currents, touch and vibration, producing tones determined by the metallurgical properties of bronze and the physics of resonance. This emphasis on material specificity informs my approach to sonification. Rather than treating sound as transparent medium for representing visual information, the work foregrounded the specificity of translation processes: how particular mappings between visual and sonic parameters create specific aesthetic results that could have been otherwise.

Gene Youngblood's seminal Expanded Cinema (1970) articulated a vision of cinema liberated from its conventional apparatus. One that is no longer confined to celluloid, projection, and darkened theatres, but encompassing any time-based, synaesthetic experience engaging perception in novel configurations. Youngblood argued that expanded cinema represented not a medium but a mode of consciousness, one particularly suited to an era of information saturation and technological mediation. This concept of "cinema by other means" later articulated by Levi (2012) provides the conceptual framework for understanding sonification as a cinematic practice. If cinema fundamentally concerns the organisation of time-based perceptual experience, then translating visual information into sonic information constitutes a form of expanded cinema—one that renders images temporal and substitutes auditory for visual sensation whilst maintaining structural relationships inherent in the source material. Prior to Youngblood John Cage had already suggested such possibilities in Aria with Fontana Mix (1958), where graphic notation functioned simultaneously as visual composition and score for sonic realisation. The work exists in the space between seeing and hearing, refusing to privilege either sense as primary.

3. Methodology:

The technical process developed for this work involved several stages of translation, each introducing particular constraints and affordances:

3.1 Point Cloud Processing

Initial visual information, in this case, paintings executed in a deliberately crude style depicting forms simultaneously readable as horses and phallic shapes was processed as three-dimensional point cloud data. This involved extracting colour and spatial information from the two-dimensional images and projecting them into virtual three-dimensional space based on colour values mapped to depth parameters. Point clouds occupy an interesting ontological position: they are simultaneously representations of three-dimensional space and datasets amenable to computational manipulation. They bridge the gap between pictorial representation and mathematical abstraction.

3.2 UV Mapping and Earthquake Data

The point cloud data was then subjected to UV mapping processes typically used in three-dimensional computer graphics to wrap two-dimensional textures around three-dimensional geometry. However, rather than applying textures, this process was used to create correspondence between spatial positions and time-based parameters. Additionally, seismic data from earthquake recordings was incorporated into the process. The earth's movements, captured as waveform data representing ground displacement over time, provided temporal modulation to the spatial data. This introduced an element of the indexical, the geological, the literal physicality of the ground-shaking into what might otherwise remain purely abstract visual-sonic translation.

3.3 Sonification Parameters

The translation from visual/spatial data to sonic parameters involved mapping:

Horizontal position to pitch (frequency)

Vertical position to amplitude (volume)

Colour values to timbral parameters (filtering, harmonic content)

Depth values to temporal position (rhythm, duration)

Earthquake data to modulation parameters (vibrato, tremolo, spectral variation)

These mappings were not inevitable or natural but rather aesthetic decisions that could have been configured differently. The resulting sonic output reflected both the source visual material and the specific translation protocols (as artistic intention or interpretation) applied.

3.4 Material Re-materialisation

The final stage involved multiple re-materialisations of the sonic data:

Musical Score: The sonified data was notated using conventional Western musical notation, rendering the algorithmically-generated sound as instructions for human performance. This introduced another layer of translation, as continuous electronic sound was discretised into the pitched, rhythmically-quantised categories of staff notation.

Three-Dimensional Printed Music Box: The principal melodic motif was translated into physical form as a three-dimensional printed music box mechanism. Following the logic of player piano rolls and early computational punch cards, the melody was encoded as raised bumps on cylindrical program sheets. As the cylinder rotated, these bumps plucked metal tines, producing sound through purely mechanical means.

This final re-materialisation completed a circular journey from image to data to sound to notation to physical object to sound again, each translation both preserving certain structural relationships and transforming others.

4. The Reverse Turing Test

4.1 AAI as Provocation

The work was presented under the title “A Re-materialised Horse: Neural Network Composition,” deliberately suggesting AI generation whilst actually employing manually-constructed sonification processes. This constituted what I term a “reverse Turing test.” Alan Turing’s original imitation game (1950) asked whether machines could convince humans they were human through conversation alone. The test measured machine intelligence by its ability to simulate human linguistic behaviour convincingly. My reverse formulation inverted this question: could manually-constructed processes convince audiences they were algorithmic? Could the aura of AI, its association with complexity, emergence, and computational sophistication, be conjured through design and strategic presentation?

The provocation operates on multiple registers, Primarily what is being felt with here is what can be defined as epistemological uncertainty. By presenting arbitrary processes as algorithmic ones, the work exploites the black box problem Flusser identified. Audiences lacked access to the processes that generated the music; they could only observe inputs (the paintings) and outputs (the music). Without transparency into the transformative process, distinguishing between genuinely AI-generated music and carefully-constructed sonification becomes impossible. This exposes a fundamental problem in contemporary AI discourse: we have learned to recognise certain aesthetic signatures as "AI-like", in particular kinds of smoothness, certain uncanny qualities and specific types of errors or incoherence. But these signatures are not intrinsic to machine learning processes; they are artefacts of current implementations, training datasets, and model architectures. They can be simulated, parodied, or deliberately invoked through non-algorithmic means.

The next element being dealt with here is what can be termed as an aesthetic indistinguishability. The sonic output of the sonification process proved remarkably similar to music generated by neural networks trained on musical compositions. Both exhibit an internal consistency without obvious compositional logic; Moment-to-moment coherence with questionable large-scale structure; Timbral and harmonic vocabulary drawn from training data (or sonification parameters); An uncanny quality, neither entirely familiar nor wholly alien. This aesthetic convergence suggests that "AI-generated" had become a style rather than simply a technical description, a set of conventions and expectations that could be fulfilled through various means.

The choice to base the entire investigation on crude paintings of horses that resembled penises introduced an element of deliberate inappropriateness to the Venice Biennale context. This served several functions. It undermined the seriousness typically accorded AI research and computational creativity, suggesting that algorithmic sophistication might be indistinguishable from juvenile provocation. It invoked a tradition of artistic irreverence from Duchamp's "Fountain" (1917) through to contemporary institutional critique, positioning the work within a lineage that uses humour and transgression to interrogate artistic and institutional legitimacy. It tested the tolerance of an academic audience for work that refused conventional scholarly decorum, asking whether the conceptual framework could survive the crude materiality of its instantiation. The gambit in a way succeeded, as (so far) the audience accepted the "neural network composition" framing and engaged seriously with the theoretical propositions, apparently untroubled by, or perhaps intrigued by the scatological dimensions of the source material.

5. (Re)Contextualising the Practice

R. Murray Schafer's concept of the "soundscape", the sonic environment as aesthetic and ecological concern, provides additional context for understanding this work's relationship to sound (Schafer, 1977). Schafer argued that industrialisation had degraded the sonic environment, filling it with "noise" that deadened acoustic awareness and severed connections between sounds and their sources. His proposed solution involved cultivating what he termed "ear cleaning" a number of practices that would restore attentive, critical listening and reconnect sounds with their material origins. This project was simultaneously aesthetic, ecological, and political. Murray Schafer believed that acoustic consciousness could foster more responsible relationships to environment and community. The work under discussion inverts Murray Schafer's project. Rather than seeking to restore transparency between sound and source, it deliberately obscures such connections through multiple stages of translation. The sound does ultimately originate in visual information and earthquake data, but these connections are not audible. They must be explained discursively. The work thus participates in what Schafer might call "schizophonia", the splitting of sound from source enabled by recording and transmission technologies. This aligns with the notion of "acousmatics" developed by Pierre Schaeffer (2017), in which recorded sound was treated as an autonomous object, deliberately severed from its causal origin. This schizophonia serves critical rather than simply destructive purposes. By making the process of sonic generation deliberately opaque, the work asks listeners to attend to their own meaning-making practices: What do they hear? What do they imagine they're hearing? How does knowing the sound is "algorithmically generated" change their listening experience? The work thus becomes a kind of anti-ear-cleaning, a deliberate clouding of sonic origins designed to reveal how much of what we "hear" is actually interpretive projection.

Jack Burnham's Beyond Modern Sculpture (1968) diagnosed a fundamental shift in artistic practice from object-making to system-building. He argued that artists were increasingly concerned with relationships, processes, and information flows rather than discrete objects. This "systems aesthetic" reflected broader cultural shifts toward cybernetic thinking, wherein stability emerged not from fixed structures but from dynamic equilibria maintained through feedback loops. Burnham later refined these insights in his essays on "software" as artistic medium, not computer software specifically, but rather the informational, processual, and conceptual dimensions of artistic work as distinct from its material instantiation (Burnham, 1970). He suggested that the most significant

contemporary art treated physical objects as mere instantiations or documentation of fundamentally immaterial artistic propositions. “A Re-materialised Horse” engages Burnham’s systems aesthetic whilst resisting its implied dematerialisation. The work is indeed fundamentally processual as it consists of a series of translations between media, each governed by specific protocols and constraints. The “content” of the work exists not in any single object but in the relationships between paintings, point clouds, earthquake data, sound files, musical scores, and music box mechanisms. However, the work refuses to dissolve into pure information or concept. Each stage of materialisation introduces specific resistances, affordances, and qualities. The paintings are not simply information sources but physical objects with particular textures, colours, and visual impact. The music box is not simply a representation of the musical score but a mechanical object that produces sound through physical processes, [plastic]tines vibrating, cylinders rotating, mechanisms clicking. This insistence on multiple, specific materialisations responds to what might be called the “dematerialisation anxiety” of digital culture, the fear that when everything becomes information, nothing retains weight, consequence, or reality. The work suggests instead a kind of “promiscuous materialisation”: the same informational content repeatedly instantiated in different physical forms, each offering distinct experiential and aesthetic qualities.

5.1 Implications

The AAI provocation raises several implications for understanding creativity, authorship, and evaluation in an age of algorithmic generation.

By demonstrating that manually-constructed processes can convincingly simulate AI generation, the work reveals how much of AI’s perceived capability reflects projection rather than genuine computational sophistication. We have learned to see certain outputs as “algorithmic” based on stylistic cues and contextual framing rather than intrinsic properties of the work itself. This suggests that the “black box” Flusser identified is as much psychological as technical. Even when processes are theoretically transparent, we may prefer to treat them as opaque, mysterious, even magical. The discourse around AI encourages this mystification. When neural networks produce interesting results, we speak of them “learning,” “creating,” or “discovering” in ways that obscure the fundamentally statistical nature of their operations.

The work asks what difference process should make to evaluation. If two sonic compositions are aesthetically indistinguishable, one generated by a neural network, one by manual sonification, should they be valued equally? Most I would presume, hope even, would answer yes, aesthetic experience depends on the work encountered, not on its origins. But this position becomes more complicated when we consider that much of AI's current cultural capital derives precisely from its generative process rather than from the intrinsic quality of its outputs. We find AI-generated images interesting partly because they were made by machines, not simply because of how they look. The "how it was made" becomes part of "what it is." The AAI provocation suggests this is confused. If we cannot reliably distinguish process from output, then either we must abandon process as an evaluative criterion or admit that our evaluations reflect guesswork and prejudice rather than genuine aesthetic discrimination. Flusser's "second magic" implied a kind of neo-feudalism wherein technical priesthoods, or those with access to the mysteries of algorithmic operation would dominate those who merely use black-boxed systems. The current AI moment seems to confirm this prophecy. Machine learning researchers possess capabilities and knowledge inaccessible to general populations. However, the AAI provocation suggests an alternative possibility. The black box can be opened through critical investigation, and its mysteries can be partially dispelled. By revealing that "AI-generated" is as much aesthetic category as technical description, the work offers a kind of digital literacy, not literacy in how to code neural networks, but literacy in how to think critically about claims made on behalf of algorithmic systems. This literacy involves cultivating healthy scepticism by asking what processes actually occurred, what evidence supports claims of algorithmic generation, what would constitute proof either way. It involves recognising that complexity and opacity are not the same as sophistication or intelligence. And it involves appreciating that the most interesting questions concern not what computers can do, but what we want them to do and why.

Finally, the work demonstrates the continued relevance of Youngblood's expanded cinema framework. If cinema concerns the organisation of time-based perceptual experience, then sonification constitutes a cinematic practice, one that renders spatial information temporal and substitutes auditory for visual sensation whilst preserving structural relationships. This suggests that expanded cinema might provide better theoretical tools for understanding computational creativity than frameworks borrowed from traditional fine arts. Rather than asking whether algorithms can paint or compose in conventional senses, we might ask how they enable new forms of synaesthetic experience, new ways of translating between sensory modalities, new configurations of perception,

new relationships between information and sensation. The music box, then, becomes a kind of cinema projector. A mechanism for translating stored information (bumps on cylinders) into time-based sensory experience (plucked tones). Its three-dimensional printed construction demonstrates that expanded cinema need not be technologically cutting-edge. Even 19th-century mechanical principles can be repurposed for contemporary synaesthetic investigation.

6. Conclusion

“A Re-materialised Horse: Neural Network Composition” proposes AAI (artificial, artificial intelligence) as critical practice and conceptual provocation. By deliberately conflating algorithmic and arbitrary processes, it exposes the epistemological crisis surrounding AI, which can be boiled down to our inability to reliably distinguish between genuinely computational creativity and its carefully-constructed simulacra. This crisis reflects the “black box” problem Flusser identified, wherein technical apparatuses resist transparency and users become functionaries manipulating inputs and outputs without understanding transformative processes. The work suggests that much contemporary AI discourse perpetuates this opacity, encouraging magical thinking about algorithmic capabilities whilst obscuring the fundamentally statistical and often banal nature of machine learning operations.

The reverse Turing test offers a method for investigating these questions empirically: If audiences cannot distinguish between AI-generated and manually-constructed outputs, what does this reveal about AI’s actual capabilities versus its perceived mystique? The work suggests that much of what we attribute to artificial intelligence actually reflects projection, conditioning, and contextual framing rather than genuine computational sophistication. Yet the work also demonstrates genuine possibilities for computational creativity, understood not as machines replacing human authorship but as enabling new forms of synaesthetic translation. By moving through multiple stages of materialisation, from image to point cloud to earthquake data to sound to notation to mechanical music box, the work refuses both naive dematerialisation (wherein everything dissolves into pure information) and romantic materialism (wherein authentic art must remain rooted in traditional media and techniques). Instead, it proposes a practice of promiscuous re-materialisation by taking informational content and repeatedly instantiating it in different physical forms, each offering distinct experiential and aesthetic qualities. This approach treats

neither material nor information as primary but rather explores their mutual implication in how each shapes, constrains, and enables the other.

The work's crude dimensions, the first encounter as paintings of horses resembling penises, exhibited at a parallel pavilion during the Venice Biennale with apparent academic seriousness, serve as final provocation. They remind us that technological sophistication and intellectual framework cannot fully domesticate art's capacity for irreverence, inappropriateness, and juvenile humour. Even the most conceptually rigorous practice may originate in impulses no more elevated than the desire to show penis paintings at a prestigious international exhibition. This is not a weakness but perhaps the work's most honest dimension. It acknowledges that creativity whether human or computational often begins not with grand ambitions but with mischievous curiosity: What if? What would happen? How far could this go? The reverse Turing test ultimately reveals less about artificial intelligence than about human gullibility, institutional tolerance, and the enduring appeal of convincing lies persuasively told.

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