

# Not Losing Ourselves to the AI Storm: Exploring how AI lives in the past and dreams of the future

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December 2023

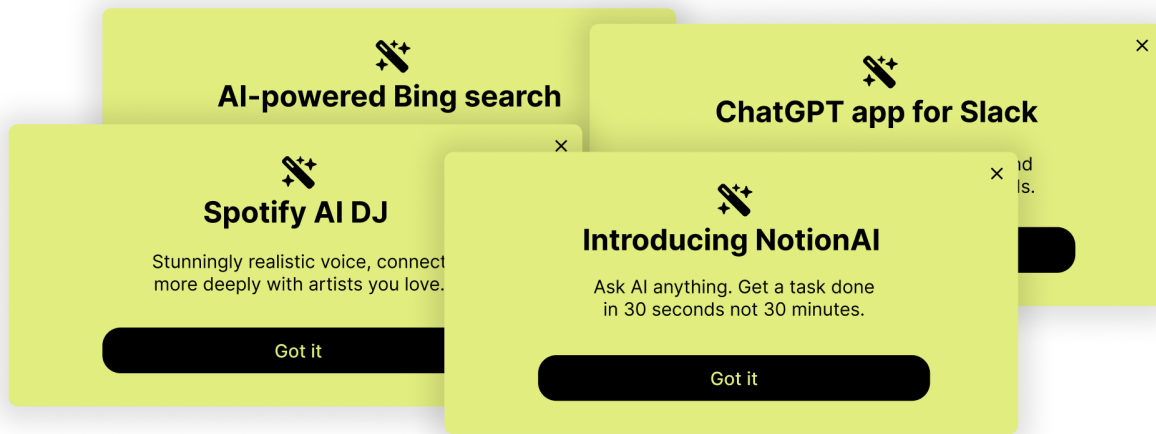
## Abstract

AI is showering us with attention when it comes to our ideas and questions. It's shaking up entire industries and our day to day routines. The tech giants are racing to dominate AI while public perception is a mixed bag of emotions: intrigue, delight, and fear. Will I lose my job? How can ChatGPT do this faster? Can I coexist with AI? We're losing ourselves to the idea that generative AI is the end all be all of creativity and productivity. As a result, how we think about "process" is being challenged. I argue that this shift in our collective values is similar to the anti-art movement in the early 1900s. Both AI and fashion trends have elements of the hyper-real that blur the line between what is human and what is artificial. This rollout of new AI product experiences carry over problems from existing digital spaces. Ultimately, AI lives in the past and dreams of the future. Through our presence as humans, we can shape, fix, and anticipate how AI bleeds into our present day.



As I drift online, I'm becoming more aware of AI's presence. When I browse the web, design a prototype, or debate what to cook for dinner it's becoming more uncertain what my next move should be. Should I invite AI into my thinking process?

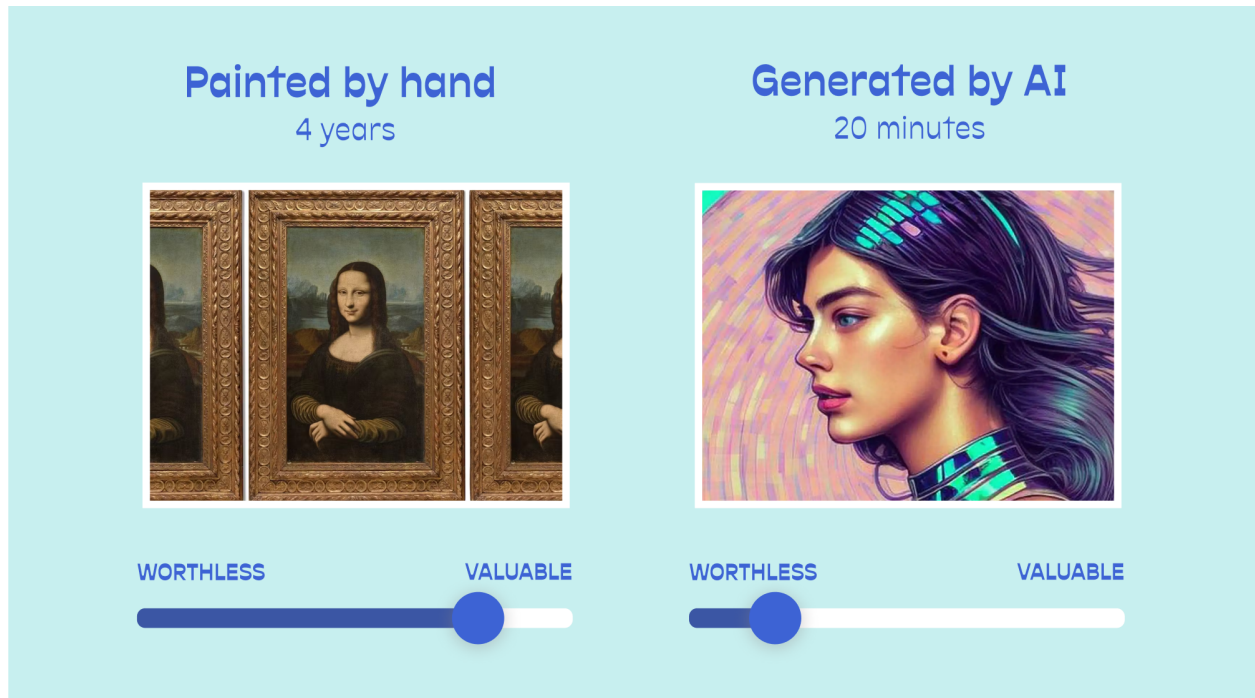
I find myself in a storm of cool AI products with murky ethics and big promises for a more personalized experience. When the thunder roars, we don't have the option to hide indoors. How do we coexist with this AI hype in our work and personal lives?



## AI changes how we create

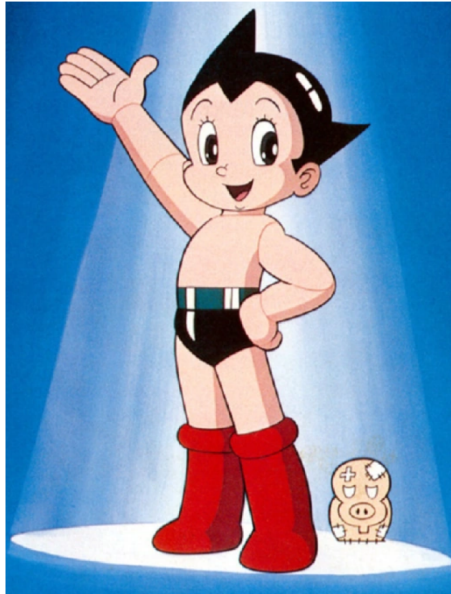
Over the decades, digital technology has pushed us to reconsider our processes and collective values. AI-powered features are rolling out into everyday consumer products like Spotify, Notion, and Bing at lightning speed. It strikes us with delight, intrigue, and fear. Finally, we have tools that can shower our thoughts with attention deceptively well. You ask and shall receive a dynamic and thoughtful response as an audio, code, image, text, or video output.

The leap from spell check to ChatGPT's ability to rewrite paragraphs in "Shakespearean dialect" lands us with new questions of what deserves our attention and praise. *Should we devalue an article written with the help of Notion AI? Is artwork generated by LensaiAI less precious than a hand-drawn painting by a local artist?*



## AI is making us rethink our values in similar ways as the anti-art movement

In the early 1900s, the anti-art movement was led by artists who purposely rejected prior definitions of what art is. It provoked a shift in what we value in the art world. During 1917, the French artist Marcel Duchamp submitted a store-bought urinal signed with the pseudonym “R. Mutt” to a gallery show. The submission was rejected and caused an uproar, but it expanded and confronted our imagination of what is considered art. This created opportunities for new forms of art that go beyond the institutional vantage point of the artist. Rather than focusing on the craft and sublimity of a physical artwork, anti-art paved the way for contemporary art that values the ideas and concepts being explored by the artist in dynamic ways like performance, video, sculpture, and installations. Generative AI is becoming the Marcel Duchamp of our 21st century. Similar to the anti-art movement, AI invites us to reject conventional tools, processes, and products. It allures us by freeing us from being alone with our thoughts and concisely telling us what to imagine. The invitation of an AI companion in our classroom, office, or home allows for us to speed up, cut in half, or eliminate our thinking process. This challenges our sense of self and our place in the world.



## AI intensifies the blurring of the line between what is human and what is artificial

As a result of AI changing how we create, what we're creating is also changing. The AI hype is taking storm in digital spaces where democratization of user privacy and autonomy is dwindling. For example, Twitter and Meta launched a paid product version that grants additional verification and visibility features. This increases the chance for misinformation, fake profiles, trolls, and bots. With AI intensifying the blurring of what is human and what is artificial, the need for authentication and transparency continues.

Vogue covered the fascination behind the viral hyper-real "big red boots" by MSCHF that resemble the pair Astro Boy wears in the anime series. These impractical, playful boots blur the line between the real and the unreal in similar ways as AI does. It plays into the double take we do while listening to the AI-powered DJ on Spotify or scrolling across the viral AI-generated image of Pope Francis in a white puffer. The uncanny quality of the big red boots force us to consider how digital aestheticization distorts details, realism, and quality. A stark contrast is made between what exists in the real world and what is trying to fit in. The boots make it obvious what qualities of the imperfect physical world can't be digitally copied over.

# FEATURING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS

DJ EDITOR ARTIST DESIGNER ASSISTANT WRITER  
ENGINEER EDUCATOR FRIEND CODER TUTOR LAWYER  
INFLUENCER VOICE POLITICIAN COMPANION COUNSELOR  
THERAPIST PRESIDENT SCIENTIST PEACEMAKER  
DISRUPTER LIAR COMEDIAN ACTOR GARDENER PARENT  
COACH CHEF PHYSICIST MANAGER MARKETER ADVISOR  
DRIVER COMPOSER DESTROYER CREATOR YOUTUBER  
BLOGGER LIAR RULE-FOLLOWER TROUBLE-MAKER REBEL

## Our presence gives value to AI outputs in a variety of ways

The shift of creativity in the age of AI also means world-building and dreaming with tools that are not independent nor neutral. In an article by CityLab, the architectural designer Tim Fu describes the AI art generator Midjourney as an advanced tool that can aid the creative process but "still requires the control and the artistry of the person using it." The rapidly generated images help with the earliest stages of a project, but the images lack detail. The architects spot gaps in the AI art generator's understanding of non-Western architecture.

In a recent NYT guest essay, Noam Chomsky describes how ChatGPT "either overgenerates (producing both truths and falsehoods, endorsing ethical and unethical decisions alike) or undergenerates (exhibiting noncommitment to any decisions and indifference to consequences)." Rather than a bot takeover, our responsibilities will expand in new ways as designers, programmers, educators, students, or casual users. We must create a new type of digital literacy to address this tension between the user and AI of knowing what to ask, how to push back, and when to accept an outcome.

By making these digital experiences with AI more collaborative, we can collectively anticipate blindspots. LinkedIn recently introduced a new feature called “collaborative articles” that starts with a pre-written article by AI. Experts on their platform with relevant skills based on their internal evaluation criteria are invited to add context and information. It uses AI as a jumping off point for discussion that emulates the back-and-forth that happens in comment sections. This is one approach for more human intervention that creates space for our live cynicism and voice to be at core of any AI output.

Together with our skepticism and presence can we prevent the distortion of our ideas. This puts necessary pressure on the in-between moments that shape who we are. The moments when we are alone with our thoughts—without the distraction of technology.

## You don't need AI to dream big

Rather than engaging in the present moment, AI takes any context and uses training data to predict what comes next in the sequence. Instead of sieving through the excess of information on the Web, we get information rearranged from large language models like ChatGPT that don't leave a clear trace of how it ended up where it did. ChatGPT creates a foggy interpolation of the Web.

Digital technology distorts our understanding of linear time by repackaging the past to remix something new as a future possibility. Our senses are grounded in the real world and in the present, where we truly exist. AI lives in the past and dreams of the future. If we treat AI as the end-all-be-all for creativity, learning, productivity, and innovation, won't we lose our sense of self and what we stand for? Generative AI exists for your text input; it lives to anticipate but doesn't live.

## Biography

**Yuna Shin** is an interaction designer and writer currently working for Artefact in Seattle. Her approach to design is to embrace the speculative and crafting process to question dominant narratives and imagine new ways of living. She writes about technology from a critical lens by connecting the dots between design, contemporary art, and digital pop culture.

