

The Dialectic of Instrumental Rationality and Creativity —A Study on "Creative Alienation" in Image Production in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of the widespread application of generative artificial intelligence in the field of creative production, this paper introduces the concept of 'creative alienation' to explore the inherent tension between instrumental rationality and creativity. The study analyses, from the three dimensions of subject, process and outcome, how artificial intelligence is restructuring the current creative ecosystem, leading to creators being reduced from 'creative subjects' to 'prompt tuners', the creative process being dominated by algorithmic logic, and the connection between works and human self-experience being diluted. Through theoretical analysis and case studies, this paper critiques tendencies towards technological determinism and attempts to explore possible 'new creative paradigms' and 'practices of self-resistance' in the AI era. The study finds that creative alienation is not an inevitable outcome, but rather the result of the combined effects of technological, capitalistic and cultural logics; creators can re-activate their creativity by repositioning their own roles and integrating AI with humanistic thinking.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence; creative alienation; instrumental rationality; subjectivity

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I. Introduction

The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence is profoundly transforming human creative activities. Large language models, exemplified by ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Midjourney and Sora, have evolved from mere auxiliary tools into 'creative agents' capable of generating text, images and video content. This transformation has not only significantly enhanced production efficiency but has also posed a fundamental challenge to traditional notions of creativity.

Traditionally, creation has been understood as an original form of intellectual production undertaken by an individual based on life experiences, emotional projection and aesthetic judgement, the results of which crystallize into 'works' protected by copyright law. This anthropocentric core has long dominated the understanding of creation (Huang Yuye, 2026). However, the advent of generative artificial intelligence is challenging this classical paradigm on both ontological and practical levels. Academic research indicates that AI has become a powerful creative partner, with the role of the creator evolving from that of a direct executor to that of a 'prompt tuner' and 'algorithmic curator' (Qin Wen & Wei Qi, 2026-01-30); the logic of creation has shifted from the traditional 'mechanical law of causality' to 'probabilistic law of causality' reliant on algorithmic probability (Qiu Zhaoji & Wei Chengyi, 2025); At the legal level, AI-generated content tends to be defined as 'non-works' (Wang Qian, 2025); the three concepts of 'work', 'author' and 'creation' in copyright law are mutually defining and cannot be separated, whilst it is recognized that substantial modifications made by humans to generated content can result in protected AI-assisted works (Hu Kaizhong, 2026). These studies collectively point to a consensus: the essence of creation is undergoing a crucial shift—evolving from a linear, closed process into an open, iterative system of human-machine collaboration, with its centre of value shifting from absolute formal originality to the unique endowment of creativity and relative adaptation to context (Guo Rinkui & Feng Mingzhe, 2025).

It is against this backdrop that a latent trend of creative alienation is gradually emerging: high-efficiency production driven by instrumental rationality is progressively supplanting the processes of traditional creation, which were characterised by serendipity and emotional investment, leading to the spiritual connection between the creator, the creative process and the work being alienated by technological mediation. This alienation manifests specifically in three dimensions: the alienation of the subject—where the creator degenerates from a complete creative subject into a functional 'prompt tuner'; the alienation of the process—where creation is compressed from a cyclical process requiring time for contemplation into an 'input-generation' system of instant feedback; and the alienation of the result—where the work metamorphoses from a crystallisation of

meaning from the human spiritual realm into a data-like image governed by algorithmic logic.

1. The Alienation of the Creative Subject: From Creator to Prompt Tuner

Instrumental rationality breaks down creative activity into standardisable and optimisable production processes. Under this logic, the traditionally understood, complete and vibrant creator is dissolved, replaced by a highly functionalised, de-emotionalised complex of ‘rationalised labour’. Whether painters, musicians, writers or designers, their roles are fragmented into those of requirements analysts (defining output objectives), prompt engineers (preparing inputs), algorithm parameter tuners (optimising processes) and aesthetic quality control officers (evaluating results). Instrumental rationality’s pursuit of maximum efficiency means that mastery of complex software operations or painting techniques is no longer a prerequisite, leading to the rapid devaluation of creators’ original skill capital, whilst creative intent faces ‘algorithmic compromise’: When creators rely on AI to generate scripts or storyboards, the erosion of creative intent becomes a manifest problem, giving rise to a blurring of identity from author to collaborator. The alienation of the labour process directly leads to the systematic exclusion of elements of value rationality (Li Maoping & Li Ruiqun, 2026); their labour process essentially becomes a translation of sensuous aesthetics into code that machines can interpret, whilst the direct, organic connection between the subject and the work is severed by a series of technical intermediaries and rational calculations.

This shift is particularly evident in the film and television industry: between 2016 and 2025, the penetration of AI into the sector has profoundly altered the core skills and sense of identity of creative practitioners. In the field of editing, the ‘emotional editing algorithm’ in the AI version of Adobe Premiere Pro now produces rough cuts that are remarkably similar to those made by humans, whilst operating at a significantly faster pace. This has forced creators to shift their core competitive edge from ‘how to operate tools’ to ‘how to ask questions and review’—that is, fine-tuning prompts and making aesthetic judgements—whilst traditional, artisanal skills (such as precise lighting and manual editing) are being encapsulated by algorithms (Qin Wen & Wei Qi, 2026-01-30), placing creators under pressure to adapt their skills. A deeper issue lies in the resulting erosion of creative intent—early AI screenplays, such as the sci-fi short film *Sunspring*, featured fragmented narratives and loose logic; even in more mature works like *Chinese Mythology*, whilst the AI handled core text generation, the process essentially involved an ‘algorithmic compromise’ that converted human abstract concepts into data. The emotional tone and subtle rhythms in a creator’s mind are highly susceptible to stylistic shifts or information loss during the process of decoding and regenerating visuals via language models; yet, in the pursuit of overall coherence, creators often abandon the idea of making changes. This unpredictability is both a source of unexpected inspiration brought about by AI and constitutes a potential erosion of the creator’s precise sovereignty by instrumental rationality—particularly when dealing with complex expressions of human nature. For instance, the AI-generated Jackie Chan in the fantasy action film *The Legend* was criticized for lacking emotional depth, which is a clear illustration of this loss of intent. As AI becomes deeply involved in core creative processes such as screenwriting and storyboarding, the authorship and control of human artists are being eroded. AI-assisted content creation platforms for Chinese-language films can reduce scriptwriting time by nearly half, whilst the intelligent marketing and promotion agent ‘Xiao Yi AI’ produces a hundred articles daily. When algorithms provide the optimal solutions for script frameworks, storyboard proposals and even emotional pacing, the human role begins to shift towards that of a script reviewer or project coordinator. The AI-created short film *The Safe Zone* was co-written and directed by ChatGPT, whilst the vast majority of the actors’ shots in the fantasy micro-series *Mirror of Mountains and Seas: Cutting Through the Waves* were generated by AI. These examples mean that whilst creators enjoy the efficiency gains brought by AI, they are also experiencing an intensified crisis of confidence regarding the traditional notion that ‘the author is a natural person’ (Guo Rinkui & Feng Mingzhe, 2025), and they often find themselves plagued by self-doubt—are they truly creators, or merely prompt engineers and proofreaders on an AI assembly line?

At the heart of this alienation lies the blurring of the value of labour and anxieties regarding agency.

Creators no longer perceive and express themselves through their holistic artistic persona, but rather function as the executive terminals of a rational decision-making system—the value of labor has been devalued from creation rooted in unique life experiences and professional depth to production based on the efficiency of information processing and tool operation; this ‘efficiency-only’ approach leads to a profound loss of identity and a sense of emptiness regarding one’s worth. A pessimistic view holds that this is the inevitable fate of technological development, and that human creativity will ultimately be supplanted by more efficient and powerful artificial intelligence. This perspective is essentially a variant of ‘technological determinism’ (Lan Jiang, 2026), which posits that technology possesses an intrinsic logic and autonomy of development, and that the outcomes of its application are unidirectional, linear and irresistible, leaving society and culture with no choice but to adapt passively. However, this attribution of technological determinism overlooks deeper socio-constructive factors. AI does not develop in a vacuum; its training data is derived from cultural products already existing within human society, whilst the majority of models on the market are developed by technology

organizations pursuing commercial interests, and their application is shaped by capital and market forces. Capital's pursuit of maximising efficiency and minimising costs forms a close alliance with instrumental rationality—when artificial intelligence is primarily viewed as a tool for enhancing productivity, shortening creative cycles and reducing labour costs, its application inevitably tends to reinforce process control, standardisation of outcomes and the 'de-skilling' of the workforce. Consequently, the alienation of the subject is essentially the result of the logic of capital reorganizing creative production relations through algorithmic tools, rather than being solely attributable to technological characteristics. Recognizing this implies that change is possible: creators can, by repeatedly affirming their own subjectivity, clarify their core roles as the definers of creative concepts, the initiators of human-machine dialogue, and the critics of produced content (Lan Jiang, 2026), and manifest their creative power in the comprehensive ability to master and guide the possibilities beyond what AI can generate.

However, behind this alienation of the subject lies a deeper paradox: creators are not merely the victims of alienation, but have, to some extent, actively embraced this trend. Firstly, there is the internalised erosion of creative value by the 'cult of efficiency' (Janice Gross Stein, 2020): when AI tools can generate images in a matter of seconds and complete a rough cut in a few minutes, creators unconsciously begin to measure their own worth against the same standards of speed – 'Am I efficient enough? Is my output fast enough?' This self-scrutiny often leads to anxiety and feelings of inferiority, causing creators to prioritize external pressure to meet completion rates over self-expression, thereby voluntarily abandoning the contemplation and refinement that should be inherent in the creative process. Secondly, there is the active avoidance of creative risks driven by a preference for safety: when using AI tools, many creators tend to accept options that are 'reasonable' and 'easily understood' according to mainstream aesthetics, whilst rejecting those possibilities that are peculiar, difficult to categorize, or niche—fearing that their work will be overlooked by algorithms, or that they will lose market recognition by straying from the mainstream. Consequently, the loss of control and serendipity—which are already precious commodities in the creative process—are actively abandoned in favour of the 'safe haven' provided by algorithms (Wang Kexiu & Chen Qiongying, 2025). Finally, there is the evasion of responsibility brought about by the relinquishment of agency (Lu Funyi & Liu Xiaojun, 2025): when a work receives a poor reception, the creator can blame it on being 'algorithm-generated'; when faced with creative block, they can rely on AI to provide 'inspiration'; and when called upon to defend aesthetic judgements, they can claim, 'This was the AI's suggestion'. This active relinquishment of agency is far more profound than the control exerted by the technology itself—whilst reaping the benefits of technology, creators are quietly relinquishing ultimate responsibility for their work. Consequently, the first step in resisting alienation is to clearly recognize these internalized 'collusions' and refuse to allow the cult of efficiency, a preference for safety, and the relinquishment of responsibility to become self-evident creative tenets.

Consequently, creators must evolve their roles—returning from being 'prompt tuners' to 'creative leaders'. Some scholars have summarized this new model as 'human-led, AI-assisted and human-machine interaction', emphasizing that humans always occupy the central position as creators, taking the lead throughout the process in determining creative direction, thematic intent and value orientation, whilst AI primarily plays a role in enhancing creative efficiency and sparking inspiration (Wang Kexiu & Chen Qiongying, 2025). In the field of digital media art, this model is taking shape: artists are responsible for controlling the cultural connotations and key design elements, whilst AI is responsible for realizing the visual style and generating intermediate content (Lu Yinghao, 2026). This means that creators are not handing over control to algorithms, but rather using AI as a tool to extend their own creative intentions—setting the direction themselves, safeguarding the finer details, and ensuring that technology serves deeper humanistic expression. Only in this way can the return of creativity at the level of the subject be realized.

2. The Alienation of the Creative Process: Time for Contemplation Overwhelmed by Instant Generation

The high speed of AI tools inevitably erodes the contemplative time required for creation. The cyclical process of 'inspiration–conception–execution–revision–reflection' required in traditional creation has been simplified into a 'input–generation' cycle; the creative process has shifted from a state of physical and mental immersion, drawing inward to express the author's perspective, to a technical procedure involving interface operations.

Furthermore, the creative process itself should be a serendipitous one characterized by constant exploration, trial and error, and refinement; in fact, this process involves a significant element of luck. Good creativity requires a flash of inspiration, yet such inspiration does not come about frequently. However, as Max Weber pointed out, the dilemma of modern society lies in the fact that instrumental rationality has come to dominate value rationality (Li Maoping & Li Ruiqun, 2026). The logical essence of artificial intelligence tools is, in essence, an extension of instrumental rationality—pursuing efficiency, controllability and cost optimization. Relying on the integrated use of big data, they often produce 'generic' content that conforms to mass-market patterns. The beauty of surprise, unpredictability and discovery inherent in the process itself is supplanted by

pre-set controllability, squeezing out the humanistic time and space for serendipity in the creative process. This, in turn, stifles the avant-garde and rebellious spirit essential for artistic breakthroughs, making it difficult to produce truly groundbreaking and unconventional visual expressions. The element of chance required in this process is hidden in the background of generative AI, making it increasingly difficult to perceive during discovery and production. Consequently, even though it possesses the general characteristic of a ‘probability database’, it still produces a single probabilistic answer based on a query (Zhou Baohua., 2023). When this certainty permeates the creative process, the freedom and randomness that creation should inherently possess are eroded.

From the AI sci-fi short film *The Frost*, which compressed its production cycle from several months to four weeks, to the Netflix animated short video—*The Dog & The Boy*, which further reduced the background rendering time to a matter of hours, instrumental rationality appears to have achieved an overwhelming victory in the creative sphere. However, it is precisely against this backdrop—where ‘speed’ has become the dominant narrative—that some creators have chosen to go against the grain, employing extreme ‘slowness’ and ‘hand-crafted’ techniques as a conscious resistance to technological alienation: the creative practice behind *Goose Mountain*; a segment from the animated short *Yao-Chinese Folktales*, provides an excellent case study for understanding this anti-alienation strategy.

Director Hu Rui’s creative approach appears almost ‘out of step’ in the age of AI. Whilst AI tools can generate ‘China Chic’-style imagery in a matter of minutes, Hu Rui insists on traditional hand-drawn characters and backgrounds in a variety of forms, with every single frame meticulously refined. More crucially, the soul of this work lies not in technical virtuosity, but in the steadfast pursuit of the spirit and grace of classical aesthetics—that misty ink-wash texture, the perfectly measured negative space, and the subtle emotional shifts in the characters’ expressions. These are precisely the vital qualities that AI algorithms struggle to capture. AI can learn the visual elements of the Chinoiserie, yet it struggles to comprehend the aesthetic philosophy of ‘between likeness and non-likeness’ found in Chinese literati painting; it can generate fluid animation, yet struggles to recreate the blunt, powerful energy inherent in hand-drawn lines—an energy born of the creator’s breathing rhythm. Over the course of several years, Hu Rui has safeguarded this artistic texture, rooted in lived experience and deep reflection; it is also a tribute to the traditional Central Academy of Fine Arts animations that coloured the childhood memories of an entire generation. The value of this slow creative process has taken on new significance in the age of AI. Similarly, Australian clay animation master Adam Elliott has returned after a 15-year hiatus with his new work *Memoir of a Snail*. He has steadfastly adhered to the traditional clay animation form, specifically noting in the closing credits that ‘This film was made by humans’, thereby clearly expressing his reservations regarding CGI and AI-generated art. Every clay character is covered in wrinkles and cracks; unlike the ‘smoothness and perfection’ pursued by AI, these physical imperfections have instead become unique marks of life. What is particularly remarkable is that Elliott has suffered from a hereditary tremor since childhood; as a child, he could not even draw a straight line—yet he has transformed this ‘imperfection’ into a distinctive aesthetic characterized by a heavy, lopsided quality, which has become the most distinctive hallmark of his artistic practice. This creative approach—transforming individual physiological ‘imperfections’ into an artistic language—is the ultimate expression of individuality and serendipity that no large-scale AI model can replicate. This is not merely a technological step backwards, but a conscious cultural strategy—at a time when technology has made image production extremely cheap and reproducible, ‘slow cinema’—which emphasizes the traces of the hand, materiality and irreproducibility—stands out for its unique aesthetic value precisely because of its scarcity and human warmth (Zhang Shuli & Zhang Yuqiang, 2026). The success of these works demonstrates that, in an era of algorithmic proliferation, audiences still yearn to see works that bear the creator’s ‘body temperature’. This commitment to a sense of craftsmanship is, in essence, a defence of creative agency: it is not a surrender of control to algorithms, but rather a means of harnessing technology to serve deeper humanistic expression.

Consequently, in the creative dynamics of the AI era, we can see that there is more than one path to countering alienation. Aside from collaborating and coexisting with AI, another possibility is to consciously take a step back and rediscover those manual skills—rooted in human senses and life experiences—that AI cannot replace. This choice is not a rejection of technology, but rather an effort, amidst the clamour of technology, to preserve a sanctuary for true creativity—a place where the warmth of hand-drawn work, the depth of thought, and the flashes of inspiration that only time can cultivate are preserved.

However, we must still ask: is the alienation of the creative process inevitable? The answer is no. Contemporary society’s understanding of creativity is inherently narrow—it places excessive emphasis on unprecedented novelty, commercial viability and conformity to mainstream aesthetics. Concurrently, the education system’s long-standing prioritization of standardized answers, efficiency and practical skills has collectively fostered a cultural environment that readily embraces ‘AI-style creativity’ (Li Maoping & Li Ruiqun, 2026). When human creativity and AI-generated output are measured against the same utilitarian standards, the former’s disadvantages in terms of efficiency are highlighted, whilst its unquantifiable emotional depth and the

humanistic value of lived experience are underestimated. This cultural paradigm forms a covert collusion with the instrumental rationality inherent in AI(Zhang Shuli & Zhang Yuqiang, 2026) .

Consequently, creators need to consciously design ‘speed bumps’ and moments of reflection within human-machine collaboration, rather than allowing the algorithm’s instantaneous generation to devour time for contemplation. After the AI has produced its output, slow thinking in the physical space should be introduced into the creative process through methods such as manually sketching and writing personal reflections; the AI-generated draft should be thoroughly rewritten and its meaning explored, shifting the focus of the process from generation to contemplation and creation(Zhang Shuli & Zhang Yuqiang, 2026) .At the same time, creators need to subject AI-generated content to a secondary process of ‘human review and dynamic adjustment’, using value judgements to avoid the superficialization of discourse that may result from the application of technology(Dong Xingbin & Wu Manyi, 2026) .

3. The Alienation of Creative Outcomes: From Crystallization of Meaning to Data-like Images

As mentioned above, guided by instrumental rationality, AI-generated outputs lack the unique human warmth.

Firstly, the deconstruction of meaning. The work is no longer the ‘crystallization’ of the interaction between the creator’s spiritual and material worlds (Huang Yuye, 2026), but are distorted into technical ‘code’ designed to meet specific demands, incapable of accurately conveying the creator’s understanding of life or their exploration of the world. The process by which AI generates concrete expressions involves complex mathematical operations, rather than the creative process through which humans express their thoughts and emotions(Liu Wenjie, 2026) , making it impossible for viewers to grasp the complex shifts in emotion or the subtle, indescribable stirrings they evoke. Their meaning is external and interpreted, rather than endogenous and emergent (Wang Qian, 2025). Coca-Cola’s AI Christmas advert featured perfectly standardized snowflakes, but the excessive precision of the characters’ smiles triggered the ‘uncanny valley effect’ in viewers, with one commenter remarking, ‘It’s so fake it makes me want to cry.’ Although the AI accurately replicated the visual elements of the Christmas scene, it was unable to grasp the emotional core of family reunions or to experience the festive atmosphere through lived experience. Furthermore, AI will never be able to paint Van Gogh’s masterpieces or create works of art such as *Dear You(Lan Hongchun)*—which flow with such power and deeply move the heart—because the results generated by artificial intelligence must always be widely understood. Yet the very meaning of creation lies in that persistence of expressing oneself unflinchingly, even when not understood; works that remain misunderstood will simply wait for the day they encounter the right person.

Secondly, the convergence of forms. Whether in literature, film, music or visual design, the vast generative capacity of artificial intelligence has not led to a flourishing of diversity; rather, it may exacerbate the self-reinforcement and repetition of mainstream patterns, with even different AI models capable of producing vast quantities of exquisite yet identical ‘simulacra’. In 2025, when large numbers of users were creating AI-generated images in the style of Studio Ghibli, the female figures produced often shared highly similar facial contours, nose bridges and standardized smiles; different women depicted in the same scene would all look exactly alike. These creations resembled polished industrial products, lacking the traces of craftsmanship, the imprint of the soul, and the vitality that springs from imperfection (Qin Wen & Wei Qi, 2026-01-30). Ultimately, the artwork ceases to be a unique ‘other’ that engages in dialogue with the human spirit (Qiu Zhaoji & Wei Chengyi, 2025), and instead becomes a hollow mirror reflecting collective data preferences and algorithmic logic.

Thirdly, AI-generated content exhibits distinct characteristics of reorganization in its composition. The algorithmic foundation of artificial intelligence is built upon the deconstruction and reorganization of existing human works; during the training phase, AI models segment vast quantities of human works into fragments and vectorize them, learning the styles, techniques, structures and expressive elements contained therein; during the generation phase, AI relies even more heavily on the vector guidance provided by user prompts, arranging and combining relevant content through complex probabilistic calculations before fusing it into new content. Consequently, whilst AI-generated content may appear novel in form, its core remains a rearrangement of existing cultural elements, lacking true originality and innovation. This reconstructive approach further exacerbates the tendency towards homogenization of the works themselves, causing generated content to closely mimic human works in terms of style, paradigms and expressive elements.

The legal sphere has also responded to this: as AI-generated content does not constitute ‘expression’ within the ‘idea-expression dichotomy’, the prompts entered by users fall solely within the realm of ideas, and ‘human contribution to the originality of expression’ is an essential attribute of a work (Qiu Zhaoji & Wei Chengyi, 2025), the forced classification of AI-generated content as a ‘work’ actually constitutes an infringement of moral rights. Taking actual cases as an example, led by Lv Yanting, the voice actress for ‘Nezha’, several well-known actors from the renowned voice-over company 729 Sound Factory have collectively and publicly asserted their rights and denounced AI voice-over infringement (the essence of AI voice-over lies in the use of blended audio tracks created from the voices of multiple voice actors); ‘Trik AI’

used the works of numerous illustrators without authorization to train its AI and generate images with an extremely high degree of similarity (by fragmenting and pixelating the artists' works and piecing them together to form new works), leading to a joint lawsuit by the artists; This incident has laid bare that AI-generated content is entirely devoid of originality; the process of relying on the fruits of others' labor and subjecting them to secondary processing cannot, in essence, be considered the creation of a work. Even derivative works are subject to copyright regulations, let alone a 'tailor' that completely fuses materials from multiple sources. This precisely illustrates that, from a legal perspective, AI-generated output is insufficient to be termed a work; it is nothing more than a data-driven simulacrum.

However, this alienation of the outcome cannot be simply attributed to the technology itself. It profoundly reflects the colonization of creativity by a utilitarian culture—when society as a whole measures works by quantifiable standards (such as reach, number of likes, and commercial value), the emotional depth and intellectual risks that cannot be quantified are naturally and systematically undervalued (Li Maoping & Li Ruiqun, 2026). More ironically, just as the buds of creativity begin to emerge from the soil, a handful of authorities invariably impose value judgements prematurely. Deprived of the process of public critique and the refining effect of time, creativity itself is reduced to a few sheets of A4 paper with a price tag (Zhang Shuli & Zhang Yuqiang, 2026). This cultural logic colludes with the instrumental rationality of artificial intelligence, jointly producing standardized products that are safe, comprehensible and conform to expectations.

Consequently, at the level of outcomes, creators can re-anchor the humanistic value of their works through a series of 'practices of self-resistance' (Zhang Shuli & Zhang Yuqiang, 2026): treating the process of crafting prompts as mental training, pursuing uniqueness and intellectual depth rather than merely generation efficiency; breaking the closed loop of purely digital generation by manually intervening in and physically assembling AI-generated outputs, thereby restoring the material traces of creation; utilizing open-source tools to train personalized segmentation models, ensuring that AI assistance truly becomes an extension of personal style rather than an imitation of public styles; and, when publishing works, proactively and transparently explaining the extent and manner of AI involvement (Zhang Shuli & Zhang Yuqiang, 2026) — an act that demonstrates respect for the audience whilst also serving as a solemn affirmation of one's own identity as a creator. At the same time, creators must remain vigilant against the potential for AI-generated content to trivialize cultural significance, avoiding the reduction of complex cultural symbols to hollow visual elements (Lu Yinghao, 2026).

The significance of these practices lies in re-anchoring creative outcomes—which have been doubly alienated by the logic of capital and the logic of algorithms—back within the network of human experience and emotion. Together, they point towards a fundamental shift: from passively accepting the empowerment offered by technology to actively mastering technological tools; from anxiety driven by the pursuit of efficiency to confidence in unique value; and from a reliance on security and certainty to an embrace of exploration and risk. It is only through such a transformation that creative agents can rediscover their place in this era of technological upheaval and achieve a truly meaningful return to creativity.

II. Conclusion

Looking back at the interplay between instrumental rationality and creativity, the spectre of 'creative alienation' gradually comes into focus—it permeates the everyday reality of every click-generated content and every algorithmic recommendation. Creators have been reduced to prompt-tweakers, whilst works have transformed from echoes of the soul into data-driven images; behind this lies a collusion between the logic of capital, the cult of efficiency, and cultural perceptions. We are both victims and participants: measuring creativity by the number of 'likes', whilst taking refuge in the 'safe haven' of algorithms.

Yet to recognize alienation with clear-eyed awareness is, in itself, a gentle act of resistance. Creators can reclaim their agency: setting the direction, safeguarding the subtleties, slowing their pace within the gaps of human-machine collaboration, and allowing hand-drawn sketches, contemplation and revisions imbued with human warmth to return; through personalized training and transparent annotation, they can ground their work in their own experiences. This is not a rejection of the era, but a search for humanity's place within it. Future technology will never learn the uniquely human qualities of 'hesitation and indecision'. A South Korean writer once said: AI cannot capture the feeling of repeatedly editing late into the night, being unable to choose between two words, or staring blankly at a blank page. Those seemingly 'inefficient' moments of hesitation, doubt and pause are, in fact, the truest expression of emotion—the warmth left behind by a living mind as it touches the world, giving a work the breathing space and the tenderness that transcends standard answers.

What is most precious is the courage to safeguard 'slowness' and 'uncertainty'. We need not feel inferior to the speed of AI; on the contrary, it is the imperfect, hesitant works bearing the marks of human craftsmanship that will leave a deep imprint in the river of time. Technology can be a partner, but only human hesitation can ignite the warmth of creation. May we stand, gently yet resolutely, on the side of humanity.

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