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The Computational Sublime: Kant's Critique of Judgment and the Aesthetics of Generative Video

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Abstract

The emergence of generative video technologies has introduced a computational sublime within contemporary aesthetics, transforming artistic production, spectatorship, and the ontology of visual creativity. This paper interrogates the philosophical implications of generative video through the lens of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, particularly his conception of aesthetic judgement as disinterested pleasure, purposiveness without purpose, and the free harmony between imagination and understanding. This study argues that generative video constitutes a "computational sublime", a new aesthetic category wherein algorithmic complexity produces forms exceeding immediate cognitive mastery, thereby provoking both fascination and epistemic unease. The paper adopted conceptual analysis and critical hermeneutics as methodology, bringing Kantian aesthetics into dialogue with contemporary debates on artificial creativity, digital ontology, and posthuman art theory. The study is justified by a gap in current scholarship: although AI-generated art has received increasing attention, there remains limited integration between classical aesthetic theory and computational media. The significance of this research lies in extending Kantian aesthetics into contemporary digital contexts, thereby contributing to debates in philosophy of technology, aesthetics, and artificial creativity. The study concludes that Kant's aesthetics remains philosophically fertile for understanding AI-mediated visual culture but requires reinterpretation to account for distributed creativity and synthetic image production.

Keywords: Computational sublime; generative video; Kantian aesthetics; computational sublime; artificial creativity; digital ontology; reflective judgment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent advances in generative artificial intelligence have enabled the production of temporally coherent moving images through computational systems, thereby transforming the ontology of visual art and the conditions of aesthetic judgement. While Kant's aesthetic theory was formulated prior to computational creativity, its analytical architecture offers a robust framework for examining whether machine-generated moving images can elicit authentic judgements of taste or merely simulate aesthetic intentionality. Generative video produced via diffusion models, neural rendering, and transformer

architectures that disrupts the traditional linkage between artistic creation and human intentionality. This shift raises a central philosophical question: can machine-generated images sustain genuine aesthetic judgement, or do they merely simulate aesthetic form? This paper addresses this question through the framework of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, focusing on disinterested pleasure, purposiveness without purpose, and reflective judgement (Kant, 2000: 75–102). While Kant presupposes human authorship, his account of aesthetic judgement as grounded in the subject's reflective activity

provides a basis for evaluating computational artefacts.

The paper addresses four problems: (i) the absence of intentionality in generative systems; (ii) the diffusion of authorship; (iii) the legitimacy of aesthetic judgement under algorithmic production; and (iv) the opacity of computational processes. The aim is to develop a Kantian account of generative video aesthetics. The objectives are to (i) clarify generative video conceptually, (ii) reconstruct Kant's aesthetic theory, (iii) evaluate aesthetic judgement under non-human production, and (iv) propose the concept of the 'computational sublime' as a mediating framework. Thus, the aim of this paper is to develop a philosophically grounded account of generative video aesthetics through the lens of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. Precisely, the study tries to articulate the concept of the 'computational sublime' as a liminal aesthetic space in which human and mechanical agencies intersect. This produces the forms that both conform to and exceed traditional aesthetic categories. The objectives of the study are fourfold: to provide a conceptual clarification of generative video within the broader discourse of digital and computational aesthetics. It will reconstruct key elements of Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement, particularly disinterested pleasure, purposiveness without purpose, and reflective judgement, and then assess their relevance to AI-generated media (Kant, 2000:120). It will also critically analyse the extent to which generative video can sustain genuine aesthetic judgement despite the absence of intrinsic intentionality. More so, it will propose the notion of the 'computational sublime' as a theoretical model for understanding the emergent aesthetic conditions of algorithmic image production.

Kant's aesthetic theory provides a foundational vocabulary for distinguishing between mere sensory gratification and genuinely universalisable judgements of taste. For Kant, aesthetic judgement arises from the "free play" between imagination and understanding, unbound by determinate concepts yet exhibiting a form of purposiveness that appears meaningful without serving a specific end (Kant, 2000: 102). However, the emergence of generative video complicates this framework. Unlike traditional artworks grounded in human intentionality and expressive agency, generative video is produced through computational systems trained on vast datasets, often without direct human control over the final output. This raises a critical philosophical problem: can artefacts generated by non-conscious systems still occasion authentic judgements of taste, or do they merely simulate aesthetic form without genuine purposiveness?

This is unlike traditional artistic production grounded in human intentionality; generative systems such as diffusion models and neural rendering architectures destabilise the relationship between author, artwork, and audience. The paper critically examines whether aesthetic autonomy can persist when artistic agency is distributed across datasets, prompt engineering, and

machine learning infrastructures. In doing so, it develops the concept of the 'computational sublime' as a liminal aesthetic condition in which the sublime is no longer located in nature's magnitude or power but in recursive algorithmic operations whose outputs appear both novel and mechanically reproducible. Methodologically, the paper adopts conceptual analysis and critical hermeneutics, bringing Kantian aesthetics into dialogue with contemporary debates on artificial creativity, digital ontology, and posthuman art theory. It contends that although generative video lacks intrinsic intentional consciousness, aesthetic judgement remains grounded not in the origin of the artefact but in the reflective capacity of the perceiver. Thus, the aesthetic legitimacy of generative video is neither reducible to human authorship nor invalidated by mechanistic mediation. Rather, it signals a reconfiguration of aesthetic experience under computational conditions.

The justification for this study lies in the growing centrality of AI-generated media within global visual culture and the relative scarcity of philosophically rigorous accounts that connect classical aesthetics with computational creativity. While existing scholarship in digital aesthetics and media theory has examined the technical and cultural implications of AI art, there remains a conceptual gap in grounding these developments within a robust philosophical tradition. Kant's aesthetics, despite its pre-digital origins, offers a uniquely suitable framework for addressing this gap because it locates aesthetic value not in the object's origin but in the reflective activity of the subject (Ginsborg, 2015: 67). This insight becomes especially significant in the context of generative video, where the locus of creativity is distributed across human prompts, algorithmic structures, and training data.

The significance of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to contemporary debates in philosophy of art, digital ontology, and posthuman aesthetics by extending Kantian categories into the domain of computational media. Practically, it provides a critical framework for evaluating AI-generated visual content in artistic, academic, and technological contexts. As generative video becomes increasingly integrated into filmmaking, advertising, and digital storytelling, the need for a coherent philosophical account of its aesthetic status becomes urgent. Without such an account, discussions of AI art risk remaining either technologically deterministic or normatively ungrounded.

Contemporary technological developments within a classical philosophical framework in this study not only reaffirm the enduring relevance of Kantian aesthetics but also demonstrate its capacity for reinterpretation in the age of artificial intelligence. In doing so, it advances a nuanced account of how aesthetic experience is being reshaped under computational conditions, without relinquishing the normative rigour that defines philosophical enquiry into art and judgement. This paper

is divided into six sections. The first is this introduction. The second section is an overview of generative arts. The third section discusses Kantian aesthetics with an elaborate discussion on reflective judgement and purposiveness. The fourth section discusses the 'computational sublime', while the fifth discusses the intersection of Kantian aesthetics and generative video art, after which a conclusion follows.

2, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a philosophical qualitative methodology combining conceptual analysis and critical hermeneutics. The choice of this methodology The theoretical character of the research problem determines the choice of this methodology. The choice of this methodology is influenced by the theoretical character of the research problem. The study does not seek to measure audience responses to generative video, evaluate the technical performance of AI models, or statistically establish relationships among variables. Rather, it investigates the philosophical meaning and implications of generative video for aesthetic judgment, creativity, artistic agency, and the ontology of the artwork. The methodology is therefore designed to clarify concepts, interrogate their underlying assumptions, reconstruct their philosophical meanings, and critically reinterpret them within the contemporary computational environment. The methodology proceeds from the premise that philosophical inquiry requires more than description. It requires examination of the conceptual structures through which phenomena become intelligible. Conceptual analysis enables the study to identify the meaning, logical relationships, assumptions, boundaries, and philosophical implications of concepts such as generative video, artificial creativity, digital ontology, aesthetic judgment, purposiveness without purpose, computational sublime, and artistic intentionality. Critical hermeneutics, in turn, provides the interpretive framework through which these concepts are situated within Kantian aesthetics and critically reconsidered in relation to contemporary algorithmic culture.

The study investigates the technological and artistic phenomenon known as generative video. "Artificial creativity" refers to the computational capacity that generates these visual artifacts. Artificial creativity elucidates the computational capacity that produces such visual artifacts. Digital ontology examines what kind of artistic entity emerges from this computational mode of production. Kantian aesthetics provides the normative philosophical framework for interrogating beauty, purposiveness, taste, and the sublime. Digital ontology is analyzed to determine whether a generative video is ontologically identical to its visible output or whether it extends to the computational processes, model architecture, dataset, prompt, and relational network

through which the output comes into existence. This analysis provides the basis for examining the artwork as a computationally instantiated and potentially variable entity. Reflective judgment explains the subject's aesthetic encounter with the generated artifact. The concept of reflective judgment is then reconstructed from Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Kant distinguishes reflective judgement from determinant judgement by describing the former as a movement from the particular toward a universal principle rather than the application of an already given universal to a particular (Kant, 2000, p. 15). The study uses this distinction to investigate whether encounters with generative video require new forms of aesthetic reflection, as such artifacts do not fit comfortably within established categories of artistic production.

Computational sublime identifies a distinctive aesthetic experience produced when human cognition encounters the complexity, scale, unpredictability, or opacity of computational generation. The central philosophical proposition of this study is consequently that generative video does not eliminate the Kantian subject; it transforms the conditions under which the subject encounters, evaluates, and experiences aesthetic form. The machine may generate the artifact, but the aesthetic judgment remains located in the reflective encounter between the perceiving subject and the computationally generated object. In this respect, generative video creates a new site at which classical questions about beauty, purposiveness, creativity, and sublimity intersect with contemporary questions about algorithms, data, artificial agency, and digital existence.

Kantian aesthetics establishes the aesthetic dimension of the framework, but it does not by itself adequately explain the changing ontological status of generative video. For this reason, the study incorporates digital ontology. Digital ontology examines how digital technologies transform conventional conceptions of objects, existence, identity, representation, and reality (Osuji, 2026, pp. 1-3). Digital objects differ from traditional physical artworks because they are encoded, reproducible, variable, process-dependent, and computationally instantiated. Manovich (2001, pp. 27–48) identifies numerical representation, modularity, automation, and variability as fundamental characteristics of digital media. Here the work of Osuji provides an important epistemological and ontological bridge. Osuji's analysis of indigenous knowledge structures emphasizes that epistemic agents operate within particular ontological frameworks through which reality becomes intelligible (Osuji, 2021, pp. 91–97). Applied to digital culture, this insight suggests that computational systems should not be regarded simply as neutral instruments. They increasingly participate in determining how objects are represented, classified, generated, and encountered. Digital ontology therefore enables the present study to ask not only "Is generative video art?" but also "What kind of entity is generative video?"

The third theoretical component is posthuman art theory. Posthumanism challenges the assumption that human beings constitute the exclusive center of agency, creativity, intelligence, and meaning-making. In the context of art, this perspective becomes particularly relevant when computational systems directly participate in the production of aesthetic artifacts. Traditional artistic models tend to establish a relatively linear relationship: (Artist → Artwork → Audience). Generative video disrupts this structure. Its production may instead be represented as (Human intention ↔ Prompt ↔ Algorithm ↔ Dataset ↔ Model ↔ Generated image ↔ Audience). Agency is therefore distributed across a technological assemblage rather than concentrated exclusively in the human artist. Hayles (2017, pp. 1–3) argues that contemporary technological environments require greater attention to forms of cognition that operate beyond conscious human awareness. This does not mean that machines should simply be treated as equivalent to human beings. Rather, it requires recognition that human cognition increasingly operates within networks involving non-human computational processes.

The paper adopted conceptual analysis and critical hermeneutics as methodology, bringing Kantian aesthetics into dialogue with contemporary debates on artificial creativity, digital ontology, and posthuman art theory. Conceptual analysis functions as an "epistemic filtering mechanism." It prevents the study from assuming that terms such as "creativity," "art," "beauty," "intelligence," and "agency" retain exactly the same meanings when transferred from human artistic practice to algorithmic systems. Critical hermeneutics interprets the philosophical texts, conceptual traditions, and contemporary technological conditions within which those concepts acquire meaning. The hermeneutic process therefore involves a dialogue between the philosophical text and the contemporary phenomenon. Kant provides the conceptual horizon through which generative video is interpreted, while generative video simultaneously exposes assumptions in Kantian aesthetics that require reconsideration. The principal philosophical text for interpretation is Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Particular attention is given to Kant's discussions of aesthetic judgment, disinterested pleasure, purposiveness without purpose, genius, imagination and understanding, and the sublime (Kant, 2000, pp. 89–102, 128–145, 174–193). These concepts are treated as adaptable ideas, not fixed doctrines to be mechanically transferred to artificial intelligence. Rather, they are critically reconstructed and tested against the ontological and technological conditions of generative video. This distinction is crucial. A merely historical reading of Kant could conclude that his aesthetics has little relevance to AI because Kant's theory presupposes human faculties of imagination and understanding. Critical hermeneutics permits a different approach: it asks which elements of Kant's framework remain philosophically productive when

the object of aesthetic experience is computationally generated and which assumptions require modification.

This epistemic orientation is consistent with Osuji's argument that knowledge structures are constituted through particular epistemic frameworks and that the interpretation of reality cannot be separated entirely from the structures through which it is known (Osuji, 2021, pp. 91–97). Applied to generative video, this insight is significant because algorithmic systems increasingly participate in the mediation of what becomes perceptible, intelligible, and aesthetically significant. The methodology therefore treats generative video not simply as an object to be described but as an epistemically mediated phenomenon requiring ontological and hermeneutic interrogation. The study consequently maintains a distinction between computational production and philosophical interpretation. While algorithms generate images, the computational processes that produce them do not fully capture their aesthetic significance. Meaning emerges through the interpretive encounter between the artifact, its technological context, and the human subject. This distinction provides the epistemic basis for bringing Kantian reflective judgment into dialogue with digital ontology.

The resulting methodology allows the study to make a stronger claim: generative video is not philosophically significant merely because machines can now produce moving images; it is significant because computational production destabilizes inherited assumptions about who or what can create, what constitutes an artwork, how aesthetic judgment operates, and where aesthetic value resides. In this sense, the methodology directly supports the central thesis of the study: the computational sublime is an emerging aesthetic-ontological condition in which human reflective judgement encounters algorithmically generated forms whose apparent purposiveness, creative novelty, and computational complexity challenge traditional distinctions between artist and apparatus, creation and generation, object and process, and human and machinic agency.

3. AN OVERVIEW GENERATIVE VIDEO AND ARTS

Generative video refers to algorithmically produced moving images generated from learned data distributions rather than direct human design. These systems rely on probabilistic inference, producing outputs that exhibit coherence and novelty without explicit intentional control. Generative video art refers to the production of moving visual imagery through computational systems capable of autonomously or semi-autonomously creating audiovisual sequences from algorithms, datasets, prompts, or learned patterns. Unlike conventional filmmaking, where visual composition is primarily directed through human intentionality and manual editing, generative video art relies on machine learning architectures such as diffusion

models, neural networks, and generative adversarial networks (GANs) to synthesize images dynamically and recursively. The emergence of this artistic form marks a significant transition in contemporary aesthetics, digital ontology, and media philosophy.

Historically, generative art developed from algorithmic and computational experiments in the mid-twentieth century, particularly through cybernetic art, procedural animation, and computer-assisted visual design. Early pioneers of computational aesthetics explored the capacity of machines to produce patterned visual outputs based on programmed instructions. However, contemporary generative video differs fundamentally from earlier forms because modern AI systems can learn aesthetic structures from massive datasets and generate novel outputs that exceed direct programming instructions (Manovich, 2001: 46). Consequently, generative video art occupies a unique position between automation and creativity, raising philosophical questions concerning authorship, intentionality, originality, and aesthetic legitimacy. The theoretical foundation of generative video art is rooted in computational creativity, which refers to the ability of artificial systems to produce artifacts perceived as novel and valuable within human evaluative frameworks. According to Boden (2016: 112), computational creativity does not necessarily replicate human consciousness but instead operates through combinational, exploratory, and transformational processes capable of generating unexpected aesthetic configurations. In generative video systems, these processes enable algorithms to construct temporally coherent scenes, visual transitions, and stylistic compositions that often resemble cinematic production.

A defining characteristic of generative video art is the decentralization of artistic agency. Traditional aesthetics assumes that artworks emerge from a singular creative subject whose intentionality structures meaning and form. Generative systems complicate this assumption because the final artwork emerges from the interaction between datasets, machine learning models, software architectures, and human prompts. This redistribution of creativity challenges classical notions of authorship and supports what contemporary theorists describe as posthuman aesthetics, where artistic production becomes distributed across human and non-human actors (Hayles, 2017: 23).

Another important feature of generative video art is its procedural ontology. Unlike static artistic objects, generative videos are often process-based, meaning that the artwork is not simply the finished output but the computational procedure that continuously produces variations. This aligns with Manovich's (2001: 302) argument that digital media are fundamentally modular, variable, and programmable. In this context, the aesthetic experience shifts from appreciating a fixed object to engaging with an evolving system of visual emergence.

Generative video art has also transformed spectatorship and aesthetic perception. AI-generated videos frequently produce hyperreal, dreamlike, or unstable imagery that resists conventional narrative interpretation. This produces an affective experience characterized by ambiguity, immersion, and cognitive disorientation. Such experiences resonate with contemporary discussions of the digital sublime, where computational complexity evokes fascination alongside epistemic uncertainty (Paul, 2015: 87). Viewers are often unable to determine whether what they encounter is humanly created, artificially synthesized, or collaboratively produced, thereby destabilizing traditional distinctions between reality, simulation, and imagination.

Furthermore, generative video art has expanded rapidly due to the accessibility of AI tools in digital culture. Platforms utilizing text-to-video generation, neural rendering, and synthetic animation have democratized visual production by allowing users with limited technical expertise to create cinematic content. While this development enhances creative participation, it also raises ethical and philosophical concerns regarding authenticity, intellectual property, dataset bias, and the erosion of human artistic labor. From an aesthetic perspective, generative video art challenges foundational assumptions in classical philosophy of art. Theories grounded in intentional expression and human genius encounter difficulty accounting for artifacts produced through algorithmic inference. Nevertheless, scholars argue that aesthetic value may still reside not in the origin of the artwork but in the reflective experience of the perceiver. This position aligns closely with Kantian aesthetics, particularly the idea that judgments of taste emerge from subjective reflective engagement rather than empirical knowledge of production (Kant, 2000: 96). Generative video art represents more than a technological innovation; it signals a paradigmatic transformation in visual culture. It redefines creativity as collaborative, procedural, and computational while compelling philosophy to reconsider the meaning of art, authorship, and aesthetic judgment in the age of artificial intelligence.

4. KANTIAN AESTHETICS: REFLECTIVE JUDGMENT AND PURPOSIVENESS

Kant's aesthetic theory provides a structured framework for evaluating such artefacts. In *Critique of Judgement*, aesthetic judgement is defined as a disinterested pleasure arising from the free harmony of imagination and understanding (Kant, 2000: 102). This judgement is subjective yet claims universal validity. Kant's exploration of beauty as "subjective purposefulness" provides a foundational framework for understanding the aesthetics of generative video art. A key concept is purposiveness without purpose, wherein

objects appear ordered and meaningful without serving a determinate function (Kant, 2000: 75). Generative video exhibits this feature: its outputs often appear purposive despite lacking intentional grounding. Kant's distinction between determinant and reflective judgement is also central. Reflective judgement operates without pre-given concepts, seeking universality through subjective experience (Kant, 2000: 18). Since generative video lacks established evaluative criteria, it necessarily invokes reflective judgement. However, Kant's framework presupposes a human origin of form, creating tension when applied to machine-generated artefacts. This tension motivates the need for reinterpretation rather than rejection.

This framework allows for a thorough analysis of how generative video art engages the viewer's cognitive faculties, reflecting the harmony of understanding and imagination. This interplay between understanding and imagination in generative video art enriches the viewer's experience and raises questions about the nature of authorship and intention in the creative process. As Kant posits that aesthetic judgement is disinterested and independent of the artwork's origin, the emergence of AI-generated content challenges traditional notions of artistic value and creativity. In this context, generative video art serves as a compelling case study, as it often blurs the lines between human and machine creativity, prompting viewers to reconsider their criteria for aesthetic appreciation. Furthermore, the unique cognitive engagement required to interpret these dynamic visual narratives highlights the role of the viewer's imagination in constructing meaning, suggesting that the experience of beauty in generative art transcends the limitations of its algorithmic origins. This exploration eventually invites a re-evaluation of aesthetic values, emphasising that the experience of beauty is shaped by the viewer's engagement rather than by the origin of the artwork itself.

The intersection of Immanuel Kant's aesthetics and the burgeoning field of generative video art presents fertile ground for scholarly exploration, particularly through the lens of Kant's "Critique of Judgement." Kant's notion of beauty as "subjective purposefulness" serves as a pivotal framework for understanding the viewer's engagement with generative video art, which often challenges conventional artistic paradigms. This form of art not only captivates the audience's cognitive faculties but also invites a reevaluation of authorship and intention within the creative process. As generative video art frequently intertwines human creativity with algorithmic processes, it raises critical questions regarding the nature of artistic value and the role of the viewer in constructing meaning. The dynamic interplay between understanding and imagination, as articulated by Kant, underscores how the viewer's experience of beauty transcends the artwork's origins, suggesting that aesthetic appreciation is significantly shaped by active engagement rather than mere observation. This study aims to investigate these

complexities, exploring how generative video art exemplifies Kantian principles while simultaneously prompting a rethinking of aesthetic values in the context of contemporary art.

5. KANT'S SUBLIME AND THE EMERGENCE OF COMPUTATIONAL SUBLIME

The distinction between the beautiful and the sublime provides the central dialectic of the theoretical framework. Beauty concerns the experience of formal harmony, coherence, proportion, and purposiveness without determinate purpose. The sublime, by contrast, emerges when the imagination encounters something that exceeds its capacity for representation. Generative video can instantiate both experiences simultaneously. An AI-generated video may initially appear beautiful because of its composition, movement, color, rhythm, visual balance, or narrative coherence. Yet reflection upon how such an image was produced may generate a different experience. Awareness of the computational processes behind the image can provoke astonishment concerning the scale and complexity of the technological system. Thus, the viewer can move from aesthetic pleasure to cognitive excess. This transition is theoretically significant for the concept of the computational sublime proposed in this study. The computational sublime may be understood as the conceptual threshold between the beautiful and the computational sublime: the point at which an apparently coherent aesthetic object begins to reveal an underlying computational complexity that exceeds ordinary human comprehension.

Kant's theory of the sublime offers an additional perspective on the aesthetic experience of generative video. The sublime arises when imagination encounters limits in representing magnitude or power, leading to a tension resolved by reason (Kant, 2000: 129). From a Kantian perspective, this shift does not invalidate aesthetic judgment. Since judgment is grounded in the subject's reflective experience rather than the creator's intention, generative artifacts can still occasion genuine judgments of taste. Drawing from Osuji's ontological deconstruction of indigenous epistemic agents, reality is not merely encountered as an objective and isolated entity but interpreted through communal symbols, linguistic categories, ancestral consciousness, and experiential structures (Osuji, 2021, p. 91). Thus, ontological relativity in digital environments manifests through computational mediation, where realities become structured according to machine-readable logics rather than purely human experiential frameworks. This conception becomes more pronounced in Osuji's discussion of knowledge justification in the algorithmic age. In *Epistemology: Justification of Knowledge in the Algorithmic Age*, Osuji argues that contemporary digital systems increasingly challenge traditional assumptions

concerning truth and authenticity because algorithmic outputs often appear authoritative despite lacking existential consciousness or moral intentionality (Osuji, 2026: 41). The danger, according to Osuji, lies in confusing computational efficiency with ontological validity. Osuji's position implies that ontological reality cannot be entirely constructed through artificial systems because reality transcends mere informational correlation. Creative agency becomes a networked phenomenon involving programmers, users, and algorithmic systems. As Boden (2016: 134) suggests, computational creativity can be understood as structurally generative rather than psychologically intentional.

To account for this condition, this paper introduces the concept of the "computational sublime." The term denotes a liminal aesthetic domain in which creative production emerges from the interaction between human input and machine processes. In traditional art, the artist is the only one who has control over the work. In the computational sublime, control is spread out among datasets, models, and users. This concept builds on digital ontology (Osuji, 2026:44), where computational objects are understood as emergent from procedural systems rather than fixed expressions of meaning (Manovich, 2001:45). Digital ontology refers to the philosophical study of being within computational and virtual environments. It examines how digital technologies transform the structure of existence, identity, reality, and human interaction. Derived from Osuji's analysis of epistemic mediation, digital ontology may be understood as the ontological condition emerging from algorithmically structured modes of perception and knowledge production. In the algorithmic age, human existence is increasingly mediated through data systems, artificial intelligence, virtual environments, and networked infrastructures. Osuji observes that knowledge production has shifted from direct experiential verification toward technologically mediated validation systems, where algorithmic recommendations and machine-generated outputs influence human cognition and social reality (Osuji, 2026: 44). This transition signifies not merely a technological change but an ontological transformation in the mode through which beings encounter the world. Digital ontology therefore concerns the reconstitution of reality under computational conditions. Within this framework, identity becomes datafied, social relations become platform-mediated, and truth becomes algorithmically curated. The digital environment increasingly functions as an ontological space where human interaction, perception, and even memory are technologically structured. The computational sublime thus marks a shift from expressive intentionality to generative emergence, raising questions about how aesthetic coherence can arise without conscious design. In generative video, this experience is reconfigured as a "computational sublime." Here, the overwhelming complexity and unpredictability of algorithmic systems produce a similar tension. The viewer confronts outputs

that exceed intuitive comprehension, generating both fascination and cognitive disorientation. Unlike natural sublimity, the computational sublime is rooted in artificial processes. It reflects not external vastness but internal complexity, shifting the locus of sublimity from nature to computation. The computational sublime requires a reconfiguration of aesthetic judgment. While Kant's principles remain applicable, they must be adapted to account for distributed creativity and algorithmic mediation. In computational contexts, novelty emerges from variation within learned distributions rather than individual expression. The computational sublime therefore represents both continuity with and transformation of classical aesthetics.

6. THE INTERSECTION OF KANTIAN AESTHETICS AND GENERATIVE VIDEO ART

The emergence of generative video technologies—systems capable of producing moving images autonomously through machine learning algorithms—poses profound questions for aesthetic philosophy. Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) remains one of the most rigorous accounts of aesthetic experience, and its foundational categories—the beautiful, the sublime, disinterested pleasure, and the free play of the faculties—provide a productive lens for evaluating accounts of aesthetic experience, and its foundational categories—the beautiful, the sublime, disinterested pleasure, and the free play of the faculties—provide a productive lens through which to evaluate these technologically produced artefacts. As Kant (1790/2000: 90) argues, a judgement of taste is "not a cognitive judgement" but rather a reflection of a universal subjective feeling that demands agreement without logical necessity. How this framework applies to outputs generated not by a human artist but by a statistical model raises questions that Kantian aesthetics must be made to address.

6.1 Kantian Aesthetic Judgment and the Problem of Authorship

Central to Kant's aesthetic theory is the claim that genuine aesthetic judgement arises from the free play of imagination and understanding in the subject perceiving the work. Kant (1790/2000: 102) argues that beauty is experienced when "the cognitive powers are set into free play" without being subsumed under any determinate concept. In the case of generative video, the viewer's perceptual engagement with the moving image may still produce this free play of colours, rhythms, unexpected motion, and temporal unfolding, which can engage the faculties regardless of the mechanism that produced it. Yet the question of whether the object itself can be called beautiful in the Kantian sense depends less on its causal

origin and more on the quality of the subjective response it elicits (Zangwill, 2001: 53).

However, Kant's concept of fine art complicates this position significantly. For Kant (1790/2000: 174), fine art requires genius, a natural talent that rules art and that cannot be reduced to mechanical production or learned skill. Genius, in his framework, is the capacity to produce original exemplary works that exhibit "purposiveness without purpose" in a manner that is irreducible to formula. Generative video systems, trained on vast corpuses of human-produced imagery, operate by probabilistic interpolation and extrapolation across learned distributions (Rombach et al., 2022: 10684). Their outputs, however visually striking, are the result of optimisation processes rather than the free, non-rule-governed creativity that Kant attributes to genius. On this reading, generative video may satisfy the aesthetic criteria of beauty in the perceiving subject while failing to qualify as fine art in the Kantian sense.

6.2 The Sublime and the Technological Infinite

One of Kant's most influential aesthetic categories—the sublime—may be more readily applicable to generative video than the beautiful. The mathematical sublime, for Kant (1790/2000: 128), arises when imagination is overwhelmed by an encounter with the absolutely enormous, producing a feeling of displeasure followed by a rational recovery that reveals humanity's supersensible vocation. Brady (2013: 147) observes that the natural sublime in Kant always involves a confrontation with overwhelming scale or power that ultimately affirms human dignity through reason. Generative video systems trained on millions of hours of footage and capable of producing endless novel imagery embody a kind of computational infinity that may trigger an analogous response: the viewer confronts the sheer representational excess of machine production, feels a kind of cognitive vertigo, and then recuperates this experience through reflection on the technological conditions that make it possible. This indicates that generative video, although not easily reconcilable with the beautiful, may represent one of the more fruitful contemporary venues for experiencing the technological sublime (Shaw, 2017: 199).

Free Beauty Versus Dependent Beauty: Kant's distinction between free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) and dependent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*) offers another productive angle of analysis. Free beauty involves pure aesthetic pleasure in form without reference to any concept of what the thing is or ought to be, while dependent beauty presupposes such a concept and judges the object against it (Kant, 1790/2000: 114). Most generative video operates within a regime of dependent beauty: it is typically prompted or conditioned, meaning that the viewer approaches the output knowing it was

generated to depict a sunset, a face, or an action sequence and judges it accordingly. This condition-dependence means that evaluative criteria inevitably intrude, and the judgement becomes partly cognitive and normative, departing from the purity of free aesthetic judgement. Guyer (1997: 218) notes that Kant's framework already contains tensions between these two modes, and generative imagery makes those tensions newly visible by foregrounding the role of specification and intention in shaping the perceived object.

6.3 Implications for Art Theory

If Kantian aesthetics helps to diagnose the perceptual and evaluative features of generative video, broader art theory must reckon with its institutional, ontological, and normative implications. The emergence of algorithmically produced moving images challenges foundational assumptions about creativity, intentionality, originality, and the conditions under which objects are admitted into the category of art. From institutional theory to expression theory, from semiotics to post-structuralism, generative video generates productive friction with established frameworks and demands a rearticulation of art theory's core commitments.

George Dickie's institutional theory of art says that an object becomes a work of art when someone or a group of people acting on behalf of the art world assigns it the status of a candidate for appreciation (Dickie, 1974: 34). This proceduralist account, which deliberately sidesteps questions of aesthetic quality or intentional expression, appears well suited to accommodate generative video. When a gallery curator chooses an AI-generated video for an exhibition, puts it in a critical context, and shows it to an audience in an art setting, the institutional machinery assigns it artistic status, even though the generative system doesn't have any intention. Carroll (1999: 224) observes that the institutional theory's strength lies precisely in its capacity to absorb formally heterogeneous objects; ready-mades, conceptual art, found footage and generative video represent a natural extension of this inclusivity. Nevertheless, critics of the institutional theory argue that it is circular and vacuous precisely because it provides no normative grounds for evaluating the conferral of status (Stecker, 1997: 62). If any object can be art by institutional fiat, then the concept loses critical purchase, and the flooding of artworlds with algorithmically mass-produced imagery threatens to accelerate this conceptual deflation.

Intentionality, Expression, and the Absent Artist: Expression theories of art, from Croce to Collingwood, ground artistic value in the externalisation of inner feelings and intuitions. For Collingwood (1938: 111), genuine art involves the clarification of emotion through craft; the artist does not merely arouse feeling but comes to know their emotion through the process of making. Generative

video systems have no emotions to clarify and no inner life to externalise. In Collingwood's terms, generative video systems are at best considered craft; they represent technical skill applied to the production of emotionally stimulating artefacts, but they do not qualify as art in a philosophically serious sense. Davies (2004: 29) argues that expression theories are notoriously difficult to apply even to abstract music or instrumental composition, but the challenge posed by generative systems is of a different order: the maker's inner life is completely absent, rather than merely inaccessible. This absence of subjective intentionality does not necessarily disqualify the outputs from artistic consideration under other frameworks, but it does require expression theory to either revise its core commitments or acknowledge a categorical limit.

The intentionality question takes on additional complexity when one considers the role of the human prompter or curator who directs the generative system. Manovich (2001: 227) argues that software art displaces but does not eliminate human agency—it relocates authorship from the moment of execution to the moment of design, specification, and selection. In the context of generative video, the artist who writes a prompt, curates outputs, trains a custom model, or constructs a generative pipeline exercises a form of mediated intentionality that is distinct from but not reducible to traditional authorship (Elgammal et al., 2017: 1). Art theory must develop conceptual vocabulary adequate to this distributed and mediated agency rather than defaulting either to full attribution (treating the prompter as author) or full denial (treating the system as mere tool).

6.4 Originality, Reproduction, and the Post-Auratic Image

Walter Benjamin's account of mechanical reproduction and the decay of aura in the artwork has become a touchstone for contemplating technologically produced imagery. For Benjamin (1935/1968:221), the aura of an artwork derives from its unique existence in a particular place, its embeddedness in tradition, and the distance it maintains from the viewer. Photographic and cinematic reproduction collapses this distance and destroys aura, enabling new political and perceptual possibilities while severing the artwork from its ritual function. Generative video extends this logic into a new register: not only is the image infinitely reproducible, but it is generatively inexhaustible. Each prompt can produce thousands of distinct but related outputs, none of which has priority as original. Tavinor (2011: 43) observes that digital art, in general, challenges the ontological primacy of the original, and generative systems radicalise this challenge by making the very notion of a singular original work incoherent. The implications for art theory are significant: if originality is central to artistic value, as many accounts from Kant to Romanticism assume, then

generative video is structurally incapable of achieving it; if, conversely, originality is itself a historically contingent and ideologically inflected value, then the post-auratic generative image may provoke a salutary rethinking of why we value art at all.

Semiotics and the Question of Meaning: Semiotic approaches to art theory analyse artworks as sign systems embedded in cultural codes and conventions. For Barthes (1977: 146), the meaning of an image is never simply given but is produced through the interaction of denotative and connotative codes that vary across readers and cultural contexts. Generative video, trained on human-produced image-text datasets, internalises these codes in the form of statistical associations and reproduces them in its output. The resulting images carry culturally legible meanings—a sunset signifies tranquillity, and a certain colour palette signifies menace—precisely because the training data embeds such associations in the model's parameters. Yet the system does not understand the signs it manipulates; it operates on correlations rather than meanings. This creates a distinctive semiotic situation in which images are legible and semantically rich but produced by a system that is, in Searle's (1980: 417) terms, engaged in formal symbol manipulation without semantic grounding. Art theory must grapple with the implications of culturally saturated imagery produced by agents that have no access to the culture that saturates it.

Ethical and Political Dimensions: The implications of generative video for art theory are not only ontological and evaluative but also ethical and political. The training datasets on which generative systems depend are typically assembled from the work of human artists without consent or compensation, raising questions about intellectual property, exploitation, and the structural devaluation of creative labour (Bender et al., 2021: 616). Art theory, which has historically engaged with the social and economic conditions of artistic production from Marx through the Frankfurt School, cannot remain indifferent to these relations. Furthermore, generative video systems can produce photorealistic imagery depicting events that never occurred, raising questions about the epistemic and political functions of video as a medium of witness and record. Mirzoeff (2011: 2) argues that there is a right to look. The capacity to see and be seen in ways that resist domination—is central to a politics of visibility; generative video, capable of fabricating visual testimony at scale, poses a significant threat to this right and demands critical theoretical attention.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper argues that Immanuel Kant's theory of judgement can meaningfully interpret generative video as a new aesthetic condition. This paper argues that generative video represents a new aesthetic condition that can be meaningfully interpreted using Immanuel

Kant's theory of judgement. This paper introduces the concept of the 'computational sublime' to provide a framework for understanding the interaction between human creativity and machine creativity. Despite the absence of intrinsic intentionality, generative artefacts can sustain aesthetic judgement because such judgement is grounded in reflective experiences. Kant's concepts, such as disinterested pleasure, purposiveness without purpose, and the sublime, remain analytically relevant but require reinterpretation. The study contributes to contemporary debates by bridging classical aesthetics and computational media, demonstrating that philosophical frameworks can evolve alongside technological change without losing their normative rigour.

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