Delving into Artistic Integrity: Unveiling Plagiarism's Dual Impact on Nominal and Expressive Authenticity

Within the realm of art, the concept of authenticity has enormous ramifications, affecting our perspective and connection to artistic creations. Its meaning varies according to the context and specific dimensions it encompasses. Among these dimensions, philosopher Denis Dutton's illuminating paper "Authenticity in Art" covers nominal authenticity, which entails correctly recognizing an artwork's "origins, authorship, or provenance." Dutton also discusses expressive authenticity, which examines an artwork's ability to transmit "an individual's or a society's values and beliefs." Plagiarism poses a complex challenge to the art world, raising questions about the true identity and origin of a work, but it may not necessarily affect the core values and beliefs conveyed by the artwork itself, as Dutton's distinction between nominal and expressive authenticity suggests. Below is the top result produced by DALL-E 2's text-to-image algorithm in response to the prompt, "Many retro TV screens stacked in a pyramid shape, with a hypnosis video playing on all of the screens." The image is a cropped representation of several vintage television screens producing a mesmerizing array of vibrant colors. The purpose of this essay is to examine how plagiarism, a type of fraud, undermines the nominal authenticity of artwork rather than its expressive authenticity, with a particular emphasis on the image generated by DALL-E 2.
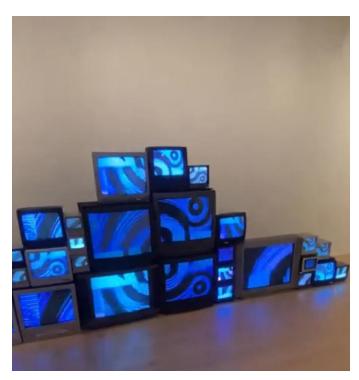

Image produced by DALL-E 2 when the prompt "Many retro TV screens stacked in a pyramid shape, with a hypnosis video playing on all of the screens" was entered

Expressive authenticity, as described by Dutton, relates to an artwork's capacity to be perceived as a product of "committed, personal expression." Plagiarism, defined as the "passing off as one's own the words or ideas of another," may violate ethical and legal standards, although it does not necessarily undermine the basic values and views communicated by an artwork. Even when the origin or authorship is misleading, the "expressive" content remains intact. For example, if the image generated by DALL-E 2 was plagiarized from another artist, it could nevertheless elicit the same emotional or intellectual response as the authentic work, retaining its expressive authenticity as something original to the creator of the work. This demonstrates that, while plagiarism can damage an artist's reputation, as in the instance of DALL-E 2, it does not change the expressive authenticity and power of the artwork.

According to Dutton, "too often, discussions of authenticity ignore the role of the audience." In his research of La Scala, he reveals how the "demise of the traditional audience" contributed to a "decline" in operatic art, owing mostly to an influx of tourists and visitors who do not correspond with the "audiences of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." By doing so, he hopes to show that not only the artist's comprehension, knowledge, and critical engagement are important in grasping and appreciating an artwork's expressive authenticity, but the audience's too. As a result, while considering the duplication of artworks by AI image generators like DALL-E 2, it is critical to remember that the emotional resonance and intended meaning of the artwork remain unaltered. Audiences can emotionally connect with the artwork, delving into its fundamental core and the feelings it produces, whether they are aware of the challenges relating to nominal authenticity or not. In summary, Dutton's findings emphasize that the authenticity of art is co-created by the audience and is not entirely defined by its nominal characteristics.

Plagiarism in the realm of art relates to the nominal authenticity of artworks. Plagiarism, by Dutton's definition, focuses on the facts of how an artwork comes to be rather than its emotive content. When an artist plagiarizes, their primary goal is frequently to deceive the audience about the artwork's provenance. The prompt entered into DALL-E 2 was inspired by an Instagram art page (@animoscillator), where the artist Dan Haywood specialized in creating innovative 3-D displays. A screenshot of one of the page's most popular reels (https://bit.ly/retro-tv-screens) is below. A detailed prompt for DALL-E 2 was created to transform his work into words.

Credit: Screenshot of Instagram reel posted by Dan Haywood (@animoscillator) on June 16, 2023

Dutton defines plagiarism as presenting someone else's words or ideas as one's own. Both cases demonstrate the importance of correctly determining the origins of an artwork, a factor that is inextricably linked to nominal authenticity. When we examine the "actual" artwork that the AI image generator DALL-E 2 attempted to imitate, it becomes clear that this model is incapable of replicating the "origins, authorship, or provenance" of the artwork. These are distinguishing factual characteristics of Dan Haywood's artwork. With this understanding of the relationship between plagiarism and nominal authenticity, it is evident that the primary battleground for plagiarism is determining the genuine identity and provenance of artworks. According to Dutton, the nominal authenticity of art is "more important than maintaining the market value of an art object." More importantly, it helps to "understand the practice and history of art." Nominal authenticity places an artwork in a definite time frame, establishing a relationship between the artist and their work at that point in time. As a result, when either an artist or an AI model plagiarizes, they deceive the audience about the work's origin while maintaining its expressive features.

To delve deeper into this, artificial intelligence's plagiarism of artwork poses a number of obstacles to many aspects of nominal authenticity. These difficulties include misrepresentation of origins, misleading attribution, uncertainty regarding provenance, and complex concerns of ownership. AI-driven plagiarism entails reproducing existing artwork without properly crediting the original creators. As demonstrated by DALL-E 2's production of several retro TV screens,

despite efforts to reproduce the art, the true source remains unknown. When AI models copy artwork created by human artists, the audience is misled by attributing authorship to a non-human entity. Furthermore, plagiarized AI art can complicate provenance records since it lacks the "traditional fashion" of lineage or history associated with human artists. By concealing the artwork's provenance, this immediately contradicts Dutton's notion of nominal authenticity.

Furthermore, AI-driven plagiarism raises complex legal and ethical quandaries regarding ownership and authorship rights. Traditional art ownership is inextricably related to the artist's rights and the origin of the artwork. AI-generated art challenges these established norms by introducing non-human producers, raising questions about who owns the rights—whether it is the person who programmed the AI, the person who supplied the prompt, or the AI system itself. Nevertheless, these discussions are linked to nominal authenticity since they revolve around the misrepresentation of authorship and origin, making it difficult to establish clear ownership and provenance records.

As highlighted by Denis Dutton's views, the investigation of creative authenticity in the context of plagiarism, particularly in the realm of AI-generated art, reveals a delicate interplay between nominal and expressive authenticity. Plagiarism, a type of deceit that primarily concerns the factual components of an artwork's development, calls into question art's nominal authenticity by confounding its origins, authorship, and provenance. It does not, however, change the expressive authenticity—the emotional and intellectual resonance of the artwork itself. The substance and power of the artwork, as experienced by its audience, remain untouched, transcending concerns about plagiarism and nominal authenticity. In essence, the simultaneous impact of plagiarism on nominal and expressive authenticity serves as a reminder that artistic authenticity is a multifaceted idea that fosters an ongoing discussion between creators and audiences. Plagiarism prompts us to consider the always shifting boundaries of authenticity, identity, and creativity within the artistic sphere. The basic substance of art—the ability to stir our emotions, challenge our viewpoints, and encourage contemplation—survives, even when its nominal authenticity is challenged. As we consider the ramifications of plagiarism in art, we are faced with an intriguing question: How will our understanding of authenticity evolve in an era where technology and human creativity are constantly intersecting, changing the bounds of artistic expression?

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