Revista Ibero-Americana de Humanidades, Ciências e Educação — REASE

OPEN ACCESS

doi.org/10.51891/rease.v12i6.27994

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, IMAGES AND DESIGN: DEMYSTIFYING NARRATIVES AS A WAY TO IMAGINE ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

INTELIGÊNCIA ARTIFICIAL, IMAGEM E *DESIGN*: DESMISTIFICANDO NARRATIVAS PARA IMAGINAR FUTUROS ALTERNATIVOS

Marcela Peixoto de Souza Almeida[1]

ABSTRACT: In recent years, the increasing implementation of Artificial Intelligences in various design and production stages, as well as the circulation of its products in everyday life, has brought to the fore the urgent need to reflect its sociocultural impact, as well as the political contours of its popularization. More specifically within the field of Design, such a conjuncture seems more likely to weaken critical reflection on the field's practices and principles than to lead to the much-publicized technological progress fallaciously regarded as unavoidable and so often associated with AI. The allied intersections between Design and the image, as evidenced by the frequent association of the former with visual communication, have also suggested renewed challenges to the field, since the confrontation between artificiality and reality now acquires new contours amid an era strongly oriented toward the circulation and consumption of media. Here we argue that, thanks to an intricate mythology associated with AI, as well as to a historical difficulty in defining the image, exponents of the field are continuously weakened by this new technological horizon, massively spearheaded by megacorporations and their interests. We therefore propose a demystification of this context as a route toward the necessary imagination and construction of alternative futures.

Keywords: Design. Artificial Intelligence. Technology. Image.

RESUMO: Nos últimos anos, a crescente implementação de Inteligências Artificiais em variadas etapas projetivas e produtivas, assim como a circulação de seus produtos no cotidiano, têm trazido à tona a urgente necessidade de refletir seu impacto sociocultural, assim como os contornos políticos de sua popularização. Mais especificamente para o Campo do Design, tal conjuntura mais parece enfraquecer a reflexão crítica sobre as práticas e princípios do Campo do que conduzir ao tão alardeado progresso tecnológico falaciosamente tido como incontornável e tão associado às IA's. Os aliados atravessamentos entre o Design e a imagem, vide a frequente vinculação do primeiro à comunicação visual, também têm sugerido renovados desafios ao Campo, uma vez que o embate entre artificialidade e realidade hoje ganha renovados contornos em meio a uma era fortemente orientada a circulação e consumo de mídias. Aqui argumentamos que, graças a uma intrincada mitologia associada à IA, assim como à uma histórica dificuldade em definir a imagem, expoentes do Campo são continuamente enfraquecidos por esse novo horizonte tecnológico maciçamente capitaneado por megacorporações e seus interesses. Propomos, portanto, uma desmistificação desse contexto como rota para a necessária imaginação e construção de futuros alternativos.

Palavras-chave: *Design*. Inteligência Artificial.Tecnologia. Imagem.

[1] Mestre em Design pela PUC-Rio, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

1. INTRODUCTION

At an impetuous pace, for the last few years AI has been intertwined in the daily lives of an increasingly large contingent of subjects to satisfy intents that frequently, through perception, aim to "capture human intimacy through the affective and emotional engagement of embodied response" (ibid.). As a disseminator of artifacts and an aesthetic that converts "culture into an operational resource" (Atanasoski and Vora, 2026, p. 1), Artificial Intelligence then becomes an increasingly urgent subject to be unveiled through critical lenses. Here we aim to demystify some of the narratives surrounding this technology and highlight the consequences of such conjuncture on the status of the image and the field of Design.

This is because, in an era already culturally marked by the avid competition for what moves the individual, in which calculated media flows prevail in spaces typically and algorithmically controlled by megacorporations, it is noted that the cultural and literal diffusion of AI inevitably accentuates tensions regarding the way we perceive image and Design. The increasing automation of processes, for example, touted as a method to eliminate repetitive work and accelerate project development, although much earlier than this (re)disclosure, has been addressed by many agents of the private sector, and well as by theorists from various fields, as that which will free the worker — here, more specifically, the designer — from certain tasks (Verganti, Vendraminelli and Iansiti, 2020), although it is rarely clarified how this will happen and to whom, in fact, this so-called innovation is beneficial. AI-generated content is also being considered by many of these same exponents as a true panacea (J. Jin et al., 2025), treated as the result of an even more refined creation previously limited by supposedly obsolete human faculties. Social media posts, television commercials, internet ads, scenes in films, street signs — in short, a myriad of visual pieces that illustrate the spectrum of creation, from the most elementary to the most industrial in scale — are therefore artificially generated and hastily compose the everyday visual landscape with questionable naturalness.

Succinctly, the repercussions are numerous, showing that this is, in fact, a complex, intertwined, and imposing movement whose validity has not yet been sufficiently questioned. We suspect that it holds the potential to bring about radical changes in the way we exist and, more specifically, in how we reflect on the practices and principles of the field of Design. Although it is far from the premises of this text to establish any peremptory theses about this process, we intend to reflect on the extent to which the increasing use of AI in the most diverse stages of variable production chains has modified the professional practice and theorization of

Design, reiterating that this specific data, of still mystified impact (Pasquinelli and Joler, 2020), corresponds to subjective contradictions of a few individuals in the face of reality (Vieira Pinto, 2008). To advance this argument, given the impact of Design upon the sensible realm, we will also propose a closer examination of a fundamental dimension of the perception of design artifacts, namely, the way we define the image. Specifically, we suggest that conflicting understandings of the image, while far from recent, are gaining renewed plasticity as artificial visual artifacts and evasive narratives surrounding AI become increasingly widespread.

To reflect on what is at stake in this dispute seems fundamental to imagining what is actually desired, collectively and locally, to be understood by technology, as well as by Design. Indeed, what this conjuncture triggers that is most relevant to us is the urgent elaboration of questions that test the ideologically inculcated character of such changes as neutral or, worse still, inherently beneficial. It seems to us that the daily application of such understandings would have the potential to provoke other ways of experiencing the dimension of the sensible and, in broader terms, of existing; ways that could map and even take advantage of the aforementioned tensions without, of course, failing to recognize the necessarily collective, resignifying, and epistemologically empowering character expected of such an undertaking. Only in this way, we believe, can we assert that the vast liberating potential inherent in all technology has been repeatedly reserved for the interests of a few subjects (Vieira Pinto, 2008); interests that also converge with the rapid deterioration of the Earth and the relationships established *on* and *with* it.

Given this, since the intention of this article is only to ignite the sparks of a questioning practice, we will be more concerned with addressing the posed problem than with developing strategies to react to it. We propose, primarily, a contrast between the theoretical approaches present in *Design in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (2020), by Roberto Verganti, Luca Vendraminelli, and Marco Iansiti, and *The Nooscope manifested: AI as instrument of knowledge extractivism* (2020), by Matteo Pasquinelli and Vladan Joler, in addition to investigating texts such as *What is an Image?* (1984), by W. J. T. Mitchell, *Future design narratives: an interdisciplinary approach to a decolonial glossary* (2024), by Victoria Rodriguez Schon and Manuela Celi, among others. It is expected that such a framework will clarify the chaotic multiplicity of the image, problematize the usual reductionism of reflection on the image in terms of aesthetic judgment or discernment between reality/artificiality, and finally, expose the ways in which the field of Design and its exponents can be brutally weakened by the growing implementation — and today

allied mystification — of AI amidst a cultural wave strongly permeated by images. With this, we also hope to remind the reader that alternative futures exist and can be imagined today, especially through Design.

2. OF THE IMAGES

Virtual spaces characterized by the incentive of addiction and consumption, guided by metrics such as views, likes, comments, and shares, have become the center of trends that today have a distinct sociocultural impact. It is difficult to think of artificially generated images without considering them, given that, although it is widely proclaimed that, "in combination with the omnipresence of digital sensors, networks, and software-based automation, AI is transforming our economy and defining a new era of industrialization" (Verganti, Vendraminelli, and Iansiti, 2020, p. 5), it is still social media that most blatantly and openly bring individuals closer to the vaunted fruits of this technology.

Indeed, in recent times, the emergence of profiles entirely based on artificially generated images has ushered a new stage for online relationships, bringing together millions of individuals around what seems to be farms of artificial content creation. Faced with an increasingly amorphous feed and still relatively comfortable remaining connected to these spaces, users are signaling a clear shift in their own expectations regarding online consumption. Meanwhile, those who govern the functioning of such spaces continually test the limits of this captive audience — whether in terms of the data extracted from each profile, the amount of advertising displayed, the parameters used to boost certain content, etc — and implement renewed artifices to perpetuate their own agenda.

It is noticeable that, thus, initially promoted as a way to keep in touch with friends and family, already changed by the rise of influencers, and now more recently modified by the normalization of following artificially created situations, memes, and personalities, many of the most popular social media today, in just over a decade, have managed not only to maintain their relevance but to expand it. This is one of the many reflections of influences and trends that go beyond the tastes of users linked to these platforms and that may sound quite paradoxical, given that they continually challenge the founding premises of the appeal of these services.

Now, it is truly surprising to contrast, for example, the recurring privacy concerns shared by early Facebook users in the mid-2000s with the now common practices of self-exposure among users of social media like Instagram. Similarly, if it were possible to go back to 2012 and

tell an Instagram user that, in just over ten years, following artificially created influencer profiles on that platform would be common and even expected, they would likely be shocked by this information. These examples, however, unveil a crucial phenomenon; revealing that the mystification of properties and interests shared by a small class (Vieira Pinto, 2008), premeditated as an instrument for asserting a supposed sociocultural democracy guaranteed online, provides fertile ground for movements that, although seemingly contradictory and accelerated, users genuinely feel they have chosen.

Indeed, amidst millions of viewed videos of security cameras "catching" rabbits on trampolines, celebrities transitioning ethnicities, and bizarre soap operas featuring vegetables and fruits as protagonists, we are confronted with the inevitable question: what does this all mean? Nothing about this question is simple.

Excessively contemporary to such issues, our vision is blurred regarding these developments, given that the temporal convergence between existence itself and the events that traverse it does not necessarily translate into contemporaneity, that is, the "singular relationship with time itself, which adheres to it and, at the same time, distances itself from it" (Agamben, 2009, p. 59, our translation). More often than not, uncertainties seem to prevail, as well as the adoption of extreme biases in an attempt to dispel them: sometimes we can perceive the movements brought about by the diffusion of AI from a fatalistic perspective, as if this were the end of authorship and truth, sometimes we can take them as the future manifesting itself, a necessary step towards indomitable technological progress. Both lines of reasoning are pernicious, given that, in addition to contributing to the mystification of “two processes of proper alienation; the growing geopolitical autonomy of hi-tech companies and the invisibilization of workers’ autonomy worldwide” (Pasquinelli and Joler, 2020, p. 1263), they conceal the fact that “AI is not a monolithic paradigm of rationality but a spurious architecture made of adapting techniques and tricks” (ibid., p. 1265).

For these and many other reasons, in order to outline the beginning of an answer to the question recently posed, it is first necessary to establish what kind of perspective we wish to adopt when speaking of images, even before considering their artificial character; both to map the possible reasons why the prevalence of artificially generated images is problematic, and to remove the weight of such flaws from the mere stage of interpretation and formal signification of such images. This is because, as pointed out by W. J. T. Mitchell, “to examine some of the ways we use the word image in a number of institutionalized discourses-particularly literary

criticism, art history, theology, and philosophy" (1984, p. 504) has long been a challenge: "pictures, statues, optical illusions, maps, diagrams, dreams, hallucinations, spectacles, projections, poems, patterns, memories, and even ideas (...) the sheer diversity of this list would seem to make any systematic, unified understanding impossible" (ibid.).

Surely, visualizing an image has never been an objective act, just as no image is perceptually translucent. In the Portuguese language itself, a broad distinction is made between the optical procedure encapsulated in the word "olhar" (to look) and the extremely broad act of "ver" (to see). Although one often suggests the other, they definitely do not translate or encompass each other. Synonyms for "ver" in the online Michaelis dictionary (Michaelis, 2026) include terms such as "distinguir" (to distinguish), "divisar" (to discern), and even the increasingly dubious "testemunhar" (to witness); "olhar," on the other hand, suggests "fixar os olhos" (to fix one's eyes), "aplicar o sentido da visão" (to apply the sense of sight).

Graciela Iturbide, El Primer Día del Verano (1982). Courtesy of Throckmorton Fine Art

I can "apply the sense of sight," for example, to a photograph by Graciela Iturbide (fig. 1) and see, in all its vastness, an infinity of things that my eyes definitely did not focus on at that moment: the warm breeze, the chapped lips, the roughness of the sand on elbows and knees, the thin layer of dust that will be scattered on hair and cheeks. I can also, similarly, look at a pin and intuit that the view of this object will be radically different when supported by the

eyes of a seamstress. Cases that illustrate such distinctions are potentially infinite and remind us that, in concise terms, the image is constant, we are the mutable subjects. We make of images, with what we gather distinctly, locally and historically, what they are meant to be, since they "are not just a particular kind of sign, but something like an actor on the historical stage, a presence" (Mitchell, 1984, p. 504).

Bearing this in mind, it is common to come across contemporary discourses about the dangers of relating, in the long term, to a world full of artificial images; about how this would fundamentally alter, and for the worse, our way of processing reality and of relating to the sensible realm, since, according to this reasoning, it would no longer be possible to discern what was staged by artificial subjects and horizons from what happened with living subjects — the latter, in theory, more deserving of our sensitivity. Such suspicions usually stem from the understanding that the repeated flow of artificial visions would generate a gradual distancing from proper human sensibilities, thus leading us to a creative, sentimental, relational, etc., lag.

Without necessarily echoing or contradicting such observations, here we should understand them more as manifestations not only of the uncertainties surrounding this technology, which is, in fact, still nebulous for common sense, but also of a frustration — definitely not dismissible — in the face of exhaustively repeated fallacies, such as the inevitable and progressive replacement of subjects by machines. The impulse to make such predictions in this context is understandable; however, it is necessary to remember that "current AI systems are not sophisticated versions of cognition, but rather, of perception" (Pasquinelli and Joler, 2020, p. 1267).

Today, we don't feel confused or apathetic when watching a graphically animated or CGI-supported film, although both do continually demand various suspensions of judgment about reality and the readjustment of our perception as they develop and update. It's certainly plausible to fear a dominant and ideologically imposed model of perception in line with private interests, especially considering the disproportionate power now held by many Big Tech's that govern much of the media content. However, artificially generated images, like Graciela Iturbide's photograph, the hypothetical pin, or an explosion created with CGI, are constant in their variable natures, insofar as they depend on subjects to be infinitely re-signified and altered in their constancy.

Today, rather than focusing our energies on the fear of a horizon dominated by artificial images, we must remember that this type of progression does not need to happen against the

shared desire of a majority, composed of many desiring minorities. As Atanasoski and Vora stated in the article *AI's AURA: Aesthetic, Ubiquitous, Regimented Automation* (2026), the core of the reflection on the aesthetics of AI should not, therefore, be in the specificity of one content or another, since

> The "aesthetics of AI" is not reducible to the familiar debates about whether generated images can fool people into thinking they are real or fake, whether Studio Ghibli's style has been accurately reproduced by ChatGPT, or whether chatbots "sound" or "feel" human. It is rather the ensemble of forms (sleek or cute robots, intimate wearables, servile or seductive voices, and pleasurable interfaces) through which monopoly platforms secure the *right to capture, recombine, and operationalize life* (ibid., 2026, p. 3).

Indeed, this transition, from an eagerness to categorize artificially generated images based on their multiple specificities, to recognizing their mutable character and, consequently, their revealing of sociocultural tensions, enables a desired process of secularization of AI (Pasquinelli and Joler, 2020), in which it is possible to move it "from the ideological status of 'intelligent machine' to one of knowledge instruments" (ibid., p. 1263). In effect, what do the "millions of viewed videos of security cameras "catching" rabbits on trampolines, celebrities transitioning ethnicities, and bizarre soap operas featuring vegetables and fruits as protagonists" mean for us here? They mean that these flows, based on exhaustively processed data, create, identify, and recycle trends that, today, contribute to the capture, recombination, and operationalization of life by megacorporations (Atanasoski and Vora, 2026); among the many ways to achieve this goal, within the culture of social media, these are techniques that have proven fruitful.

Once this perspective is established, understanding the use of AI in different design stages will constitute a considerably broader reflection than merely critiquing the aesthetic aspects involved in generating artificial images that make up pamphlets, billboards, videos, and many other media, even though this critique may definitely be valid in other settings. Rather than reducing Artificial Intelligence to an enemy of supposed truth or a representation of bad taste, the focus of the next topic will be to address which socio-historical issues and trends underpin its current dominance, asserting that this is what, in fact, must be problematized.

While it is often revolting for professionals in the field to realize that graphic pieces, photographs, or illustrations, as well as other design artifacts, have been persistently generated by AI and disseminated by media vehicles once consecrated by good human design practices, for us, the most urgent issue highlighted in this context is the fragility of this professional practice, frequently rendered obsolete by clients as soon as it can be replaced by less costly

alternatives. Therefore, we argue that a joint critique by exponents in the field must go beyond judging who is generating this or that image, the aesthetic quality of different aspects of these images, or speculations about a future in which artificial images will be the majority; a joint critique by exponents in the field must investigate why Artificial Intelligence seems to threaten the field of Design so much.

3. Design in the supposed Age of Artificial Intelligence

Verganti, Vendraminelli and Iansiti (2020) point out that, when it comes to Design, in order to better investigate whether AI is "changing the way we design, or is even acting at a deeper level, by reframing the basic principles that inspire the act of designing" (ibid., p. 7), it is first necessary to separate design into two parts: practice and principles.

> The design practice refers to the phenomenology of design in a specific context: its process (the "how of design", such as its phases, methods, tools, or collaborative practice) and the object of design (the kind of solutions it creates). The design principles refer to the perspective and philosophy that inform the act of designing, and that constitute an ontology of what design is (ibid.).

Furthering these assertions, they acknowledge that design principles can be affected by the diverse operational contexts in which design practice occurs and that, until recently, before the implementation of AI in different production stages, "the design of a new product entailed the creation of complex process architectures that could effectively deliver the product at scale" (ibid., p. 8). Designed for market segments rather than individual subjects, products and services were developed with a view to being redesigned only in scenarios of recorded decreases in profit margins or suspicion of possible increases thereof.

The authors consider that this model quickly turned innovative solutions into outdated ones (Verganti, Vendraminelli, and Iansiti, 2020), whereas today, production chains that use AI in their processes can continuously "generate specific solutions for an individual user autonomously, with no human effort involved" (ibid., p. 10). According to them, what can be concluded about Design in the age of artificial intelligence, after many other considerations that have been momentarily set aside here, is that this new paradigm has not yet altered the principles of design. The processes, however, would become significantly different from the past, making it essential for managers to understand "the new nature of the design practice in the age of AI " (ibid., p. 32).

These statements, we assert here, are enumerated in a sufficiently ambiguous manner to succinctly corroborate certain elements related to the mystification of AI. Let us therefore investigate some of the different discursive resources employed.

3.1 Narratives about AI

First and foremost, it is a maxim that designers almost always need to prioritize economic profit when making different design decisions, whether they are aware of it or not, and regardless of whether the end consumer is a market segment or an individual. This is the true guiding principle not only of design practice but also, evasively and consistently, of the elaboration of design principles, although this is rarely explored and, even more so, frequently equated with a supposed subjective priority shared by all designers.

Conceiving the delegation of design development phases to AI as beneficial to professionals in the field, contrary to what one might infer from persistent statements such as "designers have the opportunity to release themselves from the burden of detailed development" (Verganti, Vendraminelli, and Iansiti, 2020, p. 10), therefore calls for some questions: Why would the detailed development of a project be a "burden"? Why would spending prolonged periods of time on the same project be bad? And if, as the authors later elaborate, owners of products and services today sometimes demand different solutions for each of the hundreds of millions of users they serve, consequently making it unfeasible to rely solely on human intervention, why should this monopolization and consequent automation of solutions be celebrated by designers? Seen as a relief when, in fact, it has only been implemented because it is more profitable for the few individuals who hold the domain of such technologies?

All these questions lead, more or less, to the same point: such movements are desired and defended by a small class of individuals that profit disproportionately from them and by a legion of followers who feel they can benefit from them to some extent, with the designer being affected to the extent that their daily work do change, but ultimately, is not necessarily improved as is often attempted to be made out to be. This is yet another facet of the custom of treating the alignment of the client's expectations with what is designed by the designer as an inherent benefit to the latter's professional practice, since, historically, this is often what this role is reduced to. Although the authors point to these changes as ones that “may enable the exploration of radically new design spaces” (ibid., p. 25), that the “design practice of AI

Factories is radically different than what we used to know" (ibid., p. 31), it is therefore notable that constituent elements of its development since the 18th century, and directly related to the cyclical and historical prevalence of technologies such as AI, remain static.

There are also other statements by Verganti, Vendraminelli and Iansiti (2020), full of vague terms, which reveal biases, reflected or not, that we are interested in investigating, such as that, thanks to machine learning capabilities, "problem-solving loops improve their predictions about the user needs and behaviors and therefore design better solutions" (ibid., p. 11). Nouns like "need" and adjectives like "better," to say the least, are faltering if not properly clarified by those who use them. While it must be conceded that the authors did indeed highlight what they wanted to convey, furthering that the greatest benefit about AI is that it "offers unprecedented opportunities to dramatically reduce the cost and time of developing a new solution" (ibid., p. 31), they only did so with such clarity when concluding their argument: before that, the prevailing tone was that the benefits of AI would be equally shared by all.

For all intents and purposes, aiming to reduce the time and costs involved in any production chain through the use of AI is not, in itself, reprehensible, given that "since ancient times, algorithms have been procedures of an economic nature, designed to achieve a result in the shortest number of steps consuming the least amount of resources: space, time, energy and labour" (Pasquinelli and Joler, 2020, p. 1265). What does present itself as a problem, however, is the realization that, beyond the issues raised so far, "if information compression produces the maximum rate of profit in corporate AI, from the societal point of view, it produces discrimination and the loss of cultural diversity" (ibid.).

Indeed, what is understood by "need" in Verganti, Vendraminelli, and Iansiti (2020) is what a given subject, equated as a user, demands to provide a more profitable chain of actions for the holders of a given service. If AI could not identify what keeps users online longer, sensitized by ever-increasing advertising, not bored enough with browsing to switch it, among other things that, added together, increase consumption, it would not be seen as an operator of "better solutions" (ibid., p. 11). This is because what is understood by "solution" here is not what — of course, it would be nearly impossible to define, although Big tech's do not hesitate to proclaim it — hundreds of millions of individuals coincidentally desire, but rather that which is meant to produce ever stronger constraints on unreflective and even undesirable behaviors, while fostering a general docility toward invasive data-extraction practices aimed at perpetuating the accumulation of various forms of capital by the ruling class.

Similarly, in yet another illustrative example of these, let's say, perhaps unintended uses of terms, in an article entitled *Empowering design innovation using AI-generated content* (2025), J. Jin et al. considers AI-generated content — "realistic images, text, audio and videos, and three-dimensional models based on user-written input" (ibid., p. 8) — superior (ibid.) to professionally generated content. They continue their considerations, blatantly based on taste, since almost no term could be more vague than "superior," saying that models such as DALL-E, Stable Diffusion, and Midjourney can "produce visually compelling and high-quality images based on user prompts, such as subject, imagery style, lighting environment, background and other control parameters" (ibid.). In addition to once again using biased adjectives such as "compelling" to describe AI-generated artifacts, they forget to consider that every AI-generated artifact "always hides a human operator, who has applied the generative modality of a neural network trained on a specific dataset" (Pasquinelli and Joler, 2020, p. 1274).

Therefore, if "the 'creativity' of machine learning is limited to the detection of styles from the training data and then random improvisation within these styles" (ibid., p. 1275), what Jin et al. (2025) share as "superior" to professionally generated content is nothing less than a recycling of data that, undoubtedly, is often the result of content that was professionally generated. What such theorists in the field reveal with suggestions like these is that their understanding of "superiority" resides purely and simply in the ability of the projective practice to be more efficient and less costly while preserving a degree of quality — generally associated with a widespread aesthetic taste — close enough to the expectations shared by different market segments.

As we can see, such choices of terms are not neutral. What they reveal is that language is "a complex web of experiences, collective judgments, and perspectives, continuously evolving" (Rodriguez Schon e Celi, 2024, p. 129), showing that "languages reflect distinct worldviews (...) as context shapes the meaning of utterances, tied to specific times and places" (ibid.). Therefore, once we have clarified some of the ways in which discourses about AI can contribute to the accumulation of biased assumptions, let us now turn our attention to what AI is, as well as to what Design can be.

3.2 Design as potency

Interestingly, using terms similar to those listed here to reflect on the image in the previous topic, Pasquinelli and Joler (2020), in agreement with what has been stated here and

to the detriment of a structured opposition between humans and machines, reality and artificiality, prioritize the recognition that "machine learning is just a Nooscope, an instrument to see and navigate the space of knowledge (from the Greek skopein 'to examine, look' and noos 'knowledge')" (ibid., p. 1263). They do acknowledge that "AI is a new regime of truth, scientific proof, social normativity and rationality, which often does take the shape of a *statistical hallucination*" (ibid., p. 1264), which contributes to the myths surrounding it gaining considerable traction, but they also remind us that AI is just another technology, not an indomitable force. As stated by Victoria Rodriguez Schon and Manoela Celi, authors the study *Future design narratives: an interdisciplinary approach to a decolonial glossary* (2024), the Design field encompasses broad potential to shape alternative and relevant futures, with all the nuances and issues that this entails; however, it has often failed to do so due to narratives such as these, that have "been hegemonical in academia and scientific research, methodological processes, and practice" (ibid.).

Indeed, questioning the way in which design practices and principles have been structured in the context of the rampant rise of Artificial Intelligence is also to recognize that Design has presented itself much more as a maintainer of a persistent "modification and definition of consumption habits (...) that defines needs that leave a limited number of pre-determined options for citizen-consumers to choose from" (Rodriguez Schon and Celi, 2024, p. 125), than as a way to imagine other futures locally and collectively. This is not about vilifying design practices oriented towards profit, satisfying demands expressed by market segments, or identifying trends, since all of these tend to be indispensable practices in the field today. Rather, it is about recognizing that Design should prioritize the participation of multiple perspectives during the design process, as well as providing fertile ground for professionally critical and collectively engaged individuals to develop proposals.

What recent discourses, full of premonitions for Design, generally related to the panacea of the progressive automation of production chains through the use of AI, perpetuate is the obscuring of the fact that "automation is a myth, because machines, including AI, constantly call for human help" (Pasquinelli and Joler, 2020, p. 1278). There needs to be a shift in discourse towards an approach that acknowledges AI through critical lenses, coupled with regulations that protect workers interests. Welcome articles such as this from the European Trade Union Institute, for an example, highlight some of the measures that should urgently prioritized:

> (1) safeguarding worker privacy and data protection; (2) addressing surveillance, tracking and monitoring; (3) making the purpose of AI algorithms transparent; (4) ensuring the exercise of the 'right to explanation' regarding decisions made by algorithms or machine learning models; (5) preserving the security and safety of workers in human–machine interactions; (6) boosting workers' autonomy in human–machine interactions; (7) enabling workers to become AI literate (ibid.)

It is time to recognize that, in contemporary times, "pattern recognition has truly become a new cultural technique" (ibid., p. 1268) and, even though it is noteworthy that statistical models used to enrich the recognition of such patterns "have always influenced culture and politics" (ibid., p. 1270), unlike other models customarily "tested and debated within the scientific community (...) Machine learning models, on the contrary, are opaque and inaccessible to community debate" (ibid.). Again, in this context, the "millions of viewed videos of security cameras "catching" rabbits on trampolines, celebrities transitioning ethnicities, and bizarre soap operas featuring vegetables and fruits as protagonists" are only a part of a broader phenomenon, one that reveals a severe ongoing capture of affect, perception, and experience:

> This capture is ubiquitous insofar as AI is an ambient infrastructure of everyday life, dispersed across feeds, prompts, cameras, microphones, recommendation stacks, workplace dashboards, and automated "assistants." It is regimented in the sense that AI's ambient infrastructures are governed by platform monopolies, intellectual property sorting that turns legibility into control (Atanasoski e Vora, 2026).

With the emergence of AI in a complex context such as the one presented here, it becomes more clear why instead of encouraging designers to specialize in designing complex and specific scenarios, their role seems to be reduced to a dumbing down of their own professional practice, in which "to leverage the power of AI, they need an unprecedented capability: to imagine what a dumb system can do when operating at scale" (Verganti, Vendraminelli and Iansiti, 2023, p. 22). For us, more than being able to operate a software proficiently, draw wireframes, or animate special effects, although all are examples of relevant practices, designers hold the potential to "challenge and question the perceived universal cannons of what is considered good design, decentring the colonial gaze in pursuit of the emergence of non-hegemonical subjectivities" (Rodriguez Schon and Celi, 2024, p. 126). It is urgent that we consider "our ability to alter pre-existing norms" (ibid., p. 130), as well as denounce that "AI is not mobilized to reorganize production; rather, production reorganizes aesthetics under monopoly capitalism" (Atanasoski and Vora, 2026).

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The discourse surrounding the so-called new era of Artificial Intelligence suggests a series of understandings that often keep us focused on rather unproductive issues. As we have seen, considering the analysis of the content of artificially generated images as the main problem leads to an excessively localized discussion in terms of aesthetic taste and the differentiation between reality and artificiality, conveniently leaving aside relevant questions about why such images gain notoriety in contemporary times and by what means. Similarly, defining the benefits of AI solely in terms of cost reduction and production speed reinforces the notion that technology should primarily serve those who retain the domain of it, rather than advancing outcomes that societies collectively consider beneficial. More concerningly, it fosters the perception that the interests of CEOs, related to defining how the production chain should be organized, are intrinsically aligned with those of the workers they employ and the consumers who ultimately come to make use of these technologies.

What this reveals is that, often through spurious techniques and discursive maneuvers, we are led to overlook a fundamental aspect of AI: the hegemony of this technological horizon may be the most troubling aspect of the current moment, as it accelerates the depletion of scarce resources and erodes labor and social relations, all in the name of generating profit for a small number of individuals. If myths such as those discussed here were recognized as myths and properly demystified, alongside a necessary rethinking of what technology and technique are and their potential to serve the diverse interests encompassed within living things, we could envision alternative and welcome futures for the principles and practices of design.

However, by limiting the discourse surrounding AI to praise or condemnation, we are left brutally weakened by its rapid implementation amid a cultural landscape deeply permeated by images and remain static in the face of genuinely urgent issues. Indeed, we argue that, to really envision other futures for Design, the peers, academics and any other exponents of the field need to critically question this often hegemonic discourse, as well as the persistence of assumptions tied to the many myths surrounding AI.

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