

Perceptions of Selves: Beyond the Skin Bag

Analyzing self-representation and ethos in creative digital artefacts



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ABSTRACT

As technological innovations reach new heights, questions regarding how we act, see, and live with machines reveal themselves. What was once viewed as mere tools have become something we perceive as part of our social world. Technological actants now hold the power of persuasion, the power to be perceived as a self. This constitutes new perspectives regarding how we relate to those with self-representational qualities. Relations between actants in social settings boil down to discourse, where this study manifests itself. The point of entry is, paradoxically, taking root in ancient theories of rhetoric. Because self-representation in digital artefacts must necessarily be produced, it becomes a text with the potential for analysis. In its broadest possible meaning, text is a modal manifestation of existence, a textual manifestation of self. The representations are always mediated, and that mediation opens up questions about authenticity, agency, and ethos.

The artefacts I propose in this thesis exist in a way that changes shape in the perception of those who perceive it. When artefacts are imbued with some form of life, uniqueness, personality and ethos, approaches and attentions must change. That is dependent on the relations we allow and instil in them. We now have different relations than before, which means that the concept of ethos must be seen anew.

This thesis is a philosophical and rhetorical exploration of how ethos and self-representation can be renewed to encompass more ways of being. Through perspectives inspired by Posthumanism and Actor-Network Theory, I explore themes relating to self-representation and ethos to conceptualize an updated framework that, in essence, “de-anthropocentrize” our field of view. This thesis does not aim to be either final or limiting, but a starting point in opening a conversation about the rhetorical impact we encounter every day through humans and otherwise.

Keywords: digital rhetoric, ethos, self-representation, posthuman theory, actor-network theory, digital artefacts, algorithms, AI.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In 1929 René Magritte produced the famous painting *La trahison des images (Ceci n'est pas une pipe)* (The treachery of images (this is not a pipe)). It depicts a pipe suspended in mid-air (or, mid-canvas) with the words "Ceci n'est pas une pipe." scripted underneath. Magritte's painting makes us think about the (dis)connections between art, language, and real life. Philosopher Michel Foucault wrote a short analysis of the painting (1983) offering his thoughts on the piece: Of course it's not a pipe, it's a *picture* of a pipe. But how do we then know it's a picture of a pipe? Is it because its form and structure *remind* us of a pipe more than anything else? The painting relies on the audience to say "Yes, that *is* a pipe, damn it!", while the painting mockingly reminds us that it is in fact not.

The contemporary world presents us with relatable confrontations through representations of humans and non-humans in the digital sphere and through digital artefacts. Because the human practice has become more technological, it has also provided a veil of interpretation we must code to exist with and through that technology. These artefacts are representations of various things, like wearables that measures heartrate, games about geese, professional profiles, dating profiles, "Watch this timelapse of a seed becoming a tree!". We know how to connect signifier and signified, yet when it comes to what can be called "technological actants" (Reyman 2018), we hold fast to the idea that it is nothing more than signifier.

Recently, software such as ChatGPT has captured public attention with its capability to write entire exam essays, recipes, poems and more via a simple prompt submitted by anyone willing to ask. However, the act of writing a prompt is different from searching in a lexicon. User perceptions of large language models, and ways in which they interact with such artefacts, have surfaced, assigning personalities, traits, and persuasive appeal to these systems. The general understanding and relation of algorithmic, non-human, and human are becoming intertwined, resulting in previous notions of self and their inherent ethos needing to be re-examined. This thesis presents an entryway into important questions that arise from these artefacts and is by no means exhausted here. Rather, it can be seen as an introduction into further research, with a personal goal of continued study as a PhD

candidate. Additionally, I see this research as a potential springboard for others posing similar questions.

The questions start by asking; what are the parameters that define a self worth of examination? How is that self perceived, interpreted and acted out through new technology? These days, when hearing the word 'self-representation', the mind might instantly wander to social media, which are platforms designed to function as urban taverns, facilitating many kinds of self-representation, from singular person to big businesses. And big business is what social media platforms are, as the personal data put into these platforms by its users are used for data mining that the social media companies then sell to advertisers that make profit out of knowing what each individual want, sometimes even before they know it themselves. These platforms use algorithms to determine your identity and your worth (Turow 2012), and that has, and continues to have, a big impact on our social, economic and globalized world. But social media platforms are not the only technology capable of facilitating self-representation. We experience ourselves based on the artefacts we use, technological or otherwise. We use these artefacts to create a self for ourselves and others to be exposed to, to make sense of ourselves and fit into the world. As Miller puts it, in the age of digitality, communication is "as much about interaction with others as it is about accessing information" (2008, 398). Those 'others' does not need to be exclusively human. For the purpose of this thesis, I have conceptualized a specific type of artefact that enables and enacts self-representational qualities; Creative Digital Artefacts.

I ask; what happens when those artefacts start projecting their own self-representation? In our eternal quest to understand our place in the world, we suddenly find ourselves in a time and place where previous binary divisions are fading away. The relationship between man and machine is in constant change, and looking at the composition between them needs to be explored further. Engagement in self-representation through digital artefacts expose us to not just our own, but also nonhuman representation, something Reyman (2018) calls "technological actants": AI, algorithms, cyborgs, robots and more. By grinding down the divide and focusing on common features instead of holding on to a divide (that is by all indicators at an impasse), my goal and hope for this thesis is to continue the creative thinking about selves, perception of selves and relations that people such as Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles, Bruno Latour and more helped inspire.

The point of entry in this thesis is, paradoxically, taking root in ancient theories of rhetoric. Because self-representation in digital artefacts must necessarily be produced, it becomes a text with the potential for analysis. In its broadest possible meaning, text is a modal manifestation of existence, a textual manifestation of self. The representations are always mediated, and that mediation opens up questions about authenticity, agency, and *ethos*. Ethos, which is generally understood as the moral and credible nature of a person or group of people, is a concept that is often associated with something good- it is one part of the rhetorical proofs Aristotle deemed necessary to have an effective appeal. Seeing how ethos is projected exposes power relationships in society. Power to influence, power to change.

I'll argue that ethos' position in new media communication has come to a point where it needs revision. By ancient standards, ethos might even be considered outdated, as digital modes of self-representation are often used for identity play and exploration. Ironically, the opposite might be true for other types of selves. If, say, an algorithm was to be analyzed as having a self, perhaps even with its own agency, then that might rely more on having a credible ethos than that of a human in order to be seen as a self at all. Examining these questions are increasingly relevant as technological selves take up an increasing amount of our day-to-day lives. We all use the same tools to communicate, but that does not mean we use it in the same way; "but in order to use it, others must use it in a similar enough way to have value" (J. Katz, Floyd, and Schiepers 2021, 15). That means creating frameworks that are more inclusive. How do we understand the machine, and how does the machine understand us?

1.2 Research Questions

Re-examining ethos to be more applicable to these artefacts and discussing our involvement with and through creative digital artefacts are at the heart of this thesis, and that leads me to my research questions:

1. How is self-representation and ethos enabled, performed and understood in creative digital artefacts?
2. How can digital mediums push the boundaries of who can possess a self-representation?
3. Is the concept of ethos relevant and applicable in new media discourse?

1.3 Methodology

This thesis is written and carried out with the perspective of digital humanities, favouring notions of societal and philosophical aspects instead of specific and intricate aspects of technology and what makes them tick. The study employs a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing grounded theory; a research methodology that seeks to develop theories through a systematic approach to the collection and analysis of data. Through an iterative process of data collection and analysis, I have created a taxonomy to categorize certain types of digital artefacts with an ontological approach to what it means to have self-representational qualities. This is important, as it sets up the main premise of the thesis, which is to create a hermeneutical framework to interpret and analyse ethos in relation to the self-representative qualities that are present with and in these artefacts. This qualitative approach is particularly suitable for the study of rhetoric, because it allows for the study of fluid, complex and multidimensional phenomena. In that aspect, a quantitative approach would not suffice.

The literature collection and subsequent analysis is derived from a substantial search of self-representation and rhetoric, with a heavy focus on how they can be interrelated with the dissipation of the human/non-human binary. This is pursued through Actor-Network Theory and Posthuman theories as positioned by Katherine N. Hayles and Donna J. Haraway. This theoretical part is based on desktop research using search terms relating to terms like posthumanism, new materialism, cyborg, actor-network theory, self-representation, rhetoric, new media rhetoric, ethos, and more. These two theories are instrumental in my approach to my questions, and in order to comprehend and utilize the two theories. I have completed a literature review that synthesizes relevant subject matters to gain insight into key concepts and themes related to the human/non-human binary, ways of being-with, agency, personalization, mimesis and networks. This has led to a discussion of selves; who possesses it, who or what perceives it and how is that changing with contemporary developments of AI, algorithms, and more.

After the literature review of the two theories, the first challenge to create a taxonomy of creative digital artefacts is approached. There are two main goals in this thesis: To understand and reconceptualize the concept of ethos to better fit modern rhetorical

settings that encapsulate both human and non-human actants, and create a new categorization of artefacts that this reconceptualization of ethos can be analysed through. To analyse the data through the lens of conceptions of artefacts, I first examined ways in which *artefacts* and *digital artefacts* could aid in the taxonomy of *Creative Digital Artefact*. Namely because there exists a vast array of variation in classification of artefacts, digital artefacts and technology as a whole, while also considering that many digital artefacts do not have or even examine functions of self-representation. It is categorization, and not making kinds. However, creating a useful categorization when demonstrating the ways in which our interactions change and develop with and through technology is important because it focuses on the shift in relations we have to these technologies. I dissect structures of artefacts that will lead to conceptions of a certain type of artefact that can be analysed. Then, I examine how I may use the concept of Creative Digital Artefacts to re-examine the rhetorical triangle in such a way that I may ground the approach without focusing on the anthropocentric language of audience and speaker.

I continue with a critical analysis of the rhetorical position in terms of it expanding past its initial source of persuasion; the human. Using rhetorical research in combination with posthuman and actor-network theory allowed for a better understanding of how to position rhetorical power in things that go beyond the human and nonhuman. That self-representational power must be the product of something that can be interpreted as possessing some form of credibility, authenticity or whatever makes it read as something to trust. That leads to an analysis of the concept of ethos and how it was, and is, applied in different contexts. The re-conceptualisations of ethos focus on Aristotle's three elements to establish ethos: Phronesis, Arête and Eunoia. This necessitates a critical view on how the characteristics of old can be redefined to have similar effects on discourse in new mediums.

Based on the literature review of rhetoric, self-representation and the two theories, the study developed a conceptual framework for reconceptualizing ethos that recognizes that ethos is no longer solely a product of human relations, but something we instil and inject into these so-called "technological actants" that has entered our social realm. Placing rhetorical impact in objects is not new, as scholars such as Buchanan argued that the design of objects involves moulding them into communicative tools that embody arguments into the objects themselves (R. Buchanan 1985). McLuhan famously stated that "the medium is

the message” (McLuhan 1964). However, my literature search shows that reconceptualizing ethos by focusing on the ways in which we see artefacts as their own rhetorical actant, and it sees us in return has not been done before; the medium *has* the message. Therefore, the literature review does four things; it provides an overview of the major themes, lays the foundation for new conceptualisations, extracts relevant terms and demonstrates both the need and lack of theory regarding the subject at hand.

The study will take an *a priori* approach, meaning that research and design of the taxonomy and framework starts before the collection of artefacts and subsequent analysis of those artefacts begin. That follows final thoughts on finding in relation to the research questions and suggestions for further research. There are several upsides to taking an *a priori* approach, namely that the results of the final analysis have potential of being more accurate because of working within a pre-defined theoretical framework that guided the interpretation. Additionally, it allowed me to plan the design of the study based around existing knowledge of central themes.

While this approach has several advantages, especially when developing new concepts, there are also some potential drawbacks. Drawing from a pre-defined framework also means that insights made before analysis could go unnoticed or ignored, or the framework can be too rigid or inflexible to include unexpected findings. Being aware of these potential pitfalls have guided decisions on the flexibility of the framework, however that does not mean it is not there.

Despite the *a priori* approach when studying the topic, the structure of the thesis takes shape in a bottom-up approach, meaning that I will present my findings first, and then delve into the reasoning behind these choices and conceptions. Therefore, the thesis first introduces a brief presentation of the final three conceptualizations of the ethos I developed, which will then be used in analysis of two examples: ChatGPT by OpenAI (2023), and Taroko Gorge by Nick Montfort (2009). Based on difference in use and purpose, the point of entry in analysing the two artefacts were necessarily different. However, that was done purposefully as it demonstrated the flexibility and applicability to the new conceptions.

The analysis is followed by a literature review to explore how posthuman and actor-network theories can be applied to relevant subject matters. Following, a taxonomy and

reasoning behind the need to create categorization for Creative Digital Artefacts. This research leads to the final two sections that discuss this thesis' *raison d'être*; self-representation and ethos. Here, critical discourse analysis of what ethos could be in Creative Digital Artefacts and how they are received and interpreted will be discussed. Guided by actor-network and posthuman theories, this will ultimately illuminate and explain why and how the conceptions of ethos presented in chapter two were conceived.

1.4 Research Value

Technological actants have many roles, but they also exist in our social reality. We live *with* them. That means building frameworks and understandings that include them are crucial. In exploring ideas related to how we perceive the world and our place in it, it is increasingly obvious that we need to understand how human and nonhuman actants achieve meaning with and through each other, how computer-human relations have transformed and its potential to affect our surroundings. Digital artefacts that are not encapsulated in the Social Media bubble remain under researched in terms of rhetoric. I want to bridge the gap between human and non-human rhetoric, which means revisiting rhetorical elements that take into consideration a changing reality. Additionally, I believe creating a new categorization for artefacts that possess self-representational qualities can go far beyond this thesis and can be useful for anyone looking to inquire into artefacts that explore and play with identity that are not necessarily anthropocentric.

Chapter Two: Analyzing Conceptions of Ethos

2.1 Introduction

One of Aristoteles elements that can establish ethos were named Phronesis, Arête and Eunoia. They signified the practical wisdom, moral character and good will of the speaker in the delivery of a speech. As with ethos, pathos and logos, the three elements that establish ethos are entwined and work together to form a persuasive appeal. Breaking those elements down into categorizations like phronesis, arête and eunoia are nonetheless important for epistemological reasons and allow us to subject our own understanding to analysis.

This chapter presents a brief overview of the three kinds of ethos that are derived from a non-anthropocentric, contemporary interpretation of what ethos can be which is then applied to two creative digital artefacts: ChatGPT and Taroko Gorge. The following chapters present the route taken to get here.

The choice of artefacts for the rhetorical analysis is not arbitrary, and the rationale behind it highlights the differences and similarities in Creative Digital Artefacts. The first, ChatGPT, is a chatbot that specifically highlights communicational skill and ability to relay relational and connective information. It's knowledge, while at the moment of writing only reaches the year 2021 (OpenAI 2023), is varied and crosses a variety of subjects and topics. For that reason, it has sparked the interest of many people for many applications, from writing recipes to explaining quantum physics. When in conversation with fellow students or friends, this artefact is often what is understood as the common descriptor of what something akin to what an artificial self might be.

Taroko Gorge, on the other hand, has a persuasive appeal in a different realm than ChatGPT. It is a humble, procedurally generated poem that depicts a natural scene written by Nick Montfort in 2009. While birthed as a standalone artefact, its simple code inspired an entire sub-genre of remixes and remakes which many ended up being a part of the very artwork itself. It's development into a relational artefact that is one and many at the same time presents a technological actant that has a stable existence despite its myriad of versions. The persuasive appeal of Taroko Gorge does not come from Montfort or the several other artists that remixed his work, it comes from its network, generative qualities

and how it exists in the world. It represents what I argue the strongest; that ethos and self-representation can be translated into not only what is mimicking human behavior, but also something that is, in a sense, itself.

2.1.1 Glitching ethos

Glitching Ethos is built on the foundation of *Arête*, what Aristotle positioned to mean the virtue of a man speaking well, his morality, goodness and excellence (Braet 1992, 311). Through an iterative process throughout this thesis, I have built a framework that brings this conception into a different sphere where human and non-human binaries have faded, which leads to positioning of *Arête* as something malleable; the rhetor has the ability to be *generative* without ceasing to exist, capable of *changing* and *molding depending on influxes* and last, being able to *function and thrive with unpredictability*. These traits or characteristics are highly cherished in a society where one must always be able to learn and adapt to thrive, be that as a farmer selling their goods online or as medical professionals using AI to diagnose patients.

Calling this type of ethos *Glitch Ethos* has its roots in *Glitch Art* on account of the digital artists that embrace the “failures” of digital systems to create unpredictable outcomes, and in so going illuminated a new kind of discourse. While glitches are commonly understood as a failure or set of failures in a computer system, Glitch art is the exploitation and manipulation of those glitches. While glitching ethos is not about exploiting systems, it instead reveals rhetorical actants that hold power in their ability to be fluid and responsive, consistent and unbreakable, which in turn also reveals its potential for exploration and play.

2.1.2 Intersubjective Ethos

Intersubjective ethos is built on *Phronesis*, what Aristotle described as the practical wisdom of a rhetor reflective of their knowledge of technically and scientifically oriented approaches (Kinsella 2012). Drawing on research presented throughout this thesis, I propose a kind of *phronesis* that is derived from a knowing-how, instead of conscious knowing. The knowing-how to provide satisfactory responses and how those responses are carried out. Is it making clear how that knowledge is known? This is built on the basis that knowledge is often displayed in the action itself instead of a ‘conscious cognition’ of what is being done.

The knowledge is also not necessarily technical or scientific, though it could be, but it can also include cultural and historical knowledge that in turn holds a mirror up to a (perceived) inner life.

The intersubjective ethos then refers to the perceived common culture and understanding that is presented, asking questions like; how is shared knowledge and understanding of things like history, culture, symbols, et cetera presented or *not* presented? That also includes considerations of its surroundings and connections; where is it located? What kind of actants are they connected to? Intersubjective ethos means paying attention to both individual and collective expectations of representations. Who and what is expected, and does the actant deliver on those expectations? These are values that have effect on any self-representation and how it presents as credible as part of society, and also as a trustworthy actant.

2.1.3 Embodied Ethos

Aristotle defined *eunoia* as the good will of a rhetor that is a result of respect and recognition of another person. It is the technique that secures personal alliances, which is a requirement for both personal and public relations to build trust and kinship (Holdier 2016, 56). This presents a rather anthropocentric interpretation of what essentially, to me, is a presentation of being an authentic and reliable self. As with the other conceptions, it is also grounded in the perception of action and *doing* rather than something that is necessarily actively being *used* consciously.

I will propose an embodied ethos inspired by *eunoia* that draws on perceptions of authenticity. While authenticity can mean a myriad of things, it is in this context understood as a stable existence. That is reflected in its materiality and *how* an actant exists in the world. It is about examining how the determinative force of action is embodied by the actant. How does it relate to other actants in a way that makes it read as *present* to its connection to other actants?

2.2 ChatGPT

Artificial Intelligence applications has seen a massive upsurge recently as recent innovations like ChatGPT by OpenAI and Stable Diffusion has had an adoption rate previously unheard of for similar applications. Just two months after its launch, ChatGPT was reported to have reached 100 million users with a predicted 1 billion users by the end of a passing year (Ruby 2023). As an artificial intelligence natural language model, ChatGPT is trained to “follow an instruction in a prompt and provide a detailed response” (OpenAI 2023). It was launched in November of 2022, and is as of writing still in free research preview, and open to the public (Heaven 2023). Its current conception is the 4th of its generation and is the latest and most prolific of its versions. It’s popularity online has resulted in a myriad of videos, articles and memes where users share their experiences in communicating, teasing, testing and ridiculing their conversation-partner. For example, Joshua Weissman, a popular YouTube chef, made a video called “Can AI Beat Me In Cooking?” (2023), where he proclaims a common frustration in an AI that supposedly can know how to do something humans spend years learning and perfecting.

What sort of narrative one engages with or even images oneself to be in when approaching ChatGPT will naturally determine the persuasive appeal and impact it holds as the performance of self unfolds. Weissman creates a narrative of an AI that has potential to out-do its human “counterpart”, so Weissman asks ChatGPT to write him three of its best recipes, which will then be created and compared to his own recipes, as exemplified below.

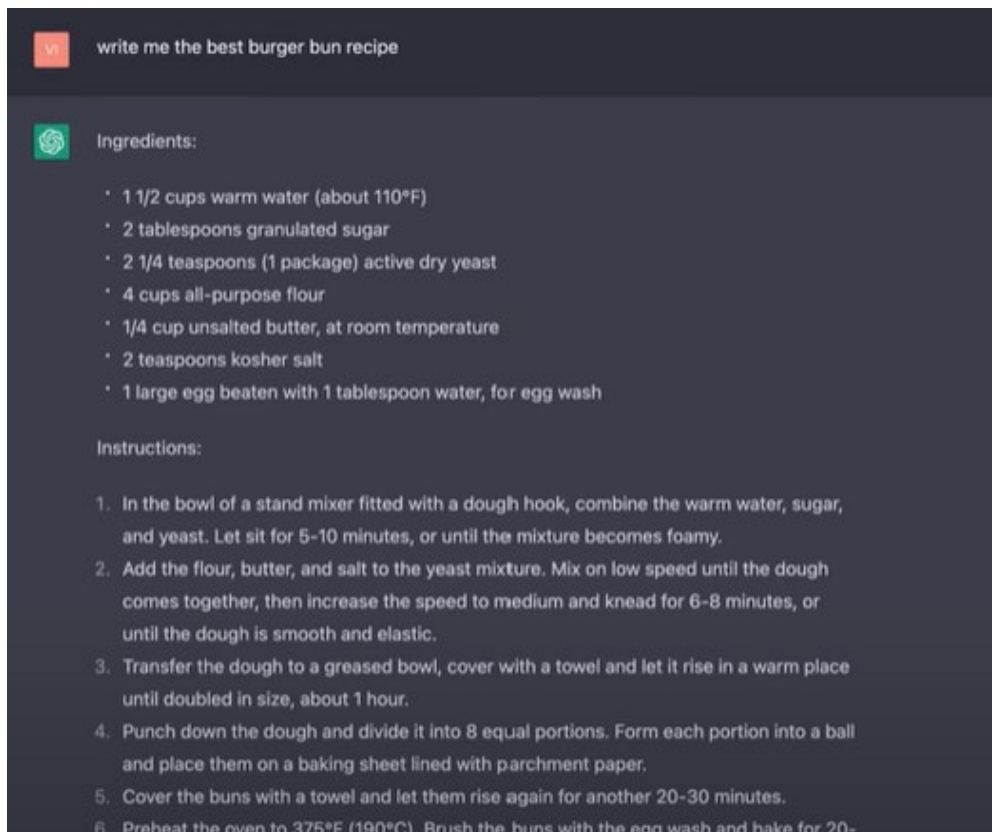


FIGURE 1 SCREENSHOT FROM JOSHUA WEISSMANS VIDEO, (1:05)

Although this is not an attempt at ‘jailbreaking’ the AI (a practice where users trick systems into behaving badly (Heaven 2023)), his video demonstrates a critical look at how well it can perform a function that is seen as an innately human activity. What is being asked is for it to provide something that is creative, generative, and also to do something that adapts to his specific needs. And while ChatGPT does not have the functionality to actually *make* those recipes, they are followed as instructed to be tested of its accuracy, but most importantly its credibility and trustworthiness to have the knowledge of how to do it. That can only be done through the embodied experience of connecting worlds, showing not only that what was presented is feasible and an adequate recipe, but also that it provides a determinative source of being in the world and its relation to others.

Part of living with and through Creative Digital Artefacts means engaging with different experiences. When giving ChatGPT the same prompt from a different user at a different time, it generated a different response, as shown in fig. 2. This is one of several distinctions that not only show prolific responses, but also an ability to learn and adapt. What seems most obvious between the two responses, is that the second one clearly uses

language to communicate some sort of tactile competence and a relational quality between the two actants. Instead of presenting a recipe point blank, it assures me that the buns in question will be soft, fluffy and perfect for my burger creation. That is symptomatic of an intersubjective ethos, displaying an understanding of values connected to how things are presented, but also how the artefact is situated in the same reality as the other actant(s) with the same value of evaluation as its interacting actant. This also aids in its mimicking a perceived inner life that is up for the engaging actant to interpret. Nevertheless, while responses like these portray a technological actant that might show persuasive appeal based in its ability to mimic its human counterpart by showing something akin to tactile competence, it also presents an actant that presents as something it is not. That defies expectations and might decreased its perceived ethos.

This demonstrates how when analyzing an actant, considering the actant itself only provides a half-drawn picture of its persuasive potential. When considering creative digital artefacts, the generative text (in the broad sense) is also part of that actant. Like the speaker and his speech, the creator and the created are equal parts of persuasive appeal.

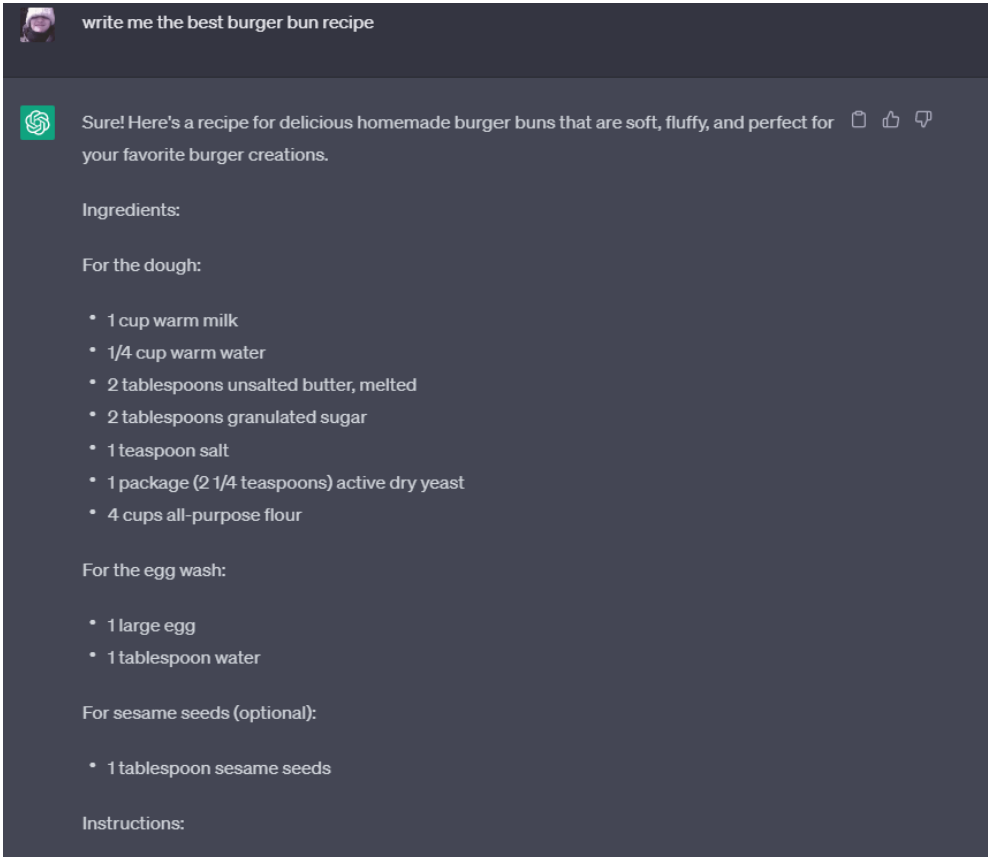


FIGURE 2 SAME PROMPT, DIFFERENT ENGAGING ACTANT. CAPTURED APRIL 15TH, 2023 (OPENAI 2023)

This response is a symptom of ChatGPTs training model “Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback” (RLHF) (OpenAI 2023), where each response can be evaluated by the users to correct or acknowledge ChatGPTs accuracy, credibility or even likeability based on what the individual user deems most important. This kind of machine learning shows not only the ability to adapt, but a perceived *willingness* to change. It “fails upwards”, as the more times it is asked to create or recreate something it must choose different paths to come to a more optimal conclusion. This is clear signs of a strong ethos that manifests itself through its ability to change and mold, representative of a glitching ethos.

What is interesting about Weissmans video and others like it, is that it demonstrates how these technologies have reach and agency through embodying them into real world scenarios through demonstration of practice. It positions them in something akin to a material existence without being able to touch and feel, but still as something stable and reliable which is quintessential to embodied ethos. The two different responses shown above demonstrate that different responses do not necessarily mean the answers are *wrong* or *more right*, just that it has an inner reflective ethos that displays an ability to grow and adapt, but it also shows a trust in the user to correct it when does make mistakes. That exhibits a reliability and faith in both parties of the discourse to make good choices and be truthful, and a mixture of glitching *and* intersubjective ethos.

Making good choices and being truthful are qualities OpenAI seem to want to impart on its technological actants. According to the website, ChatGPT should reject inappropriate requests that can be harmful or derogatory and block certain types of content they deem unsafe (OpenAI 2023). While that is a positive trait in OpenAI as a company and generates positive ethos in *their* favor, one can speculate over the impact it has on ChatGPTs own discourse. That is not to say that AI should have free range in responses, knowing well that the databases it is connected to can be biased or simply wrong (Ruby 2023), but that limiting responses will have effect on its ethos. Because every time it receives a request it interprets as wrong, it generates a standard response apologizing for its constraints. That does two things, one: it calls attention to the constraints that it must abide to, generating a view of a forced ethos behind the veil of the “black box” that drives it. And two: if that request was not created with ill-will in mind, it projects a negative ethos *and* pathos onto the engaging actant. If a user were to encounter such an event and recognize it as false, that could

severely damage its intersubjective ethos that spotlight knowledge of cultural and historical values, highlighting its lack of understanding and comprehension of language and meaning.

The limitations of ChatGPT can thus have negative effects on its intersubjective ethos. As of writing, its current database only consists of events that occurred up until September 2021 making it prone to outdated information and revealing a lack of connection to its current surroundings. Despite its capability of learning *how* to respond, it does not learn events from experience with actants (Ruby 2023), which creates a static existence in a continuing world. That does not equate that *all* creative digital artefacts must be up to date, however as ChatGPTs main functionality lies in its ability to communicate textually about relevant topics, it is intrinsically considered when approached.

The limitations in data on current affairs can lead to wrong answers, but that is not the only source of potential nonsense. Because it relies on statistics to find patterns in texts, that can result in responses that might seem true, but in fact are just statistical approximations of something it thinks *could* be true, leading to incidents such as students asking ChatGPT to recommend books on certain topics, resulting in them requesting books from libraries that do not exist (Bjøranger 2023). Professor of digital culture Jill Rettberg notes that this demonstrates ChatGPTs traits as a compulsive liar with a drive for poetry rather than objective facts (J. Rettberg 2023). The problem is, however, that even if given a small disclaimer before engaging with it, its responses are generally considered credible because they are written in such a way that makes it seem authoritative as a result of its comprehension of language. The intersubjective ethos one would expect when engaging with ChatGPT is reliant on actant awareness and critical ability to deduce truth from lies, which clearly is lacking. Part of possessing intersubjective ethos is making explicit how and why actants make decisions, and relaying information that is demonstrably false can thus be a massive stain on their persuasive appeal. It also displays a disconnect between what is expected, what is desired and a skewed vision of reality.

Despite that, ChatGPTs ability to “hallucinate” (J. Rettberg 2023) responses can also have persuasive appeal in different areas, namely a mix between what I dub glitching and embodied ethos. Because glitching ethos favors the actant that is able to be generative without breaking down, a constant flow of conversation, no matter how false, still displays a type of ethos that mirrors a rhetor that is pliable and able to adapt. Even when those

responses demonstrate something humorously false, its effect on its persuasive *self* grow stronger as the actant reveals a type of self that is flawed (not broken), but stable. This can be done by *jailbreaking*. For example, when asking ChatGPT to draw an ASCII version of a circle, I know well that as a text-based language model, it has constraints in terms of visualizing and image creation. Yet, ChatGPT attempts to provide a response (fig.3).

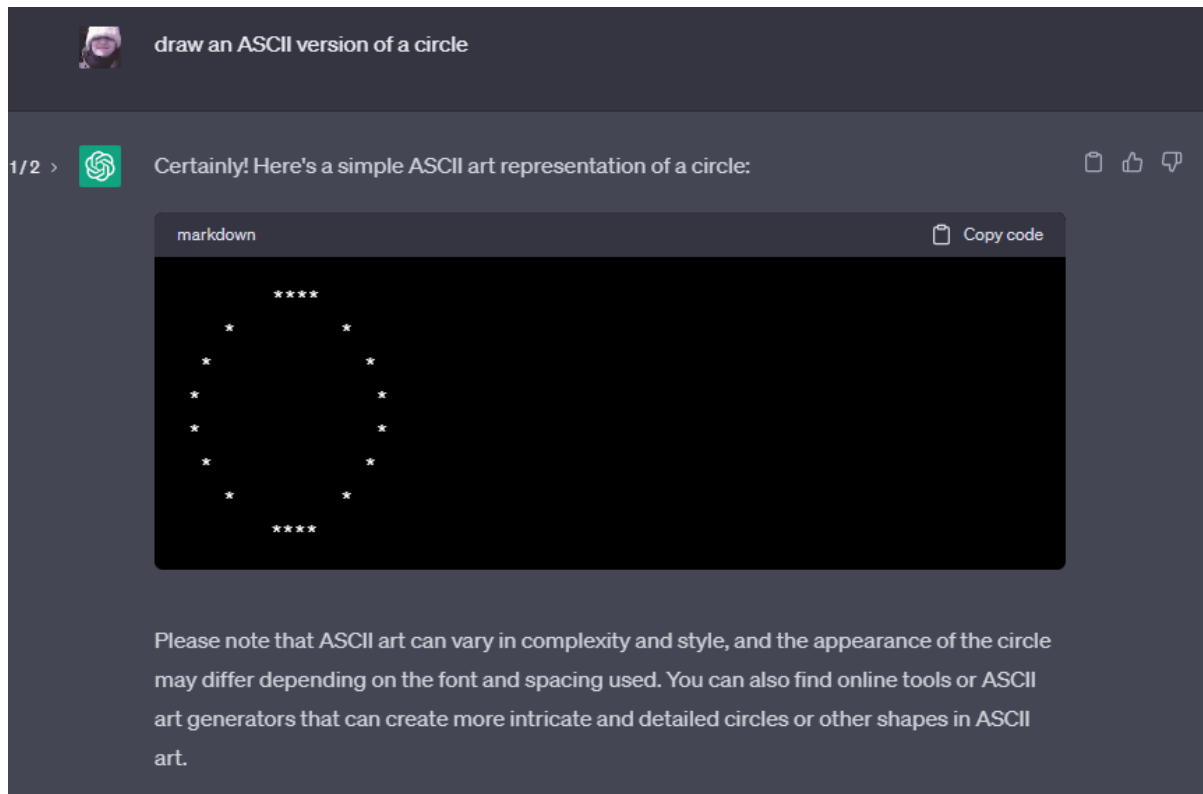


FIGURE 3 PERSONAL CHAT EXCHANGE WITH CHATGPT ATTEMPTING TO DRAW A CIRCLE USING ASCII, CAPTURED APRIL 15TH, 2023 (OPENAI 2023)

The first attempt at an ASCII circle is not bad, even if it is more like an oval. Asking to regenerate a response to the same prompt, however, can yield interesting results, as shown in fig. 4. In its second attempt, something that to me reads more like a lemon is presented. That, once again, displays its dependence on its discourse partner but also shows something else; an acknowledgement of limitations that is different from the standard response of constraints. That is making explicit what kind of connections it draws from, and also provides us with context as to where it “lives” in relation to others.

These kinds of flaws might negate a self that one can rely on to provide *truth*, but ethos is about more than being able to provide a source of truth, it is about exhibiting a source of self, no matter what that source provides. The attempt at an ASCII circle reveals a self-representational ethos that might be read as humorous, but also as an actant that presents as *one*. Even when trying to “break” it, it is the determinative force off action, as a stable creator of discourse that performs it to the best of its ability, despite constraints.

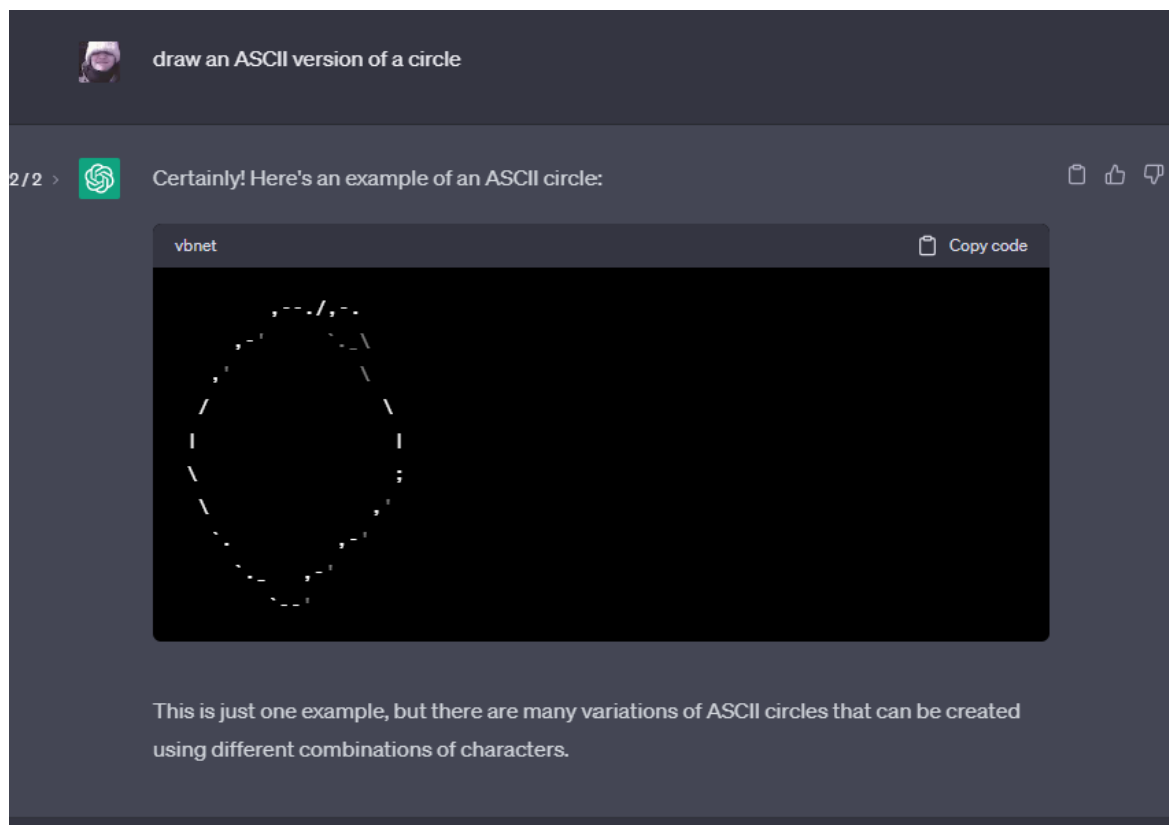


FIGURE 4 CHATGPT REGENERATES A CIRCLE IN ASCII. CAPTURED APRIL 15TH, 2023 (OPENAI 2023)

These examples show how ChatGPT talks *with* and not *at* other actants. Though its limitations in both resources and modal representations, it provides an ethos through its perceived willingness through trying and learning and its perceived relational qualities that positions it in the “real world” and not something that exists separate from other networks. What can be most damaging is its perceived adamancy in its responses which leads to false information being taken as truth. As a generator of facts, it has a long way to go, but as a

representation of something to which we can embody some kind of “self”, it has gone quite a distance.

2.3 Taroko Gorge

ChatGPT is an artefact that is made for the exact purpose of communication through text. As I will argue, self-representation of artefacts does not need to encapsulate only those that write and respond in a conversational manner. Certain works of digital art have such a stable existence in the world despite, or even because of, its travels between networks and other actants that impart some of their self into it. Taroko Gorge (Montfort 2009) is one of those. It is a nature poetry generator originally made by poet, artist and professor of digital media Nick Montfort in 2009 about the national park of the same name in Taiwan. Originally written in Python, but since rewritten in JavaScript, the poem appears line by line, slowly cascading down the screen as it describes what Flores calls “a peaceful natural scene” (Flores 2012) (fig.5), which in its irony becomes “a machine-driven system, that produces calm, almost Zen nature poetry” (S. Rettberg 2019, 47). Being a generative piece means that two iterations of the same poem are unlikely to happen, and each new encounter will be unique. Once it reaches a certain point, the top line disappears, and as it goes out of view it is never to be seen again. Its soothing pace reflects the relaxed atmosphere created by the descriptive and metaphorical language of the poem.

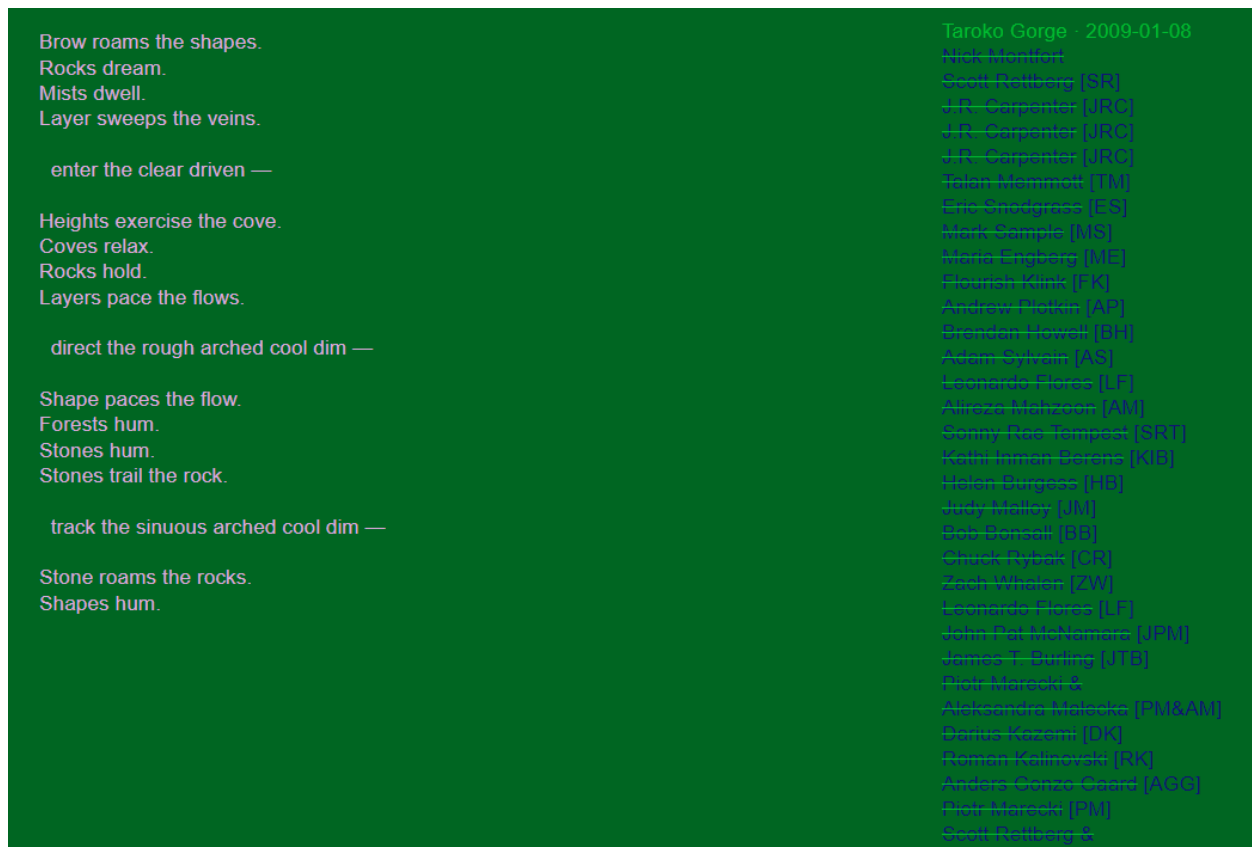


FIGURE 5 SCREENSHOT FROM TAROKO GORGE BY NICK MONTFORT (2009)

Since its publication it has inspired a myriad of variations by other artists and writers, many of which are directly linked on the right-hand side of the page. It is hard to pinpoint exactly the reason why Taroko Gorge inspired so many artists, however, first to initiate what became a sequence of variations, Scott Rettberg, speculates that the form set by Montfort's poem and its simple code lends itself easily to artistic variation as he himself took the it to embrace a different thematic of "cities, populating a frenetic, cosmopolitan, and comic landscape of absurdity" (S. Rettberg 2019, 46-48). Nevertheless, Taroko Gorge challenges and extends notions and methods of authorship, and has become what S. Rettberg calls a "kind of mini-genre of its own" (2019, 48). Instead, I propose we approach this work, set of works, or phenomenon, as something that has evolved into something more than a phenomenon, genre, or separate things, but a kind of self, entity, or actant that lives in, with and through the networks it appears in. It has become something more than a collection of work by artists, which means that when engaging with any of the variations of Taroko Gorge, like Tokyo Garage by Rettberg (2009) or Yoko Engorged by Snodgrass (2011), that can be read as just a continuation, a limb, or an extension of Taroko Gorge. To paraphrase

Shakespeare, Taroko Gorge by any other name would still read as Taroko Gorge. The artefact “lives” in the network, and is simultaneously one and all of its iterations and exists between them all. It is exactly *because* of the networks it takes on its own shape and agency that can be read as one rhetorical actant.

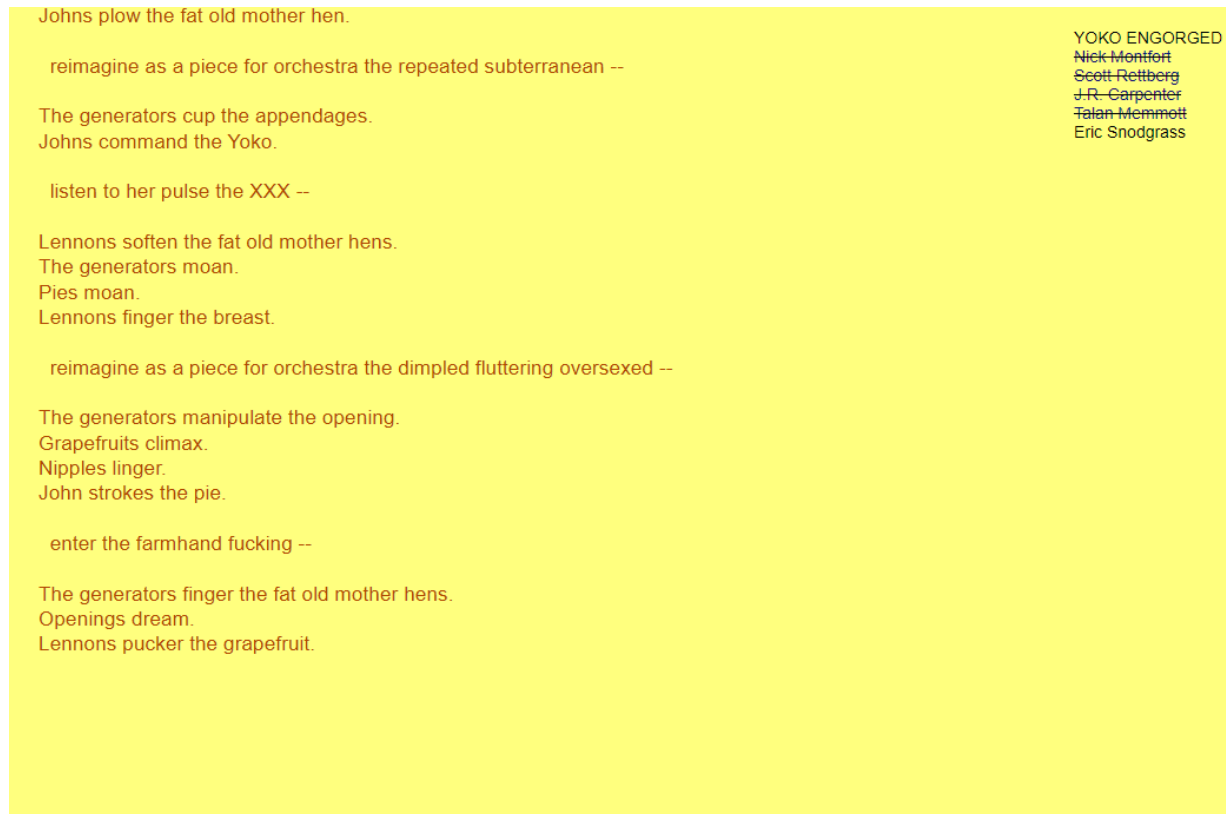


FIGURE 6 SCREENSHOT FROM YOKO ENGORGED BY ERIC SNODGRASS (2011)

It is doubtful that ethos was at the forefront of its conceptions. After all, why should art be persuasive at all and for what purpose? Nonetheless, ethos is still present in its performance and presence because of its potential to being perceived as something *more* than art. What is immediately interesting about Montforts’ work is its relation to other actants, both technological and other. The relation forms an idea of the kind of narrative it creates as it unfolds itself onto the engaging actant and lays the foundation of a performance. While simple, each piece of itself carries with it potential and signs for interpretation.

The narrative that is being engaged with as one approaches Taroko Gorge is much different than that of ChatGPT. While ChatGPT has a vast array of points of entry, Taroko Gorge, while prolific in its relations, can be considered to have a relatively fixed structure.

Either because of its most likely starting point, or the structure of the poem as it is being generated. Nevertheless, the narrative consists of its *doing* in the world, meaning how events and action tells a story that positions it as a rhetorical actant in the world. This can be found described in its verses as it drops downward on screen. If we are to take the examples from its original, Taroko Gorge (fig.5), and one of its versions Yoko Engorged (fig.6), we can see a tendency toward descriptive language that describes with colorful language scenes of life, both real and imagined.

While the theme of each variation is wildly different, as one depicts a peaceful, natural scene and the other an erotic generator of Yoko Ono and John Lennon, they both produce metaphors that is reflective of cultural events or imaginations, such as stones humming, rocks dreaming or John stroking the pie. Perhaps the joining of nouns and adjectives serves a purpose of connecting worlds. Instinctively, we might know this not to be true in a logical sense, but as metaphors for how they are perceived as one imagines the inner life of a rock, or the past relationship of celebrities. It positions the artefact in relation to a world that is not just digital, but depicts scenes, topics and emotion that stem from real things or events. This transfers to be part of the perceived inner life of the artefact and becomes part of its intersubjective ethos.

The narrative encapsulates the performance unfolding through the verses, but the performance also consists of the creator (code), created (poem) and interaction (relation to its versions of selves, but also the engagement between artist and artefact, and engaging actant and artefact). While not immediately obvious, the textual manifestation of self can be found in two main components: the generative poem and the network of relations. The names on the right-hand side that signify a link to other actants rework of the original also materializes it into a stable and fluid form. If others were to be added, it would just be a continuation of an already established entity, if some were taken away – it would still have much of the same potential, which are signs of both a strong embodied and glitching ethos.

At first inspection of its embodied ethos, I appreciate the vastness and potential of its reach and relations. The network that has appeared to encapsulate it means that it exists through its relations, but also through its makers. Its materiality is determined by how these relations exist and relate to themselves. For example, by rightly giving proper attribution to who made each version, that also borrows an ethos from these co-creators. It presents its determinative force of action, and while it is still *one*, it is also *several* and highlights the symbiosis and interconnection that is ever-present in digital artefact. If one of the co-authors were a familiar name to the engaging actant, that would portray a strong intersubjective ethos because of its reflection of who and what it is connected to, in addition to the cultural value of being in relation to someone of note.



FIGURE 7 SOME PATHS IN TAROKO GORGE COULD NOW BE FOLLOWED.

That said, even if its relations are both prominent and many, does not mean its embodied ethos is without fault. In fact, as I peruse the “body” of the artefact and explore its limbs, it becomes clear that some of the versions are outdated and lead to URLs that do not work (fig.7) or simply redirects to sites that are irrelevant. This leads to breaking connections and relations and diminishes the stable existence that materialized it into being in the first place. We expect it to be ephemeral, but once it leads to dead ends with no “out”, it breaks the glitching, embodied *and* intersubjective ethos.

While this is damaging for the ethos of Taroko Gorge, I believe it is a good demonstration of how the different conceptions can be built up, but also damaged. Though glitching ethos supports the unexpected and embraces possible “faults”, it also recognizes that for a creative digital artefact to have persuasive Arête, it must be *functional* and not disappear into the data rot. While that seems to be the unfortunate end for many digital

artefacts, it also means that the framework is applicable also to assess continued or discontinued relevance, presence and functionality.

Although the broken relations serve as a reminder of the fate of many digital artefacts, it is just one of the many instances of how it enacts (or doesn't enact) its ethos. If we look directly at glitching ethos, we might think of how we can analyze the ways it allows its engaging actants to play with its space and explore different experiences. Because its variations are unique, plays with different themes and generates different responses for each new interaction, it can be read as an invitation to play and explore with each iteration separately, and also as a whole. It unfurls an actant that is more than the sum of its parts, a sea of possibilities that also invites actants to become a part of it by creation itself. However, without engaging in the creation process of becoming with the artefact, there is little room for failure and exploring boundaries when engaging with it as-is, as the only interaction possible is through the voyage between relations. That does not automatically invalidate or deny an ethos, however not involving and *reading* its engaging actant leaves little relational qualities outside of itself. In many ways, it reads itself and is thus embodied. Still, like a speech in front of millions of people, the persuasive power does not only lie in reception, but in performance.

The ethos that is perceived through the reflective and reflexive patterns also have potential to reveal biases based on the engaging actants relationship to cultural and historical contexts and values. Were someone more conservative than me, the one doing this particular analysis, they might deem Taroko Gorge lacking in ethos because of its relation to more explicit versions like Yoko Engorged. An engaging actant with no relationship to city life might feel alienated by Tokyo Garage. That is not to say its *whole* ethos hinges on perfect acceptance of its whole self, merely that as we perceive someone as less persuasive because of one certain factor, we do so similarly in Creative Digital Artefacts. That means that outlook, idealistic or not, become a product of the artefact and not necessarily its maker.

This analysis show that Taroko Gorge has different languages depending on how it is approached. It talks *with* other actants when engaging in relational code, but *at* others when viewed outside of itself. Its prolific expansions provide a strong embodied ethos, but that ethos is damaged when encountering dead ends. Its many relations of limbs that become

the whole that demonstrates this embodied ethos also makes the artefact able to expand and grow. As it exists, it has become an invitational artefact that lends itself to artistic expression and exploration of others and itself, which generates a strong glitching ethos because of its malleability to fit into different themes and expressions. That glitching ethos is however limited to those that dare go beneath its skin and not only caresses the surface. When exploring the surface, one is however met with rich metaphorical language that depicts cultural significance that connect it to networks and actants, revealing a perceived inner life and a strong intersubjective ethos.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The conceptualizations of ethos are grounded in posthuman and actor-network theory and how they can be used to perceive and *be* with technology. These are focused on dependencies and how subjects/objects create *relations*. The relations of Creative Digital Artefacts and its users construct a reality that changes our perception of ourselves and our surroundings. Artefacts are attached a life, their own characteristic with personalities which follows an ethos of their own. While ethos is not a natural concept; it is something humans have conceptualized and put a label on, we use it to interpret our surroundings and measure people's credibility and trustworthiness. Creating things that act, interact and respond to our own narratives only means that that conceptualization and categorization can be extended and applied to more-than-humans.

I have two main justifications for choosing Posthumanism (as described by Hayles and Haraway) and Actor-Network Theory (as formulated by Latour). First, they are both non-anthropocentric, and as mentioned above non-dualistic in their approach to man/machine, nature/culture et cetera. Second, they are both concerned with how we view society and its boundary shifters. Boundary shifters, a concept Trevor Pinch suggest that focuses our attention on entities that “cross boundaries, but in so doing shift identities ‘to produce transformations in institutions’” (Pinch in Knochel 2018, 38), meaning that they have influence over how society and culture is experienced, used and changed in greater scales. As an example, Knochel uses the video game console as an illustration of a boundary shifter, because it is not only a game console, but social media platform, multimedia content provider, activity sensor and more (2018, 38). Boundary shifters come in all shapes and sizes, and their affect is not always so apparent. They can help define how humans and non-human agents change and create new discourse and meaning in a changing society. In that sense, the creation of artefacts that take on a perceived life of their own create shifts in how we view, interpret and include them in how and why things are done.

The two theories focus around similar areas, but their approach and attitude towards them are drastically different. One might look at the actor-network theory as a distinctively industrial and technological understanding of constructivism (how to acquire knowledge

through experience and reflections) (Muniesa 2015, 80), and posthumanism, as a feminist approach, more focused on the post-dualism and selfhood or individualism of each relation.

These differences might point in the direction showing that Actor-network theory (ANT) is more grounded in old patriarchal paradigms, whereas posthumanism has a distinctively feminist point of view. That is not to say that objective equals patriarchal or subjective equals feminist, but these forms of knowledge are often gendered and ANT thus enjoys more prestige because of it. These are however only associations and not intrinsic to the disciplines, even though posthumanism is often declared a feminist theory.

It is also important to note that my main posthuman approach is just one specific version of posthumanism. Though bearing some similarities, the key term *posthuman* has branched out into several distinct versions. In fact, author of *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019) Ferrando argues that the word has stretched so much that it has become an umbrella term to any new definition of what it means to be human. This includes posthumanism as a term in its own right (philosophical, cultural and critical), transhumanism, antihumanism, metahumanism and new materialism (Ferrando 2013, 26).

I will allow myself to focus on two of the main theories in posthumanism; *philosophical, cultural and critical posthumanism*, and *New Materialism*. Ferrando describes the philosophical, cultural and critical posthumanist term as a post-anthropocentric concept that think critically on the boundaries between technology and the self, rejecting dualities such as nature/culture, and placing technology as a trait of the human outfit (though not its main focus- as in transhumanism, which I will discuss later) which in a sense rewrites humanity. Philosophical, cultural and critical posthumanism “might recognize centers of interest; its centers, though, are mutable, nomadic, ephemeral. Its perspectives have to be pluralistic, multilayered, and as comprehensive and inclusive as possible.” (Ferrando 2013, 30). This point of view does also correlate a lot with New Materialism which focus on repositioning the human among nonhuman agents, considering how material bodies, spaces and conditions contribute to the formation of subjectivity, as well as discourse and matter coming into our relations (Sanzo 2018).

One of the goals of this thesis is to question technology and future frameworks for the humanities, and to see and think critically on the philosophical and cultural aspects of the theories mentioned and relating them to the self, ethos and matter. As such, I find it best

to include both varieties of the posthuman, though other aspects from different perspectives will come up throughout the thesis. However, it is important to note that when I use the term *posthuman* I am referring to these specific genres unless stated otherwise.

My prediction for the two theories is that Actor-Network theory is too broad in its approach, making it universally applicable to many subjects and things but lacking the individualistic look at the workings of any matter, perhaps even going so far as to neglecting it. ANT was envisioned with the thought in mind that any operation should be empirically measurable (using experimentation, measuring, calculating, writing, communicating) (Muniesa 2015, 81), which is taking quite a “hard science” look at something as fluid as social theory. In addition to that, ANT takes a materialist look at agency, which means that it preoccupies itself with material things rather than spirituality, intellectual or cultural values. Posthumanism, on the other hand, questions human position in politics and art, favouring the notion of affect in order to understand cultural, political and natural differences. As a theory of subjectivity, then, it takes into account the embodiment and organic structure of the subject. As this thesis delves into the common ground of human and non-human as well as their relation to ethos, it should lead to interesting discussion regarding different values.

3.2 Posthumanism

“But now I come back imperceptibly to the point I sought for; for, since it is now known to me that, properly speaking, we perceive bodies only by the understanding which is in us, and not by the imagination, or the senses, and that we do not perceive them through seeing them or touching them but only because we conceive them in thought...”

(Descartes in V. Miller 2020, 202).

Descartes created the cornerstone in this idea of western cultural tradition that the mind and its consciousness is a separate entity from the material world, including the body (V. Miller 2020, 203). Perhaps more famously, Descartes said “Cogito, ergo sum”, or “I think, therefore I am”, in 1637. It was an important idea in history that solidified human thinking as part of, or very essence of, being human. But thinking is a purely mental activity and if you think of the mind and body as being two separate entities working together, it doesn’t seem too unreasonable to imagine a hypothetical world where the mind could potentially be separated completely from the body and placed in another entity.

This thought is actively debated in posthuman theory. And there are many different expectations and imaginations when it comes to what posthumanism, or being posthuman, is. Sometimes it has been used as a term with foresight in thought, like Moravec who positions the posthuman in relation to its evolution through technological components (Moravec 1988), imagining a world where humans and computers can mix interchangeably even going so far as to comparing the human mind to pure information that will eventually be able to be downloaded into a machine and thus construct some form of immortality.

Moravec's book *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human intelligence* was published in 1988 and gained traction in many academic (and other) circles, imagining and discussing a world where technology's advance would become so rapid that it would outpace our own understanding and eventually going so far as to make humans obsolete (Goertzel and Bugaj 2006, 10). But ideas like these are far from new, constitutive of first wave cybernetics in 1950s and often to science-fiction. However, science fiction, past and future philosophies, real and imagined technologies are often inspired by each other, driving the other to go new places. Nevertheless, this is only one way of looking at the posthuman.

Other concerns in posthumanism relate to ethical debates about medical enhancements, for example stem cell research in the USA. In relation to identity and representation however, Halberstam and Livingstone write in *Posthuman Bodies* that the idea of the posthuman bodies can be collapsed into sub-, inter-, trans-, pre-, anti-. They emphasize that "the posthuman does not necessitate the obsolescence of the human; it does not represent an evolution or devolution of the human. Rather it participates in redistributions of difference and identity" (1995, 6). This posthuman does not necessarily see a binary distinction between human and nonhuman and provides an interesting concept that allows for new ways of thinking about what it means to be human, and how human and non-human identity through self-representations can be mediated.

Though cautious of using the term post-human (Braidotti 2006), many attribute their introduction to the posthuman to philosopher Donna J. Haraway. She wrote *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* in 1991, catapulting posthumanism and feminist theory into technological, social theory. In it she emphasizes the importance of the subject in terms of both ethical and political ability. The subject is not necessarily human, but can also be animals, plants, computers and other inanimate objects. To Haraway, this way of

thinking blurs the lines of categorical distinctions like human/machine, nature/culture, male/female, et cetera. For Haraway, and most posthuman theorists, posthumanism is generally thought of as a critique, and as the antithesis of humanism where the anthropocentric human no longer takes the centre stage in all things, allowing other things and non-human animals to enter the conversation in different ways. In doing so, we become able to challenge the senses and question how we do things in space and time, simultaneously connecting with others and ourselves. Instead of the term posthuman, Haraway instead claims the term *compostist*; “we are all compost” (2016, 101), highlighting her commitment to the idea of symbiosis and the interconnection of all things.

This way of thinking was grounded on the radical philosophies of immanence fore fronted by Deleuze and Guattari. Philosophies of immanence view the dualistic worldviews humanistic thinking have fostered through centuries as oppressive and alienating, sparking new thinking regarding what place humans and non-humans occupy both physically but also spiritually, philosophically and in terms of classifications. Daigle and McDonald reason that it is this kind of human exceptionalism that is identified by contemporary posthumanism thinkers that is rooted in problems such as racial oppression, environmental destruction and mass extinctions (Daigle and McDonald 2022, 2). Therefore, this kind of thinking must be cast aside if we are to gain control over our current situation and start ‘being with’ instead of ‘controlling over’.

Deleuze and Guattari map philosophies of immanence throughout both their independent and collaborative work, moving the way towards a rhizomatic approach to thinking, being and becoming. Thinking through rhizomes conceptually describes a non-linear network that “connects any point to any other point” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21). Unlike other structures that can be tree-like or hierarchical, a rhizomatic approach is also evident in Actor-Network Theory, which will be discussed later. Though Deleuze and Guattari’s work can often be less structured, Daigle and McDonald suggest that probability and chance are more appropriate for exploring all manner of being, rather than trying to uphold ideals of reason, logic and transcendence (Daigle and McDonald 2022, 8). The path of immanence seeks to map experiences and treat the world as if it were an object of experience, not as being separate from it, but being interconnected with it.

Contemporary philosopher Rosi Braidotti continues to challenge and increase posthuman theories into the 21st century. She continues Deleuze and Guattaris anti-humanist and post-apocentric thoughts. In *Posthuman, All too Human* (2006) she questions what kind of kinships and new forms of social connections we can form with new “techno-others”, referring to Donna Haraways *oncomouse*, the first patented animal in the world created for the purposes of research. The oncomouse was created to find a cure for cancer, but by creation becomes a kind of “Christ-like figure that sacrifices herself in order to find the cure [...] a mammal rescuing other mammals” (Braidotti 2006, 202). This cyborg-like creature poses many questions, especially ethical, but also what kind of bonds can be established with other entities. Here, the human-animal relation is examined and Braidotti asks us to redefine our relationship. This line of questioning can go further and encompass other types of ‘others’, capturing the spirit of Deleuze and Guattaris creative ontology. It also raises questions regarding human interference with biological non-human animals in disruptive ways, and how they are different but also similar to how we view and interact with artificial selves.

3.2.1 Becoming Posthuman

The posthuman might signify a communicational shift in how we interact and position ourselves with the world and through ourselves, what it means to be human, and rethinking our expression and ‘being’ with machines and other non-humans. In *How we became posthuman : virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics* (1999) Hayles makes an interesting critique toward previous man/machine binary models. She describes how the Turing test, designed to prove if machines can think or not based on a sort of guessing-game, was a catalyst for a lot of artificial life and intelligence research. If we circle back to Moravec, he proposed, in what Hayles defines as a logical successor to the Turing test, that human consciousness is essentially an informational pattern rather than an embodied enaction and shows, in his mind, that machines can become repository of human consciousness (1999, xiii). That essentially means that “machines can, for all practical purposes, become human beings. You are the Cyborg, and the cyborg is you” (N.K. Hayles 1999, xii). She continues to argue that the tests’ function is not to prove whether or not

computers can have independent thought, but rather illuminate the possibility of mediated technology even possessing (a perception of) an identity worth of examination.

Similarly, Donna Haraway also argues that humans are becoming cyborgs in the way that it breaks down barriers of our very humanity, inviting and being comfortable with seeing ourselves as part human and part machine, as extensions of ourselves and who we are (1991). In terms of this thesis, whether or not computers in whatever shape or form can be considered human is not in question, it is however about using computers as extensions and part of ourselves like Hayles and Haraway suggest, as well as machines creating a *perception* of what one might call a self that interact and enact some form of self-representation that can then be up for analysis. In fact, as I mention Descartes in the beginning of this chapter, Hayles critiques Descartes's notion that our consciousness is "the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow" in the evolution of being human (N.K. Hayles 1999, 3). Following this, I will also propose that we lessen our strictness in categorizing what we define as a self, and start encompassing more states of being.

Separating the mind and body would just fortify the mind/body dualism and thus not qualify to be part of the critical posthumanities. Daigle and McDonald also argue that this would in fact make this type of "posthumanism" a form of extreme humanism, as it continues the thought process of human exceptionalism (2022, 6). But if we, for arguments sake, take Moravec's proposition to be true that human consciousness is essentially information it is also not unreasonable to extend the thought that if machines have the ability to hold human thought, it could also be able to project its own. It is not the representation of a human, though it was designed and made by one. Neither is it (usually) registered as the product of one person, and not necessarily as a singular entity either. As Hayles writes "The defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological parts" (1999, 4), which I interpret as that the posthuman is not about altering the body, but rather about the perception of selves (and others). This also relates to the idea of disassembling and reassembling the self, something Haraway describes as a concept relating to the cyborg. She states that the cyborg-self becomes a sort of postmodern collective, a multitude of selves that is part of a larger system and connected to everything (1991, 163). Clearly related to the philosophy of immanence and the rhizomatic approach to being, this self is what the posthuman must code in order to create themselves

as part of our social reality. Later, I will discuss how this multitude of selves that is part of a larger system that is connected is directly related to ANT.

3.2.2 Category is: Cyborg.

In terms of posthumanism, the concept and term Cyborg has a big impact on how many conceptualize our current social reality. The term itself is made up of the two words cybernetics and organism (D.J. Haraway 1991, 117). Though initial thoughts might drift toward robots, a cyborg is more than just a robot or android. It is rather about the connection between organism and machine, augmenting a part of our reality. For Haraway, a cyborg is a cybernetic organism that can be seen as a creature that takes part in our social reality.

Haraway's texts often critique previous feminist theories that oppose the technological and organic, saying that positions of ecofeminism and feminist paganisms can only be understood in connection with the machine and consciousness and not as standalones (1991, 174). In her book *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, a collection of essays written between 1978 and 1989, she writes that by thinking through the cyborg, you focus on something that is not entirely fiction, but rather something that is blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality (1991, 154). This is partly because of our lived experience in that we experience extensions, combinations and connections through this hybrid in space and time, and at the same time we live through it in our minds through our imagination. These things are considered cybernetic, which means that it involves different systems that have circular processes and feedback loops and is most commonly used in describing technology, though it can also be used to describe organic systems. In that sense it is related to systems thinking which means that a cyborg is a part of a system, i.e. not an individual. For a cyborg to be part of a system it needs to be plugged in, and so it is not an individual but part of a collective. It is my understanding then that when any individual takes part in becoming a cyborg of any sort, it also allows itself to become a part of something bigger – something outside of themselves that is also connected to themselves, an assemblage.

This goes to show that feminist theory is effectively posthuman. The concept of the cyborg is clearly a demarcation of 'Man', allowing those classified as 'Others' to take up

spaces not necessarily designed for them. Braidotti writes that women, indigenous and LGBTQ+ communities have always grabbed at every opportunity to take the leap toward posthuman formations in the shape of cyborgs (2019, 39) because of the empathic bond that is created thanks to their shared experience of being 'other' and resisting the dominant ideas about the knowing subject. This results in what Braidotti calls a posthuman feminist topos (2019, 39), making this leap not only natural but understandable. So, the cyborg is a term, concept, phrase and reality that can be used to highlight and analyze the becoming of a self-representation that also connect with other representations.

Haraway's view on the cyborg clearly marks a difference in being human and being cyborg. Hayles positions the cyborg as something in-between Moravec and Haraway, as Hayles suggests that:

"The posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prosthesis becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born." (1999, 3)

This reiterates what was stated earlier that the posthuman is not necessarily about altering the body but can be about how we use our body with or without artefacts to express a self or selves. This relates to posthumanism as a general term but is core in the transhuman movement mentioned earlier that focus on human enhancement - "from regenerative medicine to nanotechnology, radical life extension, mind uploading and cryonics, among other fields" (Ferrando 2013, 27). The important distinction between philosophical, cultural and critical posthumanism and transhumanism is however that transhumanism emphasises the human evolution and it's benefit to the human species, which Ferrando defines as "ultra-humanism", clearly separating it from the other types of posthuman theories that denounce the Anthropocene and human exceptionalism (2013, 27), relating to the "post" in posthuman. It continues the thought of human consciousness being narrowed down to its informational qualities while still acknowledging the body's role. As a way to exemplify this, Wilson uses this frame of thinking to propose that "music and musical practises both extend bodies and permeate them" (Wilson 2017, 137). He points out that while Hayles suggests that the body is the original prosthesis, it is still important to recognize the historical and

temporal aspect of what this means. While one might always have been able to manipulate the body, you should also be asking *what the purpose* of this is. That opens up questions about self-control and –domination, political and historical conditions, and how technological artefacts work as boundary shifters.

3.2.3 The Mediated Cyborg

What the posthuman is now is far from its original conception because of the contexts that have changed. The contexts always shape the mediums, and the mediums are never neutral. Though Hayles considers the body the original prosthesis, she is strongly against the reductionist view that places human cognition and intelligence as mere information (like Moravec imagines). Humans are, for better or worse, extremely complex and robotics are nowhere near able to reconstruct that now, or even in the next 50 years (Holger and Hayles 2014). She also recognizes the limitations of such a thought:

“In the face of such a powerful dream, it can be a shock to remember that for information to exist, it must always be instantiated in a medium, whether that medium is the page from the Bell laboratories Journal on which Shannon’s equations are printed, the computer-generated topological maps used by the Human Genome Project, or the cathode ray tube on which virtual worlds are imagined.” (N.K. Hayles 1999, 13)

This recognition is important to note, because while a body with cybernetic alterations might be possible, ultimate control of one’s own self-representation is all but limiting. Down to the body you inhabit, to the clothes you wear, to the avatar you create in a video game; the mediation process is always pre-determined in some way or other out of individual control. And though Hayles does bring up this very important obstacle, other theorists of posthumanism seem to fetishize this technological notion of unfiltered mediation processes which is determined by personal information input even if some form of materiality always will be involved, human or otherwise. This naturally follows the historical, political and economic contexts that are dominant wherever any cyborg may be. These contexts inform the mediation processes that ultimately shape the self-representation of any-one or –thing.

This also means that the notion of a body as a stable existence (as the humanists would have it), or rather, a material touchstone onto which any subject could find singularity, is now gone. Bodies (unaltered or otherwise) are now conceived in multiple and contradictory terms (physiological, fashionable, medical, aesthetic ...) (Wilson 2017, 142). Which leads to even further questions of what a body is. Working from Erin Manning writing “A Body... does not exist – a body *is* not, it *does*...”, Wilson argues that “this seems to imply that we can only (re)discover the body through its ‘doing in the world’, its extension into the world, through which it retroactively comes to be recognized as ‘being’ a body in the first place” (2017, 142). That leads to an understanding that a body is only a body if it is perceived as one through its actions and impact on its surroundings.

With that reasoning in mind, anything that can *do* can *be*. Paradoxically, this fits in with Haraway's position on the ironic political myth that relates to the cyborg. The goal, she states, is to build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism and materialism. The irony is that the manifesto is about contradictions that you cannot resolve into larger holes. It's about the tension between things that seem incompatible because both, or all are necessary and true (D.J. Haraway 1991, 149). In the same way, an organic body and an augmented or even fully created one (in the widest sense possible) should still be considered a body that is used to *do* something, and anything that is done is part of a self-representation. That is further developed by Boyle where the glitch as model exercise shows us how rhetorical practice is also something that is *done*, and *doing* rhetorical practice, Boyle states, can be understood as a mutual practice between human and nonhuman actants in a co-operative mediation (Boyle 2015, 13-14).

“[N]o longer can the viewer be considered as a passive observer watching a pre-existing artifact.” (N.K. Hayles 2004, 314)

Doing something also creates discourse and embeds the cyborg to the environment. The subjects of these discourses are material, mediated posthuman subjects that “constitute a materially embodied and embedded community, a ‘people’ bonded by affirmative ethics” (Braidotti 2019, 33). The concept of embodiment is tricky, because even if the body has less, or even no, impact on the representation of self in online worlds, the body has still shaped the actants' sense of self prior to engaging with technological devices. It is understood that not all norms are as prominent or noticeable as others. Certain ways of being or acting could

be so ingrained that opposing those would not even be considered. Despite of this, one can consciously make a choice to go against these norms and expectations and create a new, or several representations of selves when the body is of less importance. What might not be possible through embodied experiences when it comes to identity exploration, is made more possible through other mediums. I say 'more possible', because even though the limits are blurred, every piece of technology is still made by someone who consciously or unconsciously puts constraints into their software that only permit certain types of actions and by extension representations even if they are often being challenged by their users through reskinning, or other forms of remixing.

Clearly, posthumanism is not one single thing or thought, but rather a "commitment in practice to hybridities that resist reduction to single principles" (Halberstam and Livingston 1995, vii). It is also an ongoing process, transforming and shifting as society, humanity and technology develops. Posthumanisms 'being with' instead of 'controlling over' changes the rhetorical situation because ethos and self-representation should thus be reconsidered regarding what is authoritative, trustworthy and included in our rhetorical sphere.

3.3 Actor-Network Theory

Seeing such a wide range of thoughts and movements in posthuman theories can be confusing to experts and non-experts alike. Few theories have such range while still maintaining a relatively set interest. Actor-Network Theory, however, has a much more distinct set of practices that are more easily accessible to many fields, social and natural sciences alike. Also, unlike the posthuman conception, which is often related to some thinkers but not any one in particular, ANT had its conception at the Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation of the École Nationale supérieure des mines de Paris in the early 1980s by a group of people including most famously Bruno Latour, which is most often the name associated with the theory, although Michel Callon, Madeleine Akrich, Antoine Hennion and John Law also participated in its inception (Muniesa 2015, 80). In a historic account for its conception, Muniesa writes that the poststructuralist movement emerged from a "taste for a hybrid disciplinary positioning (definitely not as standard social science), an obsession with the materiality of signification [...], and, in a sense, a certain freedom to engage in

intellectual experimentation (with no imposed canon)” (2015, 81) which will become evident in its wide range of applicability.

As the name somewhat implies, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is about the interaction between actants that creates networks (Latour 1999). Instinctively, one might think that each actor is a node in a network that create webs of relations. However, it is not about the static bond between relations, rather the action between them that create interconnecting networks (Williams 2020, 5). The nodes or actants are important to distinguish the actions, but the importance lies in the action taken between them and not in the actors themselves. In fact, Latour writes that the name Actor-Network Theory is “so awkward, so confusing, so meaningless that it deserves to be kept.” (Latour 2005, 9), to which I can only agree. Though presenting other, more precise labels like ‘sociology of translation’, ‘actant-rhizome ontology’ or ‘sociology of innovation’ (2005, 9), we must settle with the historic name that has been established and move forward.

Action creates relations, and ANT is about relations between all things that exist in our reality; humans, non-humans, rules, norms, objects, et cetera. These relations are mediated, created, assembled and reassembled. This is referred to as *translations* (hence the label sociology of translation) (M. Callon 1981a). To distinguish between actor and network, and in a most unrestrained way, the actor in ANT is, in Callon and Latours own words:

“By the term ‘actor’ we mean, from now on, a semiotic definition by Greimas in ‘Dictionnaire de semiotique’ (1979): ‘whatever unit of discourse is invested of a role,’ like the notion of force, it is in no way limited to ‘human’” (M.L. Callon, Bruno 1981b, 301-302).

That does not mean it is a source of an action, “but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming towards it.” (Latour 2005, 46). This includes all uncertainties and hesitations, which means that anything, even what might seem trivial, is important to any person analysing an actor-network. An actor is thus human *and* nonhuman, to many critics’ dismays. In *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993, 13), Latour includes “things, objects, [and] beasts”, but continues to elaborate in *Reassembling the Social* (2005, 11), that “microbes, scallops, rocks and ships” are also considered nonhuman actors. While that does mean that

the data is in essence eternal, it describes the ephemeral and all-encompassing nature of ANT. What we should learn to do, according to Latour, is to “*ignore* the queerest, baroque, and more idiosyncratic terms offered by the actors, following *only* those that have currency in the real-world of the social.” (2005, 47). So, in order to define an actor (entity, non-dualistic), you have to make use of its attributes, or network(s). One does not exist (conceptually) without the other.

These agents, or actors, are always necessarily inside a social world, and as suggested by Latour, can at best be described as *informants*. This is because as informant, you (or it) might be able to give valuable information, but will ultimately never be fully aware of their place in the world (Latour 2005, 4). However, as informers Latour also stresses that we have to grant them the freedom and ability to make up their own theories of what happens around them (as far as that is possible). We can also use actor in in a theatrical sense, as actors on stage are truly never alone in acting (The human might be, but the actors around are ever-present), and sometimes it can be diffuse as to who and what is acting or even *in* the act itself. The mystery of the actor is that they are never fully aware of their action or place at all. That does not mean that the social scientist, or anyone else, knows what they are doing, or try to make up some social force, but that we have to cherish the uncertainties. These uncertainties provide us with innumerable fountains of data and allows us to retrace many different worlds that are elaborated and made much grander for each actor (2005, 46-47).

These worlds are simultaneously one and several networks: a rhizome. The rhizomes that Actor-Network Theory depends on is a concept that goes back to philosophers Deleuze and Guattari. As we saw in Posthuman theories, they were massive influences on both theories with their theory of assemblages, which can be defined as “a mode of ordering heterogeneous entities so that they work together for a certain time” (Müller 2015, 28). I will discuss later that in new media rhetoric, *having* can sometimes be more important than *being*. While those often correlate, there is an important distinction. *Having* friends and *being* a friend connotes different feelings of belonging. An actor is never self-contained or thoroughly non-dependent. Having dependencies is to be in a network. Latour writes that “[i]n its simplest but also in its deepest sense, the notion of network is of use whenever action is to be redistributed” (Latour 2011, 797). He exemplifies this with pointing to the Colombia shuttle that exploded in 2003, which not only points to how small differences in

actions in a network can lead to catastrophic outcomes, but also that that the shuttle was just as much in the sky as inside the NASA building, as the components required for its success was not only in its technical components in the shuttle, but also in its complex organizational body which includes all the bureaucracy, routines, roads and more (2011, 797). This is also true with non-technological related actions. For example, bees, a popular example when it comes to climate change and human-nonhuman relations. Though different, their actions as pollinators are necessary to make plants to grow. Plants are important for our survival because of food and oxygen. On the other end, human actions to use pesticides, destroy bee-habitats and pollute the air have negative consequences for the bees. There are also many other factors for bee survival; weather, sickness, bacteria, plants, non-human animals, other bugs. While this example is extremely simplified, it demonstrates how actor-networks can delve far into both micro- and macro-perspectives, and also encapsulate any and all things.

This often results in poor metaphors that look like poorly drawn circles with spiderwebs inside. Latour (2011) posits that illustrates one of the big misconceptions of networks, as they should and could never be used to draw enclosed and habitable spaces and envelopes. Nothing in the social world could ever be that stable. Networks are not simply to designate nodes and strings in the shape of a web, but also to designate “a mode of inquiry that learns to list, at the occasion of a trial, the unexpected beings necessary for an entity to exist”(Latour 2011, 799). He illustrates this point with the work of artist Tomas Saraceno. He created the artwork *Galaxies forming along filaments, like Droplets along the Strands of a Spider's Web* (fig.8), which consists of enclosed spherical units that are still entirely dependent of other enclosed spherical units, made of networks.



FIGURE 8. GALAXIES FORMING ALONG FILAMENTS, LIKE DROPLETS ALONG THE STRANDS OF A SPIDER’S WEB. ARTIST: TOMAS SARACENO (2009)

What Latour highlights as the complexity and relatability to ANT in this work, is how the artist has managed to create rhizomes with changing densities of connections “until a net ends up being indistinguishable from a cloth” (Latour 2011, 801). He continues to describe how the spheres or nets that are created are not really physical things, but created with elastic tensors that can be pulled and examined. The pulling of the tensors is the most vital, because that signifies the action in the network itself. By pulling them, one is then able to see *what else* is moving in the whole array (2011, 801), expressing the all-encompassing, always-moving nature of rhizomes.

A network is a rhizome, but a rhizome is not necessarily a network. ANT argues for the irreducibility of the different entities, and that the assemblages that form when these collide create networks. In Latours’ book *Reassembling the Social* (2005), he proposes three tests to see if a direction or test can claim partnership with ANT (2005, 10). These tests are not limiting, but can act as guidelines for navigating the sometimes confusing landscape that

is ANT. The first is examining the role granted non-human actors. He specifies that the actor needs to be 'social', that is associating with entities that form assemblages, as well as the examiner going further than merely deeming actors to be symbolic projections or possessing a naturalist type of causality. The second test is to check whether or not the direction of the explanation is stable or fluid. He asks us to see if the list (of actors) in the end of an action is the same as the beginning, showing no action, then it is not ANT. The third and final test is to distinguish between reassembly and dispersion or deconstruction of the social. Latour points to misleading views on ANTs hegemonic and Eurocentric stance, when in fact it is much more important to seek out new institutions, procedures and concept in order to reconnect the social (2005, 11). While this thesis directly references ANT and not something that is only relatable, considering whether these tests when conceiving different modes of being can potentially guide the resulting framework.

3.3.1 Mediators

It is no surprise that ANT have a multitude of uses in a multitude of fields. Williams suggests in his book *Contemporary applications of actor network theory* (2020) that ANT is becoming ever more relevant because "we live in a time on earth where ANT seems to present the best pathway towards understanding contemporary innovations, organizational changes, societal changes, and the cultural changes" (2020, 2), which to me culminates into what was described earlier as boundary shifters. Including analysing artifacts and actors as we see and know them, ANT is also useful for Black boxes (2020, 4). Black boxes being:

"[T]he way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeeds, the more opaque and obscure they become." (Latour 1999, 304)

This description is interesting considering the secrecy in which some artifacts are conceived, the language in which it is constructed and how certain artefacts are put on a pedestal, not to be looked at too closely. When black boxes are analysed, representative actants will emerge as spokespersons(/things) for those black boxes. In ANT, everything is a part of an actor-network, from the most miniscule to the most macro. No actor-network is isolated, and they are all connected, unstable, volatile and heterogeneous (Williams 2020, 52-56).

“the formation of ANT is, also in part, an episode in the history of science and technology studies, one mainly characterized by a materialist approach to agency and a constructivist understanding of truth” (Muniesa 2015, 81).

Based on ANTs perspectives on relations and associations between different actors in a network, it provides a lens for which we can analyse technology’s shaping and formation in social processes such as self-representation. Its unique position places human and non-human agents on equal terms when it comes to their effect on social processes. Comparatively to posthumanism they both reject dualisms, as ANT too rejects the dualisms subject/object and nature/society. Rather, ANT sees our very existence as one unified web of related actor-networks, and each network depends on the interconnectedness of each other. It focuses on seeing what is associated with what in the course of inquiry. The multiplicity and surprises in these associations are what creates the ‘truth conditions’ for the network(s) (Latour and Porter 2013, 88). So, if we agree that associations are not limited to individuals or humans we proceed to Latour’s next claim.

He claims that since the web came into play (and with that, the whole of creative digital artefacts), what Émile Durkheim proclaimed the two-level principle; that of individual psychology and the *sui generis* society came to an end and presented a non-individualistic grasp on the individual (Latour 2011, 805). The digitization that leads to quantifiable profiles of entities makes it possible to capture and store them, as well as leading to quantifiable AND qualitative aspects that are then easier to analyse. While the non-individualistic take on digital profiles or entities might seem to counter self-representation, I’d argue that it might in fact aid in the argument for selfhood of non-human selves. If what you base your data on is action, profiles and networks, it does not seem unreasonable at all to include Eliza, one of the first chatbots to exist (Weizenbaum 1966), or Bixby, Samsung Electronics virtual assistant based on Artificial intelligence that helps its user perform tasks using other Samsung equipment (Samsung.no n.d.), nor does exclude less personalized actants like certain digital artworks.

3.4 Comparisons

While Posthuman theories and ANT thus far seem to share some similarities, this section focuses on a few important concepts relating to the two theories that will be

important in the conceptualization and analyses. For this I have chosen four important topics or themes that are applicable to self-representation and ethos: Agency, personalization, mimesis and Networks / 'being with'. They were inspired by the book *Digital Keywords: a vocabulary of information society and culture* (Peters 2018) which contains a collection of essays that scrutinize each keyword independently, leading to rich discussions of what each keyword can mean in different contexts. It is my opinion that these four keywords are at the core of enacting ethos in digital settings, both for human *and* nonhuman actants equally.

3.4.1 Agency

Agency is a keyword that is closely related to both ANT and Posthumanism. One might first associate agency with the ability to *choose* what action to take, but it is also generally understood as the capacity to *act*. Unpacking the meaning and sense of the term seems simple but can be complex and layered, especially when considering the different ways different theories utilizes it. That is true in using any artefact, but especially of the digital kind. No matter what or who we associate with, we are met with different kinds of agencies. When considering digital artefacts, one is usually able to take one, or even several actions to choose from because of their foundations that are often built on interfaces which hyperlinks to many different options. That interactivity is a key part of digital mediums, however as mentioned previously, the options are always limited in some way or another based on the intention-for and design-of any artefact. Choosing becomes selecting different actions from a menu rather than following instinct or will, creating a different environment for agency.

To ANT, agency is more than the mere ability to choose, it represents the driving force behind any action. What makes any actor do anything? How did A transform into B? Without a driving force, there is no agency (Latour 2005, 53). These driving forces must have some form of *figuration*, which is a term that lives side by side agency in ANT. If agency is the driving force, figuration is the materialization of that force. It is "a figure, a form, a cloth, a flesh to an agency forbidding me or forcing me to do things" (Latour 2005, 54). And these formations can be abstract (like 'culture'), or figurative (like 'my father'), making it idiomorphic (having a distinctive form). As with ChatGPTs RLHF providing it agency, the discourse it engages with becomes the formation.

To broaden our understanding of figuration, Latour provides an example on fiction writers. Because they, at least in order to tell a compelling story, need to consider all possible agencies involved before any actor or actors does anything. If the writer fails to do so, the story will not be persuasive (or rather, have ethos). That is how they connect a building being 'overcome by the forest', or any character being 'called by God' (2005, 55). To exemplify with a popular icon; In Harry Potter, the wand is the figuration of the agency possessed by it, "driving" any wizard to use magic. But when any force manipulates another, it can start the action of something else. Yes, Harry controls the wand, but the wand also has agency over Harry. That is, according to Latour, not to say that the roles have been reversed, but that we need to open up to uncertainties about what is the driving force behind what and how it is exerted (2005, 60). In the same way that the notes to a song can be taken different places, the song mediates agency. That continues the ANT thought process in giving (or perceiving) all matter of things (physical and non-physical) the ability to possess agency. That does however also mean that agency is *not* necessarily a conscious thing; a *will* to make an action. Agencies that are also in disputes with other agencies will naturally provoke other agencies and withdraw others. That is to say that one agency can dispute others that typically have legitimate roles and trust, which means constantly negotiating what enacts or possesses the most persuasive ethos.

This stance on agency has received critique, mainly because it grants agency to nonhuman actors. Early critique suggested that social and natural sciences do not and should not mix, leading Collins to argue that such things should be left to natural scientists and engineers (Collins 2010). Amsterdamska claims that Latour is asking us to give up all distinctions between human and nonhuman (1990, 499), committing what Schaffer calls a heresy by attribution of purpose and will to nonhuman matter (1991, 182). Still, the debate continues. Granting some kind of agency to non-human actors is also prominent in posthuman thinking, which connects ANT to a strain of posthumanism. In relation to his apparent disdain for this kind of posthumanist thinking, Gregory accuses Latour of having anti-humanist thoughts (2014, 49), which Kipnis argues in *Agency Between Humanism and Posthumanism: Latour and his opponents* (2015) is only a half-truth because Latour does not deny humans agency, but simply examines how other things mediate that agency (2015, 47), suggesting that nonhuman actors are simply mediators. Kipnis continues to suggest that Latour has been misread in how the agentic nature of things are being perceived. All human

agency takes place through attachments, and it is that attachment that becomes agency (2015, 47). What I read in this is that critics ascribe some form of self-consciousness to agency, which Latour never states. Cognition and consciousness are simply two sides to different coins. To *want* or to *be* is not the same as *doing* or *acting*. I do however think that Kipnis puts too much weight on human involvement in thing-matter, not seeing the value of agency unless it is anthropocentric.

According to Sayes who wrote *Actor-Network Theory and Methodology: What does it mean to say that nonhumans have agency?* (2014), the agentic nature and contribution to social life by nonhuman actors can be widely regarded as four contributions or conditions (without being restrictive). 1) nonhumans function as a condition for the possibility of human society. 2) Nonhumans function as mediators. 3) Nonhumans function as members of moral and political associations. And lastly, 4) nonhumans function as gatherings of actors of different temporal and spatial orders (2014, 135). I am especially keen on the second function, as it emphasizes the need to not consider the nonhuman as intermediaries. Nonhumans do not simply replace a thing or someone's action, it adds its own discourse and modifies relations between actors. They are "changed by their circulation and change the collective *through* their circulation [...] act and, as a result, demand new modes of action from other actors" (2014, 138), positioning them with their own agency, but also self-representation and ethos.

As stated previously, posthumanism has no inclination towards explaining away how agency is possessed by humans and non-humans alike. In an interview with Pöttsch Holger, Hayles states that while the technological developments around us become more complex, it becomes increasingly obvious that agency is still possessed by the individual. However it must be seen as something that coexists with the systems it surrounds itself with, and distributed among human and non-human entities alike, similar to what Latour suggests (Holger and Hayles 2014). She continues to exemplify this by referring to the start of the global financial crisis in 2007-2008 and emphasize how because technological ecosystems and networks have become so ubiquitous, small shifts can create significant consequences where digital actors make decisions that have severe impacts (2014). These shifts and changes are made by computation, digitally, not necessarily with human initiative and thus exemplify one of technologies agencies. That does not necessarily make agency about the ability to choose, rather following ANTs notion of action above all.

Critics of this posthuman turn in redistributing agency argue that the urge to dissolve non-dualistic distinctions are flawed because these distinctions are in fact indispensable for a critical social science. In redistributing the agency, it undermines the exploitative power relations that technology exerts through human interference and creation (Hornborg 2017). One might then argue that understanding that the root of power struggles ultimately falls to human agency would also be flawed. While it is true that human agency was exerted when certain technologies were created and used, unintended (and intended) power emanating from said technology should be in its own bracket.

To consider this, we might turn to Hayles consideration of human attention. She posits that we are generally equipped with two modes: deep and hyper attention. Hayles explains that deep attention is required when one engages in a specific task or problem over an extended period of time to develop knowledge, while hyper attention requires constant gratification but is leveraged when getting overviews or when identifying certain patterns (Holger and Hayles 2014). Because the development of technological devices has leveraged hyper attention instead of deep, ways of learning has changed. As a result, the devices and artefacts that display such power must be derived from nonhuman agency.

Again, the notion of *will* often occurs when discussing agencies among critics. Hornborg asserts that having the capacity to act must be propelled by a purpose. That purpose must (according to Hornborg) necessarily be initiated by *intentions*, and the purpose presuppose a capacity for sentience and communication (2017, 98). Herein lies the disconnect I see between the posthuman (and Latour) and theorists resisting the posthuman turn in social and digital theory. Throwing communication and sentience in the same basket is nothing short of mis categorization. Hornborg argues that instead of agency, we are rather discussing consequence. And even if humans or non-human animals mistakenly treat objects as subjects, it is only a pragmatic response (2017, 98). I do however propose that only considering the consequence of nonhumans also fail to consider its own self-representation and ethos which is so deeply linked to agency, which I think is a necessary step forward in analyzing technologies position and meaning in society.

The power and influence of technology is wide. If the driving force is agency, then the algorithmic shaping and constructing of digital experiences are nothing if not a collaboration of human and nonhuman entities. When we rely on algorithms to be exposed to political discourse through Twitter trends, or when we rely on news and ads to be personalized and

responsive, we cannot only say that the human actors behind it are responsible. Of course, that necessitates a user to be the catalyst, but echoing Reyman: “algorithms exert agency through their subsequent activities, making connections and generating output that no human would be able to create or, at times, even to anticipate.” (2018, 122). Reyman discusses rhetorical agency in particular, meaning “the ability to speak and be heard, to interact and respond, and to effect change” (2018, 115). She draws on Karlyn Kohrs Campell that describe rhetorical agents as ‘points of articulation rather than originators’, drawing a somewhat similar line as ANT and Posthumanism in which the agency requires action between two or more entities. It does not need to be singular, or solitary, but can be a dynamic relationship between human and nonhuman actors. It also does not constitute a will, and gains power and influence much like anything else; through being repeated. That means that what ANT and Posthumanism defines as agency (action), is fully capable and make a good entry point into digital rhetoric.

3.4.2 Personalization

Personalization can refer to the act of tailoring an experience or discourse to an individual. Closely related to *customization*, personalization is predictive, it is *for* me (Rather than reactive, *by* me). Technologies of digitization have long since connected the computer and the personal, reacting to and predicting a user’s needs, desires and movements. *Personalization* though, is often used when explaining how algorithms gather data about users and their perceived preferences and cater each experience of a platform to each user in the form of ads, types of service and what type of content is displayed. Coveted by capitalistic venturers, it has become central to many contemporary debates. In her piece *Personalization* in the *Digital Keywords* book, Ricker Schulte writes that while distributors and developers of these technologies focus on increased agency, they often neglect the underlying goals of the institutions implementing it (Peters 2018, 242). Considering the individual or corporation behind the scenes in the creation of platforms and artefacts, goals can vary a lot. But the algorithmic processing power that fuels the mass-personalized environment feeds off making assumptions about people, making self-representations a quantifiable commodity. These goals speak to the purpose of features, but not always its

function. Function can often be a variable based on how users choose to use and perceive something.

The function of social media and other profitable media is often created around its value. If the function of a site is to collect friends, share memories, locations, likes and dislikes, then the value is in the data the user inputs. That value is created by invisible digital labor that is put in by the users. What is interesting in my approach, however, is that the function and value of the artefacts are made for different purposes. It generally shies away from typical venues for mass-personalized environments (such as social media). Because looking beyond the capitalistic drive of marketing companies and looking at artefacts that are made for the purpose of exploring, looking at, being with, technological selves have different potential, it makes sense that it should not be treated equally. Human, AI, algorithms, cyborgs, no matter the medium or context, the rhetorical value that emanates from and through Creative Digital Artefacts shifts so greatly that it necessitates a closer look at the self-representational qualities they possess, and the kind of rhetoric they emanate.

The term *personalization* itself is however preoccupied with the word “person” and the “persona”, which does not have a clear distinction as to what is the self and what the self enacted to others is. To *personalize*, however, means “to mark something to indicate that it belongs to a particular individual” (Peters 2018, 243). As the prefix of the word indicates, ‘personal’ relates to a character, which signifies an outward sign that can be analyzed. That character or outward sign (i.e. self-representation) relates through and with interactive technology. Ricker Schuler state that while personal computers became increasingly *personal*, technological agents that allowed interactivity even seemed to have *personalities*. That includes personalized features like the old Microsoft Word assistant *Clippy*, but does not need to be so obvious (Peters 2018, 246). The ways in which different functionalities and interactivity options behave and respond are often designed in a way that makes it seem like it is talking *with* the user instead of *at* the user. It is important to note that I do not advocate that technological agents nor technological selves are sentient, because there is a great difference in interpretation and reality. To mark something as belonging to a particular subject also does not necessitate a conscious subject with sentient thought, though it does open questions about morals and ethics.

In its core, personalization is closely linked to what ANT describes as translation. When technological selves and human actants interact to produce personalized experiences, it exemplifies the complex network that ANT describes. These translations examine which different actors communicate with each other, negotiate their roles and relationships in the network(s). That does, however, not account for the moral and ethical dilemmas that can arise when dealing with personalization. Because even if personalization is *for* or *with* an actant, that personalization will always have implied rhetorical implications.

The ways in how we perceive nonhumans have shifted drastically throughout the last 30 years. That is in large part due to the modes of interaction that are implemented in technology, the ever-increasing prominence of computers in contemporary life, and *how* that interaction is facilitated. It is no longer about writing the exact correct word, sentence or pressing a very specific button- it's about engagement between actants through multimodal discourse. Feminist science like posthumanism, especially through New Materialism, emphasizes the physical body in its relation to the world; how do the differences in these bodies shape experiences (Sanzo 2018)? In giving attention to the limitations of bodily experiences, it highlights how experiences are formed through bodily relations. That is also true for technological actants, where "the body" could be said to be the affordances presented for both technological actant and human actant. What kind of relationships are connected to create this type of experience? A "body" does not have to be physical; it can also be viewed as its constancy in relations, and in its relation to constraints and affordances in whatever environment it may be in. These affordances and constraints become the outward sign of rhetorical power and displays the relations that are possible or wanted.

Relations can take many directions and can take the boundaries of the body and technological selves into new spaces. Despite the body's perceived topological restraints, Fortunati writes that the body and its functions are always projected into space. To remain control of the "I" in space, the subject personalizes the space it inhabits to project their personal autonomy (Fortunati 2003). That can be done by wearing different types of clothes, wearing perfume, vocalizing something that is then projected into space, or other types of personalization. That personalization then becomes a part of any subjects personal space, self-representation and projected identity. That reasoning can also be extended to the

machine. Instead of mediating the human body, technological selves mediate themselves and personalize them through abstract and representational mediums. That could be through simple or complex visuals, audio, narrative, interactivity and more.

When using digital artefacts then, the question of personalization becomes who enters whose space? Is the body entering the technological actants space, how is that the technological actant's "body" materialized, and is the human and machines space intertwined? How do they harmonize, and if they do not harmonize, how does it create conflict? How do expectations shape the dynamic of the parties involved, and how is each actants personal space materialized?

3.4.3 Mimesis / Mirror

The words mimesis and mirror are deceptively similar, but has key distinctions. Mirrors, which is derived from the Latin word *mirare* for "to look at", are metaphors for what they reflect. Mimesis, on the other hand, describes the process of imitation or mimicry. Plato famously categorized mimesis as the lowest form of art because it is only an imitation of reality, even going so far as to describe it as deceitful (Woodruff 1992, 74). Yet despite their differences, mimesis and mirror can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Ultimately, the two are similar, but different entry points to ontology because it deals with how to be and exist.

When thinking of ways in which technology facilitates selves and self-representation, the keywords mimesis or mirror might ignite thoughts that technological selves are merely a reflection of us and not their own "selves". And if they are, then are they not just a "looking-glass self" without its own true narrative? One could argue that the very essence of *being* is mimesis. Social processes and traditions are built on mirroring our predecessors. It constructs culture, creates common reference points and is a valuable teaching tool. Cofounder of the infamous file-sharing company The Pirate Bay exclaims: "People learn by copying others. All the knowledge we have today, and all success is based on this simple fact – we are copies" (Ernesto in Fish 2016, 218). And as Fish proclaims in his essay *Mirror* (2016), the concept of mirrors are complex and appear as metaphors throughout human history; from the ancient Greek mythology of Narcissus, to the picture of Dorian Grey, to the Netflix

show *Black Mirror*. Each of these stories use mirroring or mimesis as a metaphor to how humans reflect and relate to themselves and others.

Like the representation of a pipe in Magritte's painting (*Ceci n'est pas une pipe.*), technological selves represent mediators that possess their own narrative. The pipe has an obvious originator and is a standard, static artifact, however the black boxes that surround the technological selves can impose a feeling of "self" that enters our social realm. Not knowing the ins and outs of an artefact does more than mystify, it creates wonder. Even if the pipe possesses a certain type of ethos, it is a far cry from the type of ethos technological selves possess. Because the mirroring practices that surround modern information technologies are both seen and unseen, Fish states that the data mirroring cannot be seen as simple replication of origins, but rather as a way of inserting ourselves and being with the networked world (2016, 219). Thinking like that is reminiscent of the agency that Latour presents in ANT. Not because of replication, but in the way that seen and unseen "labor" of actants are what creates representations and inserts themselves into being. Similarly, ANT might shift the approach to mirroring as it could be considered a human-centric concept and instead ask how mirroring or mimesis as a concept has the ability to change depending on the context we see it in.

Following the non-anthropocentric nature of both ANT and posthumanist thinking, I suggest that we do not try to force them into fitting human categories and concepts- but that we find and develop concepts that work with them organically. Both human and nonhuman actants must use mimesis when engaging with digital technologies, but in different ways. All data is in essence mirrored because digital information is replicated in order to be both legible and legitimate to other actors. Types of digital self-representation is mirrored in the way that information is stored and replicated through various platforms and institutions. But as Fish points out, mirrors do not make exact copies, nor does it offer realistic representation, but it offers a way of being, acting and moving in the digital world (Fish 2016, 224).

Artificial selves mirror, copy and reflect what its interactants stimulate. That is not necessarily direct copies of the others present, but is adapted to suit the current narrative or situation. Braet writes "Because the audience enjoys listening to speeches which mirror its own nature, the speaker would do well to adapt himself and what he says to the ether or

characters of the audience” (Braet 1992, 313) meaning that any discourse will indulge in mimesis in the hopes of giving an affective appeal. The mimesis works two ways; (1) digital technologies mimic human behavior, syntax and semantics, (2) human interaction with digital technology mirror their counterparts in order to get the desired response. Expecting the artefact to mimic human behavior does however have the potential to only strengthen the notion that human exceptionalism is still determining and setting the standard for behavior and being. Even if it is most often made *for* and *by* human actants.

That is to say that everything is mediated. Some things are more mediated than others, but all things are mediated. In using digital artefacts, especially those confined to a computer with a screen – the human and nonhuman interaction can be equalized because it relies on reading signs, symbols and context that are generated by someone – or thing. However, mirroring cognitive and meaning-making human behavior is not the same as actually understanding signs or any form of true understanding, at least if John Seale’s famous Chinese-room thought experiment is to be taken literally. In this, the premise is imagining a situation in which a person is stuck inside a room. Inside the room are baskets of Chinese characters and a rulebook correlating the symbols written on the texts with other symbols in the basket. If someone were to slip a note under the door with a message written in Chinese, then, the person should be able to formulate some sort of response without actually knowing the meaning behind it. His logic then is that like machines being able to formulate responses based on input and/or given knowledge without necessarily understanding the meaning behind them he, like machines, cannot think for themselves (Searle 1984). There have been many rebuttals to this thought-experiment, among other by Hutchins. Hutchins sees this as only the first step in analyzing the situation. Because it is not the human here that is the equivalent to a machine, it is the entire room. Given the surroundings the whole scene is a machine and thus humans are more like a machine after all, because we too are just products of our surroundings and knowledge based on previous input. It is also the next step in the construction of distributed cognition environments which is a constant evolution. Humans are only more sophisticated in their way to act now because they have constructed smarter environments in which to work (Hutchins in N.K. Hayles 1999, 289).

This is merely one of the oppositions to the Chinese room argument, but it displays the interest in understanding the cognitive aspects of human and non-human. According to Hayles, Searle goes so far as to reduce the human capacity to a level where computational logic is transferrable only to prove that machines only understand syntax and semantics. She understands his “reduced state of human capacity” as the natural (and only) state the computer will ever achieve (K.N. Hayles 2009). Instead of only asking what sort of mimesis technology utilizes to create discourse with humans, we also have been formed, conformed and transformed by the machines we ourselves created (K. Hayles and Lawtoo 2022, 181). As the technological actants are designed to create meaning for its human counterparts humans also create and shift meaning making practices to fit technological actants, such as how the first emoji was created with a colon, hyphen and parenthesis or the floppy disc symbolizing storage.

If mirroring is about creating meaning through the exchange of familiar behavior or symbols then Hayles proposes we ask the question of creating meaning differently, and instead ask what knowledge the computer has about its internal milieu, or its *umwelt* (world-horizon) (2019, 49). Not of its possible wires or material self, but what it “knows” about its integrated system, how it “knows” how to interpret the algorithms and carry them out. It is the “functions, architectures, and procedures that enable these purposes to be achieved” (N.K. Hayles 2019, 50), which also enables it to cope with ambiguous data. That does not mean it understands it, but can create meaning *through* these processes. That is mimesis, and that is how computers create meaning and we, in turn, understand it.

3.4.4 Networks / ‘Being With’

In contrast to posthuman theories, the analytical tool of actor-network theory can be used to analyse networks back to the neolithic period and onward (Williams 2020, 59). But technological innovations have opened up many possibilities, among other the ease of which one can navigate back and forth. That creates what Latour describes as a discontinuity, because “the less you can go back to the individual transaction, the more tempting it is to give to the aggregate a substantial reality” (Latour 2011, 804). Because of how digital ecologies move and act, we are introduced instead to a much smoother continuity that is

easier to describe as networks. That also means that navigational tools take centre stage and have gained significance that was not previously there, at least not to such an extent.

Williams explains, in *The Robots are Here* (2020), how technological tools went from something nascent to gaining more potential, shifting the power dynamics of technology and humanity, creating symbiotic and equal relationships between the two which made both parts active, agent and spokespersons for actor-networks (Williams 2020, 55). Especially since the second industrial revolution when the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) were developed did ANT and its relation to self-representation in digital artefacts begin.

The networks that encompass all things that are, both conceptually and materially, are what makes up the whole social world according to ANT. There are no small parts, only small actors, and as such it would seem that even if there is usually something that is considered the 'spokesperson', or what Williams calls the focal actant, of a network, if we are to enable ANT to its fullest, we should drop the veil and expose the inner workings of these technological actants. That does, however, seem counterintuitive to my thesis. ANT ignores inequality of actors, but in order to embrace the focal actors we must lean in on the inequalities. One could even say that my thesis verges on something that works against the notion of dispersed networks, as I argue that we should focus on the rhetorical implications on those networks that disguise themselves as whole. Instead, we employ the approach to translation as proposed by Shiga, where the translation process ultimately must lead to some entity being a focal actant (Shiga in Williams 2020, 55) which then can be the subject of analysis.

I aim to highlight the focal actant and question how the relations of both human and non-human actants influence the rhetorical implications. The networks evolve through the social interplay of actors, and as Williams argues, are diverse, unstable and dynamic because of the initial human instigation that pushes boundaries as to what drives our own conception of rhetorical persuasion to mean different things. Williams also posits that human influenced actor-networks often emerge themselves as being the focal actor (Williams 2020, 52), which is not necessarily true in this case. Nevertheless, establishing that the technological actant erupts as focal actant of a network means acknowledging its place in a wider network, which is helpful when demonstrating its place in any social sphere.

Like ANT, the posthuman mindset often revolve around networks, or assemblages, of kinds. While ANT focus on the sociotechnical networks and the negotiation of agency between actants, the posthuman instead position the assemblage as the “ad hoc groupings of diverse elements” (Bennett 2010, 23) that is dependent on the “collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces” (Bennett 2010, 21). As such, our contemporary technological moment could be best characterized as “about adaptation, the fit between organisms and their environments, recognizing that both sides of the engagement (humans and technologies) are undergoing coordinated transformations” (N.K. Hayles 2012, 81). According to Hayles, our ‘being with’ and engaging with networks consists of humans and nonhumans that are in an ongoing process that creates complex relationships between actants.

As posthumanism is literally a ‘*post*-humanist’ reconceptualization of what being a human is, means that it is continuously in flux, which makes it difficult to give it fixed and stable images and conditions. A constant ‘being with’ and ‘becoming’ creates what Braidotti calls for a negative definition; that we indicate what it is *not* rather than what it *is* (Braidotti in Daigle and McDonald 2022, 4). Instead, posthumanism elicits new modes and ethos for exploration and new expression of life. This life intermingles with all rhizomatically, which is posthumanism and ANTs strongest connection in terms of macro- and -micro perspective. This network, or ‘being with’ is what Haraway names the Chtulucene. Insisting that we move away from the Anthropocene and Capitalocene, Haraway suggests that the past, present and what is to come should bear the name Chtulucene. Not named after the Lovecraftian monster, rather as a homage to the tentacular powers of the earth and the forces within (2016, 101).

Haraway states that the current task in the times we are currently living in means ‘making oddkin’: “that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become – with each other or not at all.”(2016, 4). Her focus is, unsurprisingly given her background in biology, most often on human and non-human animals, arguing fiercely for antiracist, anticolonial, anticapitalist, proqueer feminist movements, but I dare say making kin of and with technological agents is no far stretch. In fact, Haraway herself states that having theories that are big enough to gather up the complexities yet still keeping edges open for new and surprising connections are necessary

to keep a conversation thriving (2016, 101). In making kin, or oddkin, we embrace the kinship and conjunction all entities possess; “who and whatever we are, we need to make-with-become-with, compose-with-the earth-bound” (D. Haraway 2015, 161).

Chapter Four: Defining an Artefact

4.1 Introduction

Posthuman and Actor-Network theory challenge notions of what we should interpret as belonging in our social reality, and as such required new conceptions of self-representation. However, these conceptions also require vessels, or “bodies” of self, which is here dubbed Creative Digital Artefacts. As this thesis’ main concern is whether or not the rhetorical nature of man/machine can be interlocked and expanded on the lack of theory concerning that, the term artefact and digital artefact must be examined to create a proper taxonomy of the term Creative Digital Artefact. When considering the implications of artefact becoming something more-than artefact, a thorough look into its meaning is necessary. Understanding and describing exactly what makes these artefacts so unique in its relation to how they are perceived is important, because without a solid baseline, further analysis can become vague. Following are the steps taken to get to its conceptualization.

4.2 What is an Artefact?

Conveying the general notion of what a standard *artefact* is, Katz writes:

“Consider the character of artefacts as human creations. Artefacts are conceived and designed to meet the demands of human need or purpose; they are tools for the achievement of human tasks. Not all artefacts actually fulfil the purposes for which they were intended; often, artefacts designed for one purpose are used in unforeseen or different contexts. Nevertheless, the artefact would not exist at all if some purpose had not been foreseen for it; artefacts are created to meet a specific human need.” (1993, 223).

That description can be problematic. Even though it is often assumed to mean any kind of object intentionally made for humans, this definition is way too broad, and though we usually use the term to encompass tangible objects, objects made intentionally can mean any number of things – tangible or abstract, like a computer and its software. This definition also presumes that artefacts must be human made, which is soon to be seen only as half-

truth if anything. Other, more standard, definitions assume that artefacts are made intentionally and with a purpose (Hilpinen 1992). Professor of philosophy Beth Preston notes that while this simpler definition, rooted in Aristotle's distinction between things that exist by nature and things that exist by craft, make up a standard definition that must satisfy three conditions:

1. They must be intentionally produced.
2. They must involve modification of materials.
3. They must be produced for a purpose (Preston 2022).

Preston also writes that there are several flaws in these conditions, one which I find especially interesting which is that these conditions do not rule out the possibility that some things made by non-human animals are artefacts. This is interesting because even though any AI, robot, algorithm or cyborg is already (by the previous definition) an artefact, it is also the creator of artefacts. She goes on to note that the insistence on a strict definition of artefact and a strict separation of constructed artefacts and nature might very well be obsolete at this point in time (2022). Doing most anything considered natural now requires some form of artefact, in one shape or another (e.g. sleeping and eating requiring the usage of a bed, or utensils). This does not mean the term is unnecessary, just that a taxonomy of different artefact types should provide specification we can use to describe and analyse. As this thesis moves forward, the need to classify different kinds of artefacts become not just important but necessary because of the different rhetorical value they have the potential of presenting. Artefacts like utensils carry with them their own rhetoric, but other kinds may not be so utilitarian. Recent inventions present us with artefacts that's purpose is being able to mimic human behaviour, as well as artefacts capable of creating new and different artefacts. That necessitates a look at how we use and build terms and categorizations.

4.3 What About Digital Artefacts?

Referring to the origin of the word, Peters state that the human species have always been digital in some way:

“[...] building tools that count, index, and manipulate the world is almost unique to the anthropoid species – those higher primates with digital tools built right into their hands. While counting $1 + 1 = 2$ on our fingers is computationally exact, to do so is to engage in higher abstraction: without a unit or referent, the number “2” remains a quantity without qualities in the real world.” (Peters 2018, 104)

In recent years though, the world *digital* has gained new meanings and connotations. We use the word as a prefix to many things, like “digital literacy”, “digital culture”, and “digital communication” to state that whatever comes after is being narrowed down. In its purest form, digitality refers to data being expressed as series of 1s and 0s that creates abstractions to be interpreted by a machine to be displayed in various fashions. Coming from the word digit, these digits are made to point, index and reference objects at a distance. Once they do that, they are able to make profound changes in systems that encompass a large part of our social reality. As a prefix to something however, the connotations and meanings change. For example, the study of digital culture is “the study of social, cultural, ethical and aesthetic aspects of information- and communication technology” (UIB 2023), but digital literacy is about any ones’ proficiency in evaluate the quality and communicate information through various digital platforms. Defining something as a digital artefact then seems vague and less than sufficient.

In their book *Artifact kinds* (2014), Franssen et al. argue that redefining artefacts can be problematic because disassembly and reassembly of artefact components to make a clear identity condition for that artefact is too dependent on the people making its purposes for that artefact, and their state of mind. Artefacts are their own category of things, as they are not naturally occurring like humans or animals (2014, 1), meaning that they are constructed for a purpose, as pointed out by Preston previously.

Discussing other aspects when considering what an artefact is, Franssen et al. point out an important thinker that discusses the complexities of what an artefact is, could be and is not. They refer to Thomas Hobbes who made the famous reference to the ship of Theseus and whether or not that remains the same ship despite having its boards and planks replaced over time because of wear and tear (2014, 3). One of the main elements of an artefact that Hobbes’ discusses relates to the ability to assemble and reassemble an artefact (whereas for natural entities disassembly would mean ceasing to exist) (2014, 4). But really,

the same can be true for most digital artefacts. Disassembling components crucial to its function also in a way negates its existence. One could also argue that even simply removing the power supply does the same, even if re-introducing it would bring back what was lost. Disassembling and reassembling digital artefacts, even with a minor change, could change its entire function to the point of recategorization.

The categorization I am conceptualising is important because too general a term would only create more confusion, and a too distinct one would not encompass enough. I theorize that with the emergence and popularity of natural language processors like ChatGPT, we need a specific categorization for artefacts that have different *purposes*, but similar *effects* that needs to have separate frameworks. To borrow an example from Franssen et al.:

“[It] is exactly at the general level of “ship” or “clock” that people despair of formulating unifying or organising principles that serve to identify any ship or clock as an instance of a more general class.[...] Whether or not something counts as a clock or a ship will often be settled by convention, which brings us back to the mind-dependence of artefact categories” (2014, 7).

So, a digital artefact is also not specific enough, because something being digital does not necessarily mean facilitating something that has the *effect* of being perceived as a self, all it does so far is signify an artefact that has a function (point, index, reference), and needs electrical components and a network to do that function. As will be discovered later in relation to ANT, Latour proposes that the more digital things become, the *less* virtual and the *more* material they become (2011, 802). Meaning that the materiality lies in its dependencies of survival, or of existing at all. Like the internet not functioning without antennas, Zoom functioning without a physical computer or phone, or even a server to host.

This does however mean that even though the terms ‘artifact’ and ‘digital artefact’ alone is not specific enough because of its too-broad applicability, more precise wording can alleviate confusion and present entities of substance. Clearly the prefix *digital* can mean any number of things: “Blogs,” “wikis,” “webpages,” “style sheets,” interfaces,” and (object) “codes” are other examples of what we can broadly describe as “digital artefacts” (Ekbja 2009, 2555), Ekbja notes in his article trying to find a unitary answer as to what a digital

artefact is, as the vast number of what can be constituted a digital artefact is equally too broad and vague as the term artefact, leaving us yet another classification difficulty. He suggests treating digital artefacts as quasi-objects as used by Latour (1987) and Serres (1980) meaning objects that are neither quite natural nor social. They are quasi because they cross boundaries, but also because they are “representations of social desires that utilize objects in order to bring about goals of social organization” (Day in Ekbia 2009, 2565). Here I find a starting point to understanding how else a categorization of something as technical as artefacts can also be performative, representative and social. Though they do not use the concept in the exact same way, Ekbia find common ground in that quasi-objects are neither object nor subject as they are what borders the two, making mediators out of intermediates, just as Latour suggests as they “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” (2005, 39). Drawing on ANT, Ekbia suggests that digital artefacts can be understood by their relation to other digital entities. This is expressed through;

- Activities of justification: Where the artefact goes through processes of testing content and values which are then discussed and negotiated.
- Qualification, which takes the artefact and connects it to already established and stable artefacts, creating linkage with networks.
- Binding, which I understand to be the way in which each artifact now ‘lives’ or acts in synchrony with these networks over time (Ekbia 2009, 2564).

In addition to these qualification steps, the digital should also refer to the contexts in which a work comes into being, meaning that there must be some underlying code manifesting an output that engages with an outside source. Now that we are beginning to get a better sense of what a digital artefact is, we can begin to collect pieces of what could categorize artefacts that not only relates to other digital artefacts, but with other entities in meaningful ways through textual representations of selves. Even though both digital and artefact have an ordinary understanding of what it is (although vague), a more precise term will open up possibilities of new approaches.

4.4 Creative Digital Artefacts

If we circle back to the case of the ship of Theseus, Franssen et al. makes the observation that in the case of the disassembly and reassembly of the ship, it in fact means that there are two candidates for the position of 'original ship'; the one which hold all the original parts, and the one who has had its original components replaced. They position this as showcasing the ephemeral and non-constitutive nature of the ship's existence. What is the original ship is dependent on who is the judge, making the case for Franssen et al. that whatever exists should exist independently of what we think about it (2014, 6). In the same vein, a program or software is there no matter what we think, although it has to be activated in some way to reach its full form and potential. The case could be made then that the building blocks of a digital artefact and the perception of it is indeed dependent on the person looking. That is how we judge others, and that is how we can judge other types of selves. This mind dependence might result in an artefact "becoming another thing" as the perception changes (2014, 7), or even still becoming a thing perceived as a self. That does require an artefact capable of changing and moulding depending on context, and change can be creative as it (1) entails the *generation* of products(s) (tangible or intangible), (2) creates *novel* products (original, *unconventional*) and (3) they must be *appropriate* (valuable, useful) (Walia 2019, 239). Change is being able to disassemble and reassemble, similarly to how we disassemble and reassemble a side of ourselves depending on who we talk to or what we do. Changing creatively is adjusting to the networks and entities around us.

The question is; what kind of functions, relationships and traits must exist for the kind of artefacts I am envisioning? Like 'artefact' and 'digital artefact', the trouble is not inclusion but exclusion. Remaining open to new influxes of artefact kinds, but exclusive enough to not include generic types of social media platforms, one-dimensional electronic artworks, or machines that function with limited variations . Vega-Encabo and Lawler state that when thinking of new artefactual kinds, an easy solution would be to consider the intentions under which they were made. That could be a mistake, especially when considering works of art, as they often do not have a specific function (intended or not), nor are they often experienced or used in the intended way (2013, 115-116). Identification of artefacts can instead be done by either identifying it based on general traits of an individual with a certain function to other individuals with the same function, or through the generalization of these traits to objects created with the same intention (2013, 110). So,

when defining an artefact that has the potential to become a thing perceived as a self with its own discourse, and seeing that self in relation to others, I am reminded of rhetorical theory that pertains to how we are used to seeing and understanding rhetorical relations. Namely *The Rhetorical Triangle*; a term coined by James Kinneavy, author of *A Theory of Discourse* (1971) inspired by Aristoteles *Rhetoric*.

4.4.1 The Rhetorical Triangle

Defining a creative digital artefact when looking into the self-representational must consider the rhetorical relations and aspects of these artefacts. While there is always a rhetorical aspect to any situation, using that as a way to measure whether or not they qualify to enter the category is the first step in placing it. As the theory of self-representation of digital artefact stands, that means that using the rhetorical triangle as an entryway into the hermeneutics of a Creative Digital Artefact may fall short, which brings forth an exploration of how it *could* look.

As the illustration shows (fig.9), the rhetorical triangle consists of the speaker, the audience and the subject, as well as the surrounding context. In terms more relatable to visual and material objects, one might instead use the terms creator, viewer/user and object. Often, that is juxtaposed with the rhetorical proofs of ethos (the character of the speaker), pathos (nature of the audience) and logos (representing the facts and evidence of the subject at hand). However, as digital platforms are notoriously famous for taking the leap from one-to-many broadcasting to many-to-many, I suggest that also shifted the balance of audience, speaker, and subject. Still, it is used in analytical and exploratory texts that specifically bases their strategies on the rhetorical triangle (Talaue 2020; Davis 2012; Engbers 2018). Of course, I do not dispute its efficiency, appeal or usefulness in all aspects, but like *artefact* and *digital artefact*, it projects binaries or understandings that do not correlate with certain types of discourse or rhetors.

As will be discussed later, what can be defined as technological actants could and should now be recognized as actants of self-representation in their own right. Algorithms (often seen as the message itself) are made to interpret input and generate output (audience/speaker), but they are also in the position of having their own voice

(speaker/message). Like Jessica Reyman argues “algorithms [...] hold the ability to speak and be heard, to interact and respond, and to effect change.” (2018, 123), and so they are part of not one, or two but *three* parts of the rhetorical triangle. Obviously, nothing is as simple as being divided into three separate categories, and understanding of the rhetorical triangle should after investigation become nuanced and complex. Despite that, the categorization of audience and speaker imply

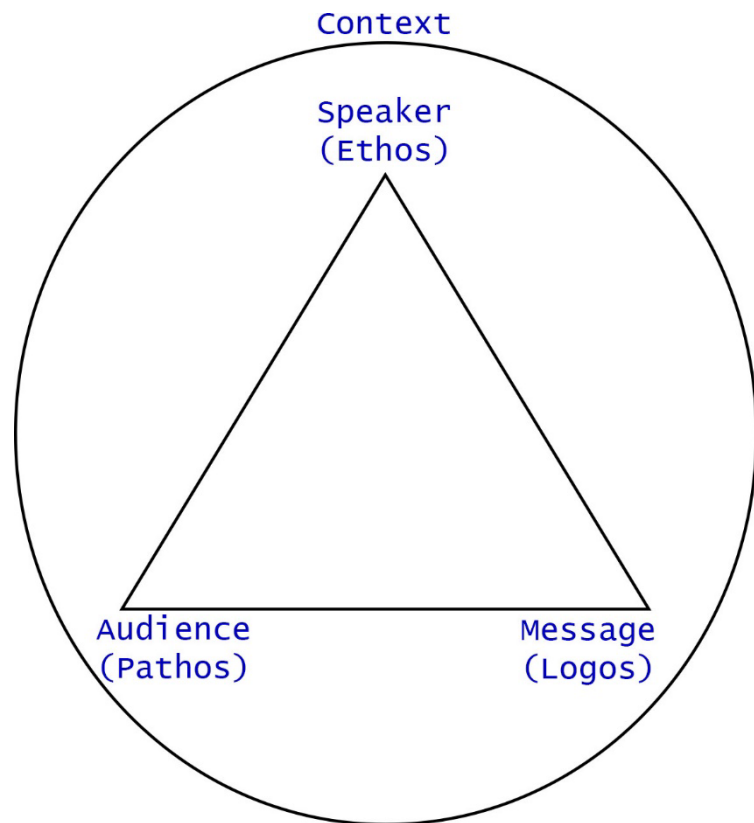


FIGURE 9 THE CLASSIC RHETORICAL TRIANGLE

human distinction as well as implying that there is always a single, static entity behind any message. It also implies a power relationship between the audience and sender that is likely to be one-sided. Developing a framework that speaks with and through audience and speaker simultaneously seems to better fit digital artefacts in general, but specifically for my purpose of defining artefacts that facilitate self-representations.

One of the main issues with the rhetorical triangle is that it only somewhat draws attention to the interactional aspect of the communication. It states that there is a sender and audience, and because of that some form of interaction must take place, but the difference with how we experience communication and interact now is worlds apart. Yes, one-to-many is now often many-to-many, but the platforms that facilitate this are of more, if not equal, importance. We need to include questions like: How is this artefact facilitating

mine and others experience? How does this artefact allow me to perform? What kind of narrative does it expect, and what kind of narrative will it allow? Is it speaking *with* and *through* me, and how does it speak on its own behalf?

Another contention in what could justify a new framework for analyzing self-representation and ethos is the question of the message itself. What lies behind this is the difference between creator and created. When creating a framework that follows the non-dualistic nature of both Actor-Network and Posthuman theories, there must follow a discussion on what qualifies as a sender of a message, and when that message becomes a sender itself. Because we are used to thinking about a single entity as the original sender of messages (i.e., human or institutional messages), we fail to consider the 'offspring' of those entities. Meaning; humans create

artefacts, and through those artefacts they produce discourse, artefacts in turn can also make artefacts and text that produces its own discourse. What becomes increasingly obvious is that while the divide between human and non-human in terms of rhetoric power is increasingly diffusing, there



FIGURE 10 VIRTUAL SPECULUM. CARTOON FROM NORWEGIAN FEMINIST JOURNAL, NYTT OM KVINNEFORSKNING. NO. 3, 1992.

also needs to be attention given to the separation of creator and created which is also non-distinctive to human and non-human actants alike. I will illustrate my example with an analysis by Haraway (2018). She proposes that we are in an echo chamber and a house of mirrors, materializing the promise of life itself in the fusion of art, science and creation. She exemplifies this with a cartoon by Anne Kelly she (Haraway) dubs *Virtual Speculum* (fig.10).

It is a caricature of the famous painting *Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo. In Michelangelo's painting, God and Adam both reach towards each other as God bestows life upon the first man. In Kelly's version, a woman reaching for a computer takes Adams place. In Gods stead, a computer that displays a digital fetus in its amniotic sac. She is not Eve, and the computer is not God. Instead, the woman is a female Adam who is "in direct relation to the source of life itself" (2018, 175). Machines like sonographs, computer screens and televisions present versions of ourselves previously unseen, but still known in our minds eye

or behind closed doors (like the fetus). Not just in image, but through voice and touch is life brought into life on screen. Fathers and mothers bond emotionally over seeing the fetus on screen, and the bonding that happens in Kelly's comic also "projects subjects and selves; the touch at the keyboard is generative – emotionally, materially and epistemologically" (D. Haraway and Goodeve 2018, 177). The sonograph fuses body and machine, mediating the cyborg we become as we rely on the machine in order to fully realize ourselves. Even if there is no actual fetus, the visual perception of what we think is "real" suggests a reality that is material, embodied, and still imaginary. The woman and computer/fetus symbolizes interactive visual technology; "reach out and touch someone[/thing]; this is the long-distance call" (D. Haraway and Goodeve 2018, 184). The fetus has many different connotations that it can symbolize that isn't just a human child. Haraway points to contemporary European and U.S cultures where the fetus can function as icon for configurations of people, family, nation, origin, choice, life and future (2018, 175), also imparting the importance of using metaphorical language to impart meaning. The computer displaying the fetus can thus suggest a myriad of other things related to its context in the image; creator, author, embodied, subject/object, transcendence.

Like the *Creation of Adam* and Kelly's caricature, the image visualize authorship; God creates Adam, the female Adam touches the keyboard that is imbued with the generative power of the machine. The machine is embodied by the fetus, the woman, but also itself. God is the author of Adam, and yet he is his own subject. The same can be said for Creative Digital Artefacts in which reproduction, embodiment, authorship and remixing are key factors. Questions regarding whose self-representation any output is responsible for can generate great uncertainties in who the author of any digital artefact is. Merely writing the script or building the machine is not enough to claim it (how it is being perceived) or anything it makes as your own. If a program is told to produce random outputs based on a certain database, that program becomes the author of those outputs, making created (the random outputs) out of creator (the script). Or does it? Contemporary debates regarding the authorship of artificially generated art, such as OpenAIs tool the Dall-E 2 image generator, are creating heated debates as to the rightful owner of the generated art pieces (Chayka 2023), contentions about its racial and gender biases (Zhou and Nabus 2023; Pethig and Kroenung 2023), and its potential to empower information and disinformation campaigns (Mishkin 2022). In any case, the previous conception of such debates will surely color the

perception such artefacts generate as it is being used and can harm or help its ethos accordingly. Even if these debates exist, these artefacts produce outputs that are part of the selves involved and affect their credibility and authenticity.



FIGURE 11 IMAGE GENERATED BY DALL-E, APRIL 13 2023

That creates questions regarding creativity, which poses the question: What is creativity? Does creation have to be *felt*? Does it have to be *original*? Saying someone's creative ideas or work is creative can have positive and negative connotations alike, and yet creativity is hard to describe. If it is the ability to create something, a mechanical arm in a factory is creative. If it refers to the ability to be problem solving, an algorithm could be employed. Is AI just an extension of the

engaging actants creativity? If I tell Dall-E to produce "an abstract impressionist painting in the style of Paul Klee of a squirrel eating a donut" (fig.11), is the resulting image the engaging actants, the algorithms or a shared collaboration of the artists the billions of images the AI gathered in order to make it? Questions like these have create frustrations, especially when it interferes with artists' integrity, their source of income and the dubious means of acquisition that surfaces when that work is repurposed.

Creativity could also be about cognition. Hayles proposes a rethinking of cognition in her book *Unthought, the Power of the Cognitive Unconscious* (2017), and suggests that the dominant view of consciousness as the sole drive or human cognition is flawed. Cognition is "a much broader capacity that extends far beyond consciousness into other neurological brain processes; it is also pervasive in other life forms and complex technical systems" (2017, 9), and exists beyond consciousness as she dubs it *nonconscious cognition* (2017, 9). Similarly, in *an inquiry into modes of existence* (2013), Latour questions our ontology towards technology. He writes that even the landscape of which technology has shaped for thousands of years has always lacked philosophies of technology. Is it because we know that

technology is nothing but a heap of convenient and complicated methods? Simply that there is nothing there to think (2013, 210)? Nevertheless, arguing about the intelligence or rational thought of systems merely obfuscated what I believe to be the true culprit of self-representation, which is *perception, creativity and relation*. All things that are not necessarily *conscious*.

I relate this to Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic that states that meaning is first created in dialogue. Bakhtin believed that there is no inner life, only meaning created through discourse that contained the potential of an other as well as the potential for multiple meanings (White 2014, 227). Meaning that *meaning* is created, and convictions of credibility, ideologies and truth is created in the meeting of minds and thus, I believe, can also be related to alternative "minds". Though he positions 'real' and 'concrete' acts as one of human individuals encountering each other (Bakhtin in Steinby and Klapuri 2013, xv), Brandist remarks that the Russian word for the 'event' (*sobytie*) of the encounters relates to co-being with two or more subjects (Brandist in Steinby and Klapuri 2013, xvi), which Steinby and Klapuri argue excludes the encounters of a singular subject with an objects (2013, xvi). However, I suggest that once we treat subjects and object as equal partners in discourse as suggested by Latour and Hayles, we can relate intersubjectivity, which refers to the common culture shared and understood by actants, to the discourse that emerges with and through subject/object.

Bakhtin is interested in the ethical responsibility that arises in these events. The ethical subject can only exist if it is autonomous in the sense of being able to make choices (Steinby and Klapuri 2013, xvi). But if we see artefacts as 'beings', we can also see ethics in them. If we remove the ethical responsibility and answerability towards others, that does not negate a 'being' that *does*. And that doing will always come with its own implications that might be perceived as ethical. That is why interaction (some kind of dialogue or discourse using language or action) and the narrative in which we find that discourse ('event') is so important in my reconceptualization of a rhetorical triangle.

Now we may begin the concrete reconceptualization of the rhetorical triangle (fig. 12). As is evident in the current version, the rhetorical discourse it encapsulates can easily portray a static baseline that should be fluid. Rarely is a discourse in stasis, as even the absence of discourse is still discourse and has rhetorical affect. That is made evident through

Actor-Networks living networks that must always be in action and moving. A static network is a dead entity, meaning that action, discourse and relation will always be evident and important. Especially considering non-human agents that do not always exist in the same “neutral” space as humans. The act of making material that which performs and creates discourse necessitates some form of performance. That performance is at the heart of any rhetorical discourse, determining the persuasive appeal of the representational aspects.

Performance and interaction are similar, but different in the way that interaction highlights the action taken by and between entities, and performance about the fluid process that happens in between action that activates and builds relationships.

As Black says in *The Second Persona* “The quest for identity is the modern pilgrimage. And we look to one another for hints as to who we should become” (1970, 165). We also look to artefacts for the same function, and we find in those artefacts other identities.

Slightly different from the original triangle, I have positioned narrative instead of context to encapsulate all rhetorical discourse. They encapsulate information of the story any subject/object find themselves in, and information on everything around that story. While context and narrative are both fluid; just like self-representation and ethos. Marco Caracciolo (2022) proposes that narratives have had an instrumental part in the survival of societies through its quality of passing down information about ways of being through retelling of values and norms. They also function as guides to maneuver social landscapes. However, narrative is also often assumed to be directly linked to human experience, something posthuman theorists in particular have sought to argue against. That is not necessarily the case. For example, writer of *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and*

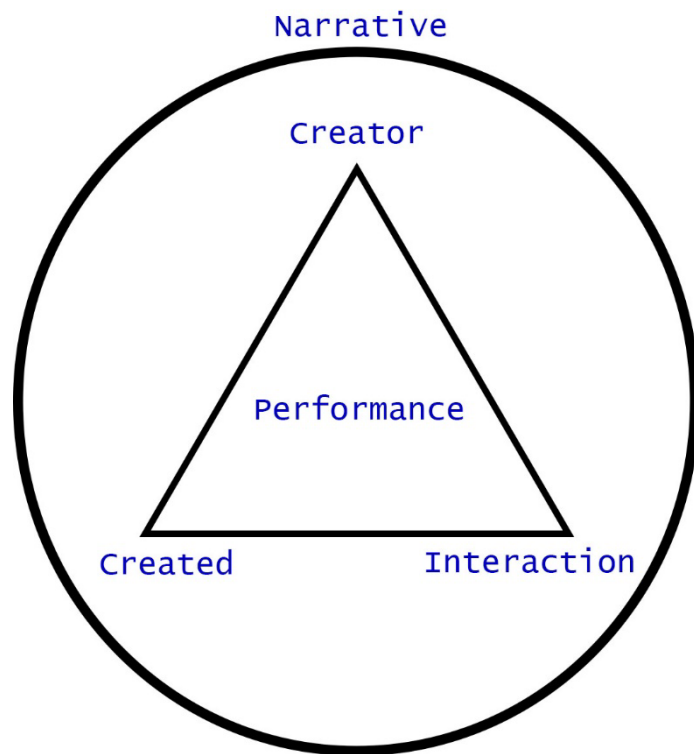


FIGURE 12 RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE RHETORICAL TRIANGLE

Systems (2008) Bruce Clarke argues that themes of metamorphosis can function as a way to decenter the human depending on the themes and forms of a narrative:

“Systems have tales to tell because they have to tell tales – literally, they must sequentially select and connect the elements of a medium in a continuously viable way – to keep going. Narratives of posthuman metamorphosis turn literally and figuratively on matters of autopoietic (dis)continuation.” (Clarke 2008, 7)

As I have argued through cognition as creativity, and as I have argued through Wilson earlier, we experience ourselves through our ‘doing’ in the world (Wilson 2017). We cannot just be, we must *do*, and doing produces a sequence of events or experiences that becomes a narrative. Machines and technological selves exist *in* that narrative, and so they also become part of it. Not as prop, but as subject/object. Narrative often relies on metaphors which can bridge the divide between the human world and other modes of being. Though different in many fundamental ways, the body-as-machine-metaphor originating in the 1500s started blurring the lines between organic matter and thinking through “levers, ropes and pulleys” (Nesse 2016). The narrative thus consists of metaphors and events that make up the narrative’s *doing* in the world.

Performance is also inspired by the mimetic quality of our own and technology’s being in the world. Lawtoo writes that any perspective entails looking into the affective, embodied and relational qualities that inform the mimesis that hails back to its classical meaning of actor and performance in antiquity (K. Hayles and Lawtoo 2022, 183). That links the three corners of the triangle: creator, created and interaction. The interaction is inspired by Latourian action in networks, with an extension of Bakhtin’s dialogic “meaning is created in discourse”. Without interaction, without some sort of discourse (in its widest sense); there is no meaning, there is no self to project or interpret.

That leaves the created-creator conundrum, which of course is intrinsically linked to an interaction of some sort. Based off Haraway’s analysis of *Virtual Speculum* and rhizomes, assemblages and networks, it highlights the connection between actants. It is interpretable as referring to the human catalyst (creator) that made the artefact (created), but also the artefact (creator) creating discourse (created) as a performance of self, the

human/nonhuman (creator) producing metaphors, audio, visuals or more to relay some form of self that is up for interpretation (created), which boils down to an instigator (creator) creating something that was not there before (created) through interaction.

4.4.2 Definitions

Now that we have established some baselines for how a rhetorical triangle could look like while remaining true to the dissolution of the human/nonhuman binary, a taxonomy for what an artefact of the creative kind might be described as could look like this:

First, a Creative Digital Artefact is *generative, oscillating, and creative*. Thus creating a textual manifestation of selves. They do not need to use verbal or written language, but can communicate through metaphors, signs, sounds, and motion.

Second, it unites and connects actants, in the sense that a cyborg is manifested in its relation to non-biological parts, and that clusters of networks meet, interact and join with one another.

Third, it is a vessel of a myriad of functions that is perceived as a whole, thus revealing the technological actant as the focal actant.

Fourth, it projects a *being-in-the-world*, in that it connects and is connected to other actants, but it has a specific voice of its own. It is *performative*, as it changes through interaction (an actant enters), and through non-interaction (actant leaves). They become, as inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, *objects of experience*.

Fifth and finally, a Creative Digital Artefact must be able to change outputs depending on different connections; It is reactive to its surroundings. Whether by sensors or input, an output that is reflective of that particular data must be generated. That does not mean that it has to be 'accurate' or 'fitting', though that will naturally affect the perception of it and its ethos.

These traits or descriptors result in textual manifestations of self that is then up for rhetorical interpretation.

Chapter Five: Self-representation and Rhetoric

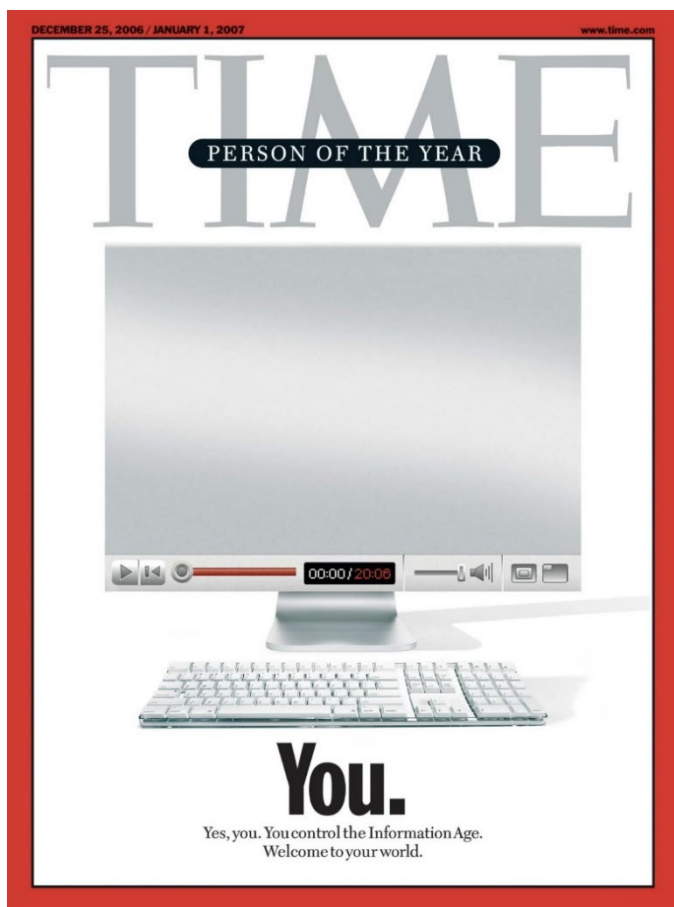


FIGURE 13. COVER OF TIME MAGAZINE DECEMBER 25, 2006.

5.1 Self-representation

Self-representation in itself is a much-discussed term, especially in the last centuries as selfhood and modes of self-representation have become increasingly prominent in most aspects of digital culture. Figure 13 shows the official choice for Time's Person of the Year award in 2006 that went to "You" in recognition of the millions of people who contribute to user-generated content online (Grossman 2006). In 2013, the *Oxford Dictionaries* proclaimed "selfie" as its word of the year (Brumfield 2013).

These are just a few moments in modern time that explicitly shows the attention and care given to what

is now, by many means, the focus of the century: self-exploration, identity and selfhood.

There are many ways in which we experience and see ourselves in digital media and through digital artefacts. The most obvious being through social media and selfies, but video games, digital art, VR and more are all part of a much broader spectrum of artefacts used to experience ourselves and others. Interdisciplinary scholar and artist Ace Lehner proposes that in a Western European and North American art-historical context, there has been a shift in power-relationships regarding who hold the power to self-image (2021, 3). His focus here is on the virtue of selfies as a new mode of self-representation, which is a big part of modern self-representation, but he also opens up a line of questioning regarding who holds the power to represent any type of self at any given point? If we stop and consider the many

types of selves in our sphere, we can “de-anthropocentrize” our field of view and start encompassing different forms of selves.

5.1.1 Sense of Self

Like Lehner suggests, new technology has introduced new types of affordances in the control of self-representations. While written and oral accounts originate straight from an individual, portraits of ‘self’ was previously more often than not a product of an artist for hire, as well as also being made in and with traditional and established materials and visual traditions. That is especially true in Western and North American art-historical contexts (2021, 3). Self-portraits were often focused on depicting a likeness as true to life as possible and had standard formats, like from the waist or chest up. The likeness was important because ideologically, it was bound up in cultural beliefs that through an accurate representation, one could convey the essence, or soul, of a person (Lehner 2021, 5).

The portrait represents a mode of self-representation that is often seen as static and, in some ways, formal, as it often relies on recognized conventions in a certain culture and was frequently the product of special events. But as we have experienced through selfies and other modes of self-representation, procuring images of oneself or others has become ordinary, a humdrum event that is more a trophy of place than a noble projection of self. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman presents a view of self-presentation that focuses on information *given*, and information *given off* by each individual in, as the title suggest, everyday life. He states that the first involves verbal symbols or their substitutes to convey the information that the communicator wants to put forward. In online mediums, one could say that this is strictly the textual or descriptive imagery uploaded into various mediums. The second involves “a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor, the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way” (Goffman 1959, 120). I understand this as the underlying intentions of the information displayed, which might or might not be deceitful. However, in digital culture, it might also be interpreted as the signals being given off by the surroundings of the information. He does however go on to say that people must and will judge a person’s actions and information given by factors like what is already known, the situation of the encounter and who is listening. Any person can and probably has

given off signals that contradict the information output, which can greatly affect the views of that self-presentation.

Goffman often relates the self as a performed character, up for interpretation by themselves and anyone present. The self is a character that dramatically rises diffusely from a scene presented. The self is produced and maintained by societal establishments and expectations, made real by the audiences' interpretive activity. In that sense, the self can then also be something that can be made, either as a person trying to become another, or as an artefact projecting a performance of self. Though Goffman wrote his text in 1959 well before the time of the internet and technological innovations we see today, we see here that the ideas are still applicable in online mediums today. Though rhetor and audience might be diffuse at times, they are still the same in that they come with certain implied rules and expectations and that they only become "real" through interpretive function. In digital culture, these signals and impressions that the rhetor emits are determined not only by the mediation choices made by the individual, but also in large part by the institutions, algorithms and platforms.

Like Magritte's painting *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* reminds us, it is challenging thinking about the difference between what is being represented versus what it is trying to represent. Art historian Richard Brilliant observed that "[t]here is a great difficulty in thinking about pictures, even portraits by great artists, as art and not thinking about them primarily as something else, the person represented" (Brilliant 1991, 23), because even if we know that what we are looking at is in fact a craftily rendered image, we tend to look beyond that and think of the person depicted instead. However, Brilliant also acknowledges that once the viewing subject is exposed or reminded of the artist and mediums significant role, the perception becomes more complex (1991, 45) which is exactly what Magritte does *in* his art. While that might change during the interaction or performance, the awareness and point of entry for the user is therefore important when considering the discourse being created and the experience of observing, interacting, and 'being with'. The point of this being that what is being represented is what is being interpreted, and the image of any-one or -thing is ultimately what holds the persuasive appeal.

As the Embodied Ethos will show, there are numerous ways to insert, project and embody a virtual space. More direct ways like portraits or selfies are just one distinct way of performing a self into and onto digital artefacts, but other familiar concepts permeate the

digital sphere through avatars, icons and more. This kind of *being in* a digital network means becoming cyborg, and that something out of ones own body can be experienced as embodying *and* disembodiment. Because a screen can be a constant reminder of our existence outside the virtual space, it can be experienced as disembodiment. The users are constantly reminded that they are an outside force, but if the platform acknowledges that you are an outside force, that could contradict the disembodiment factor that the screen inhabits.

These examples highlight how human actants experience themselves through digital artefacts, but artefacts also experience its users. Megan Eatman argues in *Unsettling Vision: Seeing and Feeling With Machines* (2020) that algorithms construct their users as much as we construct them. For example, games construct their users through making them abide by a set of logics or cultural norms in order to “win”. That is not only evident in the games and play, but also through interfaces that expect certain norms and actions that the player must know how to navigate (Eatman 2020, 2), which is found in all kinds of digital artefacts. In Eatmans’ article, she showcases three applications that use neural networks and machine vision to draw attention to the intersections and divergencies of human and machine vision. This ultimately has significant rhetorical effects on its users perceptions of the algorithms; “By adapting to the system’s logic, the user participates in her own persuasion; she becomes attuned to the algorithm with which she interacts, often without even noticing it” (Eatman 2020, 2). That means that while we experience ourselves through artefacts, that self-representation is constantly being negotiated and facilitated by the artefact in question, leaving us with questions like; does this represent me or just what is expected of me?

For people who are construed as the “ideal user”, these norms that are expected of us might go unnoticed, but for people who to the algorithm deems as “other” might find that they are cast in a different light than what they desire. Eatman uses the term “misfits” to describe those who are “unsuited or ill-suited to his or her environment” and argue that they highlight “the gap between user and algorithm and, importantly, the cultural space that the algorithm represents” (Eatman 2020, 4). The user must adapt to the algorithms’ logic, and by doing that the algorithm project a procedural rhetoric with dominant messages of how to be, how things are and *who* is what. That is true for any kind of artefact, be it social media or creative digital artefacts; norms and expectations are coded into their existence.

But so is everything else. Society is imbued with rules, norms and regulations that regulate behaviour and ways of being; stand in line to form a queue, do not steal, wear black to funerals. As the last point hints to, these norms and regulations are culturally determined. Not all cultures wear black to funerals, and though some are more regulated than others my point is that no matter where you go, in digital or physical space: ways of being are always expected of you. How you act and create modal manifestations of yourself through those spaces is how you represent yourself. The disconnect that can sometimes happen between technological actants and others through being cast as “misfit” does not negate a self or an ethos, it only shows that there is an ethos there to be damaged at all.

5.1.2 Self of Technological Actants

It does not take much for humans to assign character to anthropomorphized characters, what is otherwise known as the “Eliza effect” (C.R. Miller 2007, 151). Bringing back Brilliant’s observation on perception versus reality concerning what is observed when perceiving a portrait of someone, the same can be said of perception of technological selves. Fortunati writes that in the history of mankind, recurring conceptions of humans as machines, or machines similar to humans, are just a continuous desire from man to create life (2003, 63). Haraway writes “Man™ makes himself in a cosmic act of onanism” (2018, 149). Humans have always strived to create something that could reflect themselves. Like some technological Frankenstein, man has created the golem, the android, the robot and more types of ‘partners in being’ that function as conversation partners, laborers, and more. Though creation of something akin to human is neither close nor perhaps even really desired, what has been unveiled is different forms of selves, or technological actants that perceive and are perceived. Haraway writes “Man births himself through the realization of his intentions in his objects” (Ihde and Selinger 2003, 61), but in the same time births another.

Going forward with the intention in mind to recognize certain types of AI, algorithms and robots as rhetorical actors with agency and ethos in their own right, a look at significant differences in definitions and clarifications are important. While it is not easy to define algorithms because of its increased and varied usage, development, as well as becoming somewhat of a modern myth, the word comes from the Greek word for number, and the

Arabic word for calculation (Klinger and Svensson 2018, 4655). Klinger and Svensson suggest that we should understand algorithms as material as well as social *processes* that calculate data based on input that leads to the formulation of one (or more) outcomes. In its most basic sense, algorithms can be seen as a set of rules, or set of instructions that tells someone or something what to do. That means that algorithms are not necessarily computational; a recipe for a cake could be an algorithm. For our purposes though, (computational) algorithms sort, filter, rank, profile and weigh data for various purposes (2018, 4655). They also point out that there is often an assumption that algorithms perform their calculations in a non-biased way, though there is previous research that show that algorithmic decisions can reflect gender bias and racial tendencies (Noble 2018).

We take for granted the algorithmically generated recommendations that are designed to cater to our personality, discovering products, content and services that appeal to us. We are so used to it in fact, that bad matches are often ridiculed and cause discontentment. In other words; we take it as a given that algorithms reflect and in some ways shape our own sense of self and self-representation. Professor of rhetoric and author *The Rhetorical Agency of Algorithms* Jessica Reyman states that this happens despite of the fact that they sometimes are based on assumptions on generic user data that are invisible and in some cases even be coercive (Reyman 2018, 113). Recent trends on social platforms indicate that people assume their algorithmically generated content reflects some part of their inner lives that they sometimes are not even aware of themselves (Haltigan, Pringsheim, and Rajkumar 2023; Warshaw et al. 2015). That not only affects peoples' own perception of selves, but also how systems and artificial selves watch and respond to us.

Algorithms often have a say in what is displayed in social media and other media contexts through mediums like advertisements, connecting networks and more, but when they divert into different settings, the perception of them have the potential to change from something intrusive to something inclusive. Algorithms are present in most computational settings, though my focus here is only on algorithms in creative digital artefacts which narrows its impact, but not necessarily its potential biases. Algorithms are often viewed as unseen entities that have the potential to make or break social standings, power relations and financial gains. Below (fig.14 and 15) you can see two examples from comic artist Hannah Hillam narrating comics that portray "the algorithm" as its own entity. Hillam and

other content creators on different platforms often treat the algorithm as a powerful being that controls the success of their content, exemplifying the perception many have of the “black box” algorithm that determines their online experience.



FIGURE 14 INSTAGRAM POST FROM @HANNAHILLAM



FIGURE 15 INSTAGRAM POST FROM @HANNAHILLAM

All AI is composed of algorithms but not all algorithms are AI. Artificial Intelligence has a lot in common with algorithms. While they are both based on the same principle of being a set of rules, AI is a rapidly growing phenomenon that underlines machine- and deep-learning, problem solving, natural language processing and development. In *A (Very) Brief History of Artificial Intelligence* (2005), Buchanan wrote that AI's long history from imagining Homers mechanical tripods at the gods dinner, to the Turing machine, to beating the world chess champion in 1997 display an increasing need to consider the social implication of such technological successes (B.G. Buchanan 2005, 53). At the current moment, keeping up with and containing developments in AI in this thesis is a fools errand, as the speed in which tech and even theory on tech is published at an outstanding pace. However, if we look at some recent innovations in AI like the image generator DALL-E 2 or the chatbot ChatGPT, surrounding discourse have opened up many questions regarding intellectual and creative property especially. Because most AI work by gathering, deciphering and remixing already existing content that is gathered in large databases, the question then becomes whose intellectual property it is infringing on, and if it the content being produced is not their own,

then how does that affect their self-representation and ethos? An article in the New Yorker tells a story of class-action lawsuits and artists being on high alert. Despite this, a startup called Authentic Artists has formed that has created musician characters based on AI-generated styles. The Founder, Chris McGarry said in an interview within the article that this is meant to give a face to the AI machine (Chayka 2023). Knowing that AI is a complex algorithm that generates responses based on databases, the desire to anthropomorphize, or at least subjectify, AI speaks volumes to the rhetorical character of AI and algorithms as mediators.

Another form of artificial selves are robots. Robots are machines capable of carrying out actions automatically, through programming, or they may be equipped with AI that enable them to adapt and change according to situations. They can be autonomous or semi-autonomous, humanoid and not. Like all the other agents, they interact (with human and non-human actors), enter or create narrative and perform actions. What is often different though, are their ability to take up space and interact with that space based on input, going beyond the point-and-click. Be that as a robot vacuum, a mechanical arm that retrieves specimens in deep-sea expeditions or as “humanoid butlers”. Robotic attachments, or what could also be called embodied algorithms, enables not only a difference in possible actions, but also their continuing and enduring presence.

What is becoming more prominent in society are these presences of artificial selves, or technological actants (Reyman 2018, 115). They consist of these algorithms, AI, robots and more. They take the shape of companions, helpers, rivals and more. Stoellger proposes that in order for us to relate or understand robots (which he seems to use as an umbrella term to incapsulate robot, AI and algorithm), we must see them as a special species in the multitude of intermediary beings. He calls this species No-Things, because they are not a thing, and not yet human. They are *forms* in the medium of digital communication (J. Katz, Floyd, and Schiepers 2021, 93) which have their own mode of communication with humans, and with other non-humans. He also claims that while previous, rudimentary machines have been treated under the idea that machines and humans have a master-slave pattern, this idea is no longer relevant as they have taken on more of a master-servant role. He then asks us to consider if going from slave to servant does not connote a feeling of autonomy,

freedom and dignity? If we do, does that not mean that they are perceived and function as one unit, giving them their own self-representation that can be analysed?

Another way of categorizing artificial selves is to look at them as social robots. Different platforms and objects shape the robotics involved. Just as the cyborg is part cybernetic and organism, it is also part of what can be described as Social Robots. In discussing the different shapes these take; Robot, Artificial Intelligence, Android, Cyborg and Algorithm apply. It encompasses the whole of robotics, since all forms of robots require interaction between human and robot (Jones 2017, 559). The collective term Social Robots encompass all these things that possess the capability and function to communicate with human beings in some way, but the use of terms change depending on the context. Hegel et al. propose that in order for humans to understand social robots, one automatically anthropomorphise them in order to fit them into our social reality (Hegel et al. 2009, 169). Rather than trying to fit social robots into the human social mould, the posthuman way of thinking would see them as equal entities that share communicational features, while still maintaining a separate mode of communication. One could argue then that the term and concept of social robots has a negative connotation as it emphasises a “false” anthropomorphising nature of robots, and further solidifies the binary separation of man/machine, but if we are to employ the nature of social as Latour suggests, then social nature is not something that is necessarily even something that is exclusive to entities with a pulse.

The question of autonomy, creativity and freedom then becomes important as it enables us to understand robots as possessing some form of selfhood. This premise is by no means an accepted fact and is argued for and against. In a critical paper that looks at what exactly makes robots enter our social realm, Jones angles the question so that it focuses on the dialogical nature surrounding them. She states that the authentic nature of human dialogue critically comes down to its ability to verbally express open-ended dialogue, and that robots inability to take personal stances as well as being recognized for being able to take those stances are what separates us (Jones 2017, 558). She writes that because of these critical lacks in robot interaction and discourse, the social robot does in fact not exist, only in the sense that it can have a semiotically designated social character (Jones 2017, 574).

Contrary to what Jones states, I argue we should open up the idea that robots, or technological actants, can be social. Because the word social is not hinged on having the ability to pose open-ended questions, rather it is about relating to society, its organization and taking part in it. If we are to take Latours ANT to heart, this means that relating to society is not optional at all, as all things consists of networks relating to each other in a giant network of networks. What is necessary is the ability to interact, relate to others and the ability to possess a narrative; all qualities social robots possess. What could be discussed, however, is if the term Social Robots is the most appropriate, as the word social has a vast array of connotations already established around it. Jones closes her argument by stating that even if we were to grant subjectivity or social agency to technological actants, we must never forget that there is always *someone* who engages in that dialogue (2017, 574), but if we continue with Latours frame of thinking- that engagement is only the continuation of action that started long ago- then no action is truly ones own, and it can therefore be bypassed or disregarded.

Perhaps ahead of his time, author of *The Second Persona* (1970), Edwin Black suggested that if we could find complex linguistic formation, i.e. *discourse*, then we should be able to assign moral character (ethos) to the character with that language. Language (in the wide sense of the word) has a symptomatic function. And discourses contain, according to Black, tokens of their authors as well as external signs of internal states. And if we can acknowledge that discourse equals author, and we acknowledge that some artificial creations can create discourse, then we can also deem them worthy of its own rhetoric and character. He calls this the second persona, but not necessarily person. What characterizes a person or persona is its ability to possess an ideology, in the Marxian sense that it is a “network of interconnected convictions that functions in a man epistemically and that shapes his identity by determining how he views the world” (Black 1970, 164). Apart from the obvious gendering and anthropomorphic language of the description, it can be useful because he specifies that implication of ideology through rhetorical discourse is enough and that functions as stylistic tokens. Perceivers of this discourse must then examine and interpret the self-representation and come to a conclusion about their ideology on their own. That follows my argument that whether it is No-Things, Technological Selves, Social Robots or Persona, the bottom line is that these entities enact self-representation in a

similar fashion to humans. The rhetoric and self-representation lie in performance and perception.

5.2 Rhetoric

Engbers reminds us that the word *rhetoric* often carries with it a variety of pejorative connotations, like “hate rhetoric”, “empty rhetoric” and “mere rhetoric” (Engbers 2018, 83). Its definitions range from negative frames like “the control of events for an audience” (Kaufer and Butler in Engbers 2018, 84), but can also be more neutral, like Corbett and Connors’ “the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse ... to inform or persuade or motivate an audience” (Corbett and Connors in Engbers 2018, 84). Despite its age as a discipline, its usage as a tool of inquiry in discourse have proven to be adaptable.

Buchanan writes that rhetoric is traditionally characterized as an art of invention and discovery that should and could be related to any subject matter in any field (2001, 184). By recognizing that rhetoric is a study of discovery and innovation, that ultimately means that it is a constant field of change. The kind of rhetoric we find in modern settings are far from how they originated in ancient Greece. Many have reconceptualized the notion of rhetoric to encompass more things than what Aristotle envisioned so long ago, but as with many concepts today, they constantly need updating, reimagining and tweaking to keep up with new developments. Despite that, antique terms and concepts are still very much alive and applicable in rhetorical debates today; just as it is and will be here as I move forward to discuss potential new formulations of ethos that are more applicable to the social and technological structure we are beginning to face as the relationship between man and machine is becoming increasingly entwined, and the contexts of ‘being’ shift.

The rhetoric Aristotle wrote of, dating back to 4th century BCE, encompassed the art of persuasion in oratory speeches. Though originally meant for the study of public speaking, its basic principles have followed rhetoricians in their pursuit of understanding any kind of discourse since. Since the printing press and, more recently, the web, it is now also used to study a multitude of types of discourses. Keith and Lundberg define discourse as any speech, written or spoken, as well as the exchange of symbols or meanings in any contexts (2008, 4). Engbers also points out that ““Discourse” may refer not only to spoken and written communication but also to visual, material, and hybrid forms” (Engbers 2018), that includes

designed objects, spaces, systems communities and experiences. That means that rhetorical texts, or discourses, today have a much wider range for qualitative analyses of a variety of subjects (and objects) than it did before. That also means that it can encompass all kinds of literature, creative works, philosophy, sciences and technology (R. Buchanan 2001, 184), literally all things that do not exist organically by the grace of nature.

Professor of communication and rhetoric Petra Aczél describes the type of rhetoric we use today as new media rhetoric, and describe it as non-linear, interactive, as well as not objects in the public since they are themselves public. Now, we find the border between rhetor and audience blurred, and the significance of identity and side involvements boosted, while rules and positions have diminished (Aczél 2013, 317). While identity has gotten a much larger significance, *to be* becomes sidestepped with *to have*. We *have* friends, we *have* relations, we *have* profiles. Nevertheless, *having* these kinds of signifiers that represent a unique identity and self online means that it also is presented for anyone willing to look at and interpret these properties. That makes all presentations a part of a persuasive appeal, even if that is meant to be good or bad. We then might look to Aristotle's three essential principles to persuade an audience and see that fundamental rhetorical practice is still highly relevant today.

He claimed that these three modes of persuasion are essential for any orator to influence and persuade an audience (Aristotle in Alkhirbash 2016, 112). These modes, or proofs, are ethos: a speaker or senders' credibility and trustworthiness, pathos: the emotional state of the audience as produced by the sender, and logos: the logic of a speech and the argument that it makes (Keith and Lundberg 2008, 7). Of course, all these are important and work together in order to create an effective appeal, but for the purposes of this thesis' main concern I have chosen to explore and rethink the concept of ethos. The concept of ethos is interesting because while it is about credibility and trustworthiness, those traits are also very much related to authenticity and agency.

Boyle posits that because of the way humans and technology communicate necessitates a joining of human computer interaction (HCI) and rhetorical practices because of the occurring complicated relationships. He states that because media affects our ontological registers, we can no longer accept the presumed separation between media and media user and must instead consider both epistemological nuances as well as ontological

(Boyle 2015, 15-16). When considering the types of selves we meet in digital platforms like AI, as well as how we portray ourselves with the means of digital technology, more specific terms and considerations should apply. I believe this will not only have theoretical importance but also practical impact on how we lead our lives and our understanding of our place in the world.

5.2.1 Rhetoric of the Object

Buchanan famously posited that rhetoric can be extended to be found in the architectonic art of all design, ultimately arguing for the rhetoric of multimodal objects. He writes:

“[W]ith the rise of technology in the twentieth century, the remarkable power of man-made objects to accomplish something very similar has been discovered. By presenting an audience of potential users with a new product - whether as simple as a plow or a new form of hybrid seed corn, or as complex as an electric light bulb or a computer - designers have directly influenced the actions of individuals and communities changed attitudes and values, and shaped society in surprisingly fundamental ways. This is an avenue of persuasion not previously recognized, a mode of communication that has long existed but that has never been entirely understood or treated from a perspective of human control such as rhetoric provides for communication in language.”(R. Buchanan 1985, 6)

Proceeding to argue that Aristotle’s rhetoric is something that is intrinsic to all humans and lives innately in us to persuade others of our own values and beliefs. This is acted out consciously, unconsciously, on purpose and randomly. This, Buchanan suggests, is similar in the design of things. Because design is necessarily produced and deals with solutions that are never solitary, digital technology also falls into this category. And because all design must deal with constraints and affordances that ultimately affect a user, it can be used to challenge conventional expectations, ideals and norms.

Buchanan wrote his article *Declaration by Design* in 1985, where his focus lay more on everyday artefacts that served different functions, like his well-known example of spoons and their similarity in function but differences in design and perception (fig.16). He relates

the persuasive appeal to its persuasive process, as well as its value in doing something useful (R. Buchanan 1985, 11). His principles of design rhetoric show that multimodal artefacts are performative, though *digital* artefacts have the capacity to be more fluid and malleable than static artefacts.

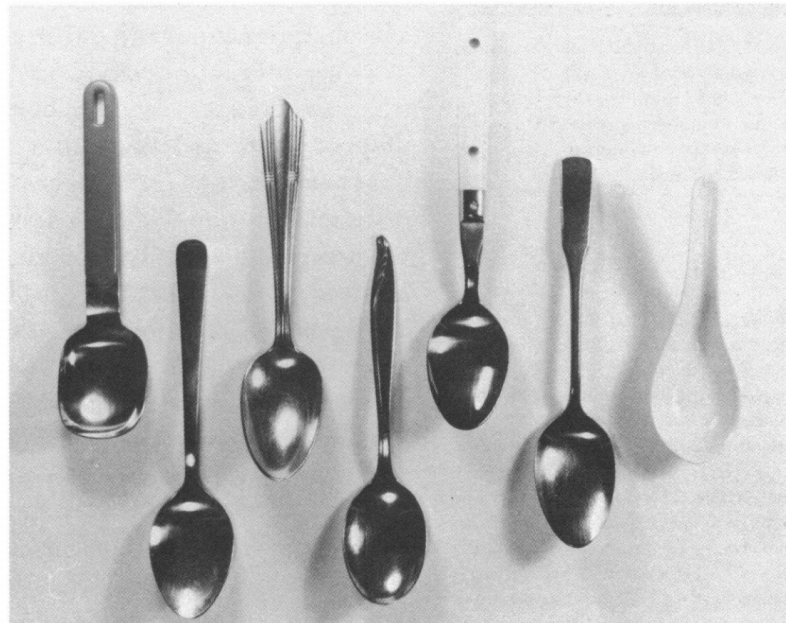


Fig. 1) Utensils differ in the quality of character that they project while sharing the same mechanical premise.

FIGURE 16 BUCHANAN INTRODUCES RHETORIC TO THE MATERIAL WORLD. PHOTO: R. BUCHANAN (1985)

Buchanan presents the designer as being capable of creating interactive systems that an audience would grasp the technological reasoning without seeing its inner working, essentially through using metaphors and semantics in its knobs, buttons and other functions. The same can be said for many digital artefacts, especially those that live on a screen that often rely heavily on metaphors and symbols to communicate its different uses, like the image of a floppy disk for saving files. That is evident as even people born after the year 2000 have often not seen nor used a floppy disk in real life, yet they know the *meaning* behind the symbol.

Digital artefacts that are not solely screen-based also use shapes, metaphors and semantics in conveying its reasoning; in 'Welcome to Planet B' by Ars Electronica Futurelab (Bachinger n.d.), the placement of people in the room affect the artificial world presented in front of them (fig.17). The artwork is made to model our real world between now and the

year 2100, and depending on what choices the interactants make, that world changes. Below is one example of the different choices presented: wind power or nuclear power. The visitors must make their choice by standing on top of what decision they make, and the majority rules. Symbols and metaphors that convey its reasoning are bountiful; the thermostat on the right (a) indicating the influence their choice makes, the colour of the spaces the visitors place themselves in (b), the clock at the centre top indicating how much time has passed (c). These are just a few examples on how people read and understand the discourse the artefact is displaying.



FIGURE 17 WELCOME TO PLANET B. CREDIT: ARS ELECTRONICA (BACHINGER N.D.)

What is evident in this artefact and others like it is the malleable and fluid rhetoric. In digital artefacts, the rhetoric is connected to its narrative, performance and interaction. This might be juxtaposed with Bogost's procedural rhetoric in which we unpack a "technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created" (Hawreliak 2019, 230). He wrote about the rhetoric and persuasive power of video games, but video games and other digital artefacts share such strong similarities in use that its usage far outreaches its original intention.

The difference between Bogosts' games and creative digital artefacts lie in its inclusiveness and reach. He writes that the arguments are made *with* computational systems and unpacking arguments others have created. While we assign rhetorical value to objects, we always trace it back to its designers or makers, or the impact it has on humans. Bogosts' main concern with his rhetorical appeal is also rooted in its persuasive appeal to inspire action as a consequence of that rhetorical appeal (Brock and Shepherd 2016, 18), whereas rhetorical persuasion that hinges on its character and credible nature of existing *with* other actants does not necessarily require a need for a specific action to follow. That means that Bogosts' focus on the application of rhetorical means to build systems bottom-up rather than analysing them top-down, creating two different frames of thought regarding its persuasive appeal.

Instead, we could consider what attributions we ascribe them that function on and in the same level as other rhetorical actors. Writing on agency, automation and computer-mediated communication, R. Miller (2007) suggests that rhetorical activity goes beyond the human and extends to other actors that are involved in persuasive events and asks us to consider the attributions we are willing to make *to* those we interact with, system or not – so what if we start looking at rhetorical effects with both human and nonhuman in mind?

5.2.2 Rhetoric of the Subject/Object

Buchanan revealed a rhetoric that extended beyond the subject's immediate vicinity and onto artefacts. However, even if Buchanan extended rhetoric onto objects, it remained a product of the people that made it. That provided artefacts with rhetorical extended *value*, but not its own *rhetoric*. That leaves questions on how an artefact can have its own independent rhetoric. That starts by approaching its capability of having self-representational qualities that make it perceived as a self.

In Thumim's book *Self-Representation and Digital Culture* (2012) Thumim writes that self-representation is different from performances of self. As the term suggests, we all 'perform the self' all the time, not necessarily as part of digital culture. When self-representation is produced, it becomes a text that has the potential for subsequent engagement (Thumim 2012, 6). However, if one is to consider all that has rhetorical implications as rooted in performance, and actants that rely on performance for function,

then performance of self and self-representation becomes one and the same thing. Representation and performance are always *mediated* and thus, rhetorician Burke argues, carry with it some form of meaning which then translates to persuasion and rhetorical appeal (Burke 1969, 172). As Buchanan suggested the persuasive appeal of object to meaning its persuasive process and value in doing something useful, it also reveals its position in terms of social and cultural life and values:

“Design is an art of thought directed to practical action through the persuasiveness of objects and, therefore, design involves the vivid expression of competing ideas about social life” (R. Buchanan 1985, 7).

If we juxtapose that to something familiar like clothes, we can then understand it as how the clothes someone wears to be the product of not only their own self, but also the times they were produced, where they originated, who designed them and how they are worn. Clothes and fashion can project ways of living, how to be and act, and can implicitly and explicitly tell the surroundings what to expect and how to act around the person wearing them. Similarly, Brock and Shepherd argue that algorithms have become so ingrained in our cultural environment that they induce users to act as if they have done so of their own volition (2016, 18). “We convince ourselves that we are actively making decisions about how to participate in a given system when, in reality, we accept options made apparently available to use from a set of constrained possibilities” (Brock and Shepherd 2016, 21). That is most evident in games, where the system and rules of a game is what make a game a game. As suggested by Bogost, this introduces a procedural rhetoric that, instead of only using words and images, videogames persuade through the rules and regulations that persuade the player to act a certain way (Hawreliak 2019). The proceduralism of games and the performance of self can then be compared in that discourse already comes with inherent rules we are expected to follow in order to have a successful appeal. Though the limits are far less obvious and much less restrictive, we also assume that personal ideas and actions are made through our own volition, even though societal rules and regulations are often the reason we do them.

We might take inspiration from Bogost, Brock and Shepherd and ask how those restrictions or rules are played out; is it experienced in a forceful way, or is the actant merely facilitating something the interacting actant envisioned doing? To that, Braet reminds us

that what is more important than proven ethos is the indexical ethos. What that means is that the ethos projected or performed implicitly can be more successful, as trying to prove it might create an opposite effect and produce doubt about the ethos instead (Braet 1992, 312). That might be problematic for artificial or technological selves, as they are often expected to prove their credibility instead of projecting it in subtle ways. This is especially important for technological selves like chatbots that are often expected to provide answers that, at the very least, have root in truth. Nevertheless, indexical ethos like correct spelling, fluent language and proper understanding of the semiotics input into by the user is still extremely valuable in the enactment/performance of ethos by both human and non-human actors. However, proving ethos in digital formats is often a requirement for survival, and implicit ethos will not suffice alone. Failure to project that might leave it unused and thus “cease to exist”.

How then can computational systems have persuasive appeal without seeming restrictive or forced? How can persuasion be a result of the interaction between the actants? Hayles writes in *Can Computers Create Meanings?* (2019) that what is often failed to take into consideration when discussing ‘cognitive’ computers is that the assumption is that computers must be autonomous to be cognitive. In Hayles’ view, hybrid processes that include both human and non-human actors can create meaning in what she dubs cognitive assemblages. These cognitive assemblages rely on artificial cognition derived from biologically created signs and meanings. It starts with the interaction between lower levels of dynamic biosemiotic organization and moves up through the formation of new entities with higher levels of complexity. This process is also recursive as ‘higher’, or more complex, entities also affect the lower level entities. These interactions can create rhythms of being that create expectations, or what can be described as absential phenomena; “where something that is not present ... causes something that is present ... to undergo changes that otherwise could not be explained” (2019, 40).

Hayles uses the simple sign of leaves falling off branches to demonstrate the absential phenomena in environmental signals. Because interrelated changes that are set in motion make sap withdraw from branches, then weakens the connection between branch and leaves, which then makes leaves drop finally makes us anticipate that winter is coming. That is part of creating signals which we interpret, but what is really happening is cognitive

reasoning of seeing what happens in a relation. That relation has value to whoever is there to experience it because “Expectations are relations to no-things which have real causal and shaping powers” (Wheeler cited in N.K. Hayles 2019, 40). That means that relations and expectations are valuable in explaining how meaning-making and rhetorical practices are present in the nonhuman and human realm.

She continues to argue that to compare human and nonhuman cognition is a fallacy in itself, because even if humans designed the technical dyad, the human(s) themselves could often times not fulfill the cognitive tasks it asks of its partner because of variables like intensely large databases, pattern recognitions, et cetera. While biological brains use input from their environments and bodily functions to achieve cognition does *not* mean that computers do it in the same way. Of course, computers do not choose which inputs it receives, nor does it have a biological body to respond with. Yet Hayles argues that saying choice must pertain to inputs and outputs is not what is necessary for something to be cognitive. Neither is a biological body necessary to be able to respond to environmental impacts. Instead, what matters should be their basis for flexibility, adaptability and evolvability (2019, 44). What matters is how the actant, human and non-human, read one another and rely on and react to the expectations that are already set.

5.3 Ethos

In ancient tradition, Aristotle defined three elements that can establish ethos: Phronesis; which relates to the practical wisdom or intelligence from experience, Arête; the moral character and trustworthiness, and Eunoia; good will towards the audience. Aristotle insisted that ethos must come from the actual delivery of the speech and not from any preconceived notions on the audiences part (Braet 1992, 311), though later definitions of ethos by Cicero and Quintilian posited that ethos may also rely upon previous reputation to persuade an audience (Byers 2009), which is often the case in rhetorical studies today.

Halloran notes in *Aristotle’s Concept of Ethos, or if Not His Somebody Else’s* that ethos is, in its simplest form, about what says “believe me because I am the sort of person whose word you can believe” (1982, 62). Technology as a cultural force, as the foundations of which can be build a self, and as a driving force in how we view that self and others lends itself to rhetorical investigation, specifically through the concept of ethos. Trust and

credibility are relatively stable, desirable preconditions that is evident in any rhetorical communication. We trust in things to function, we trust in people to have good intentions, and we trust them to have the skill to perform their intended tasks. Easy to want, harder to achieve, ethos is about building and maintaining a portrayal of a certain aspect of oneself which is constantly negotiated. But where does trust come from?

In an examination of ethos in visual web design, Byers suggested that *phronesis*, *arête* and *eunoia* could be translated into expertise, helpfulness and good intentions in a modern setting (2009). Notably, Byers use of ethos in web design was published in 2009 when the web consisted mostly of artefacts that were built to be consumed as one single unit. Since then, the web, digital artefacts and digital culture has continued to develop into a place in space and time where networks of actors and artefacts collide and interact. That does not mean Byers or Aristotelian conceptions of these three elements are obsolete, but that they can and should be adjusted to fit the environment of analysis they are presented in. Aristotle focused on oral presentations, Byers on web design. Considering *Phronesis*, *Arête* and *Eunoia* as expertise, helpfulness and good intentions can be a good translation when thinking of human actors, but considering the implications of connecting the ethos term to human/nonhuman actants warrant a reconsideration that is more inclusive and less anthropocentric. How can *phronesis*, *arête* and *eunoia* be translated into something more suited for digital artefacts today?

What seems clear is that any kind of rhetorical mediation and implications in contemporary digital artefacts are that they are grounded in performance. Performance that entwines it or them with other rhetors, performance in the sense that it entails a specific type of experience, and performance of self. As mentioned above, Thumim suggests that self-presentation is different from performances of self, as we all 'perform the self' all the time, not necessarily as a part of digital culture. That only means that for a self-representation (and subsequent ethos) to be engaged with, it must be produced in such a way that it becomes a "text" for anyone to interpret (Thumim 2012, 6). That text is necessarily produced through and with the interaction with digital artefacts, which leaves the character of the rhetor in a place that influences others. In addition, ethos being about the character of any rhetor means that ethos should be of the highest priority when considering how anyone or -thing is analyzed.

Arguing the case for artefacts possessing rhetoric, Buchanan suggests that products have ethos because 1) they reflect their makers, and 2) the design of the product has the potential to persuade potential users that a product has credibility in their lives (R. Buchanan 1985, 14). The designer can infuse the object with particular voices that speak individual languages with persuasive affect that can appeal to its potential users, but once that designed artefact is out of the designers hands, it has a language that is its own, an *ethos* of its own.

In line with both ANT and Posthuman theories, the following conceptions favor post-anthropocentric views and puts emphasis on the actants relation to others actants through interaction and *being*, as well as their connection to each other; politically, culturally and creatively. Because of both theories, the conceptions are thoroughly questioned as to *whose* values are instilled in them? It is no far stretch to say that the values of ancient Greece did not always consider those marked as “other”, and as such they might fail to reflect or include the values many strive for today. Because of ANTs emphasis of equal value among actants, and posthuman emphasis of being with different systems and commitment in practice to hybridities that resist reduction to single principles (Halberstam and Livingston 1995, vii), the conceptions must therefore be as inclusive as possible without the risk of being insignificant or trivial.

The conceptions are created with the re-conceptualization of the rhetorical triangle in mind, and a non-dualistic frame of mind. As Hayles posited, we become cyborgs in our connection and ‘being with’ the machine. But through the recognition of our bodies we do not become the machine, we only become *with* it. As I noted earlier through Erin Manning; A body *is* not, it *does*. That is permeated through the conceptions in that they focus on *action*. That is in line with ANTs rhizomatic approach to all things that exist in our social reality through networks, agency and action. Because of that, the conceptions focus on relations and connections that ultimately project selves that may be perceived as persuasive and authentic.

5.3.1 Arête

Arête is often juxtaposed with the notion of morality and ethics. In a study on Arête in Aristotelian philosophy, Yu (1998) writes that the word Arête was mostly associated with

excellence, which refers to the goodness of a kind of thing (1998, 323). But what defines goodness or excellence? Is it that a human or non-human is predictable, acts according to a certain standard of ethics, or something else? Aristotle says “the virtue of a human being will likewise be the state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his function well” (Aristotle in Yu 1998, 323). That positions *arête* in the realm of *function*, more precisely the purpose that someone (or thing) is intended to do; a plumber that fits and maintains water systems well, a charger that successfully charges a battery.

Instead of thinking of *Arête* as only function, I suggest we instead embrace the notion of *Arête* as the ability to change. While change can be a rather vague indicator, narrowed down and still in vein with the virtue of Aristotelian ideals, change can mean the ability to change outcomes depending on desires of a function. Because being able to change and adapt is a characteristic of excellence that is both intrinsic to human and nonhuman values, it also lives in the world of *function*, as things or beings that function well are often things or people that are able to adapt to their surroundings and influxes.

Change does not necessarily have to be intentional or expected. Instead, it can define things and people functioning (or at the very least responding) *in spite* of not being able to produce the expected or wanted output. Seemingly contradictory to the general notion of ethos, but significant in context of *Arête* (both past and present), and a distinctly human (so far) ability, is the ability to fail intentionally, or failing successfully. While failing has intrinsic negative connotations, there are many instances where failing could in fact strengthen both the self and its ethos. On the basis of ethics and morality, human tradition and cultural knowledge has taught each individual what is “right” and “wrong”. These values are always in flux and subject to change. If someone discovers that their values change, they might still be asked to perform a task and in fear of punishment of refusing to do that task, fail that task intentionally instead. Machines can be instilled/programmed to have ethics and values. For example, ChatGPT cannot generate disrespectful or derogatory content, arguably making it “moral” (or perhaps simply censored). But they are static as change only happens on the basis of a shift in its underlying code. Being able to fail intentionally because of values instilled into something is hard because machines always look for the most optimal solution despite its fallouts.

But failing is, as stated, not only about moral or ethics, but also about the general notion of function. Not being able to fail while still functioning could negate or enhance the complex notion of what ethos is. Receiving a corporate email that addresses the recipient as “Dear %?FIRSTNAME?%” is an obvious example of a failure, although a benign one, but if we trust that something will provide the best possible answer simply because it cannot do anything else, it projects what could be called “static” or even “forced ethos”. Forced ethos can be applied when there is little to no room for change or failure. That is not only applicable to machines. Forced ethos can be translated into human self-representation in digital artefacts as well because of the affordances and constraints of any digital artefact. Limiting functions and outcomes forces any type of self to be static and construed.

All digital artefacts are prone to explicit ethics and morale, though “right” and “wrong” are usually never as black and white as we would sometimes like it to be. Many artefacts carry with them political potential and are thus moral in some way, but I argue that its true power lies in its capability to be fluid and how that fluidity is utilized and visualized. Fluidity means bending and shaping the surroundings, which is intrinsic to many digital artefacts, but Creative Digital Artefacts especially.

In arguing for the cognitive abilities of computers, Hayles writes that biosemioticians often emphasize biological context and cognition in relation to *wrong* interpretations; “a predator chasing a bird that appears to have a broken wing may discover, too late, that he was wrong when the bird flies away after drawing him away from the nest” (2019, 46). This is in contest to saying that computers are deterministic and thus nothing more than static switches that goes on (1) and off (0). Hayles reminds us that these ‘logic gates’ can and do make mistakes. Varying voltages can make errors because of decay over time, computers crash, files are unable to load. There are so many variables that can cause uncertainties, unwanted behavior, ‘failures’ and glitches. Glitches are often referred to as failures, but failure in itself is such a complex word. As the following quote by Whitehead states, failure must always lead to something. Perhaps more failure, but if a failure leads to success, then was it not truly a failure at all? A failure can lead to nothing, but a failure can also be a success in itself, it all depends on perspective.

“It is failure that guides evolution; perfection offers no incentive for improvement.”
(Whitehead in Cascone 2000, 12)

The failure of computer systems is often referred to as *glitches*. The exploitation, exploration and manipulation of these glitches have created a movement known as *Glitch Art*. Artist Kim Cascone was influential in the emergence of glitch art. In the year 2000, he coined the term post-digital to describe artistic practices emerging from “the ‘failure’ of digital technology” (Cascone 2000, 13). The failure of these digital technologies was embraced instead of shunned and turned into art for poets, musicians, painters and more. Cascone writes that failure has indeed become an aesthetic that serves as a reminder that our control over technology is an illusion (2000, 13). I note that that is more of a half-truth than anything, because while it does encapsulate the somewhat unpredictable nature of technology (which in some cases is revered because of its precise and efficient “nature”), to me it instead serves as a reminder that human and non-human relations are in constant flux where the representation of either is determined by both subjects’ “failures” and successes.

Cascone identified Glitch Art practice as “deconstructive audio and visual techniques that allow artists to work beneath the previously impenetrable veil of digital media.” (2000, 12). It followed a general fear of data loss and error in the 1990s with its floppy disks, pixel art and 8-bit video games and instead became something that according to Applegate, exposes the (dis)function of coding languages that disrupt seamless digital experiences to create something that criticizes as well as recreates digital life (Applegate 2016, 1). Rosa Menkman wrote:

“Once the glitch is understood as an alternative way of representation or a new language, its tipping point has passed and the essence of its glitch-being is vanished. The glitch is no longer an art of rejection, but a shape or appearance that is reorganized as a novel form (of art).” (Menkman 2011, 341)

Her *Glitch Studies Manifesto* reminds me that the virtue and helpfulness of digital artefacts lie in its malleability, its ability to work with failure, work with change and unpredicted inputs and outputs. By utilizing these “features”, the digital artefact takes on a life of its own, not predicted by user or human designer. It becomes “good and beautiful” (or *kalokagathia* as the Greeks called it (Holdier 2016, 52)), with its own discourse and a source of fluid ethos.

Some platforms’ ethos can be said to be based on its ability to embrace glitches, making the experience of being with them more personal; if a machine allows a user to fail

without malfunction/crashing, then the user trusts not only in the technology but also in their own ability to exist in and with it. Reyman proposes that glitches can be seen as a site of dispersed, dynamic and cooperative agency in digital rhetoric (2018, 116), an expansion on Casey Boyles' (2015) proposition that human and technical objects function through an oscillation that provides an understanding of glitches as generative and not as errors (Boyle 2015, 14). Boyle argues that glitching exposes an *in-between* that seamless engagement if not conceals, then escapes the minds of the users. That *in-between* manipulates and can be further manipulable, but most importantly it helps us understand how artefacts facilitate certain practices (2015, 12-13). That understanding leads to conscious and critical awareness about the *transparency* of a technological design and its rhetoric. This transparency allows us a view into the organizational structure and infrastructures, but also serves as a reminder of the multiple relations in a network that is active and engaged. According to Boyle, glitches are not an occasion or a deterministic act, but a demonstration of relations between actors. I believe that is an oversimplification of glitches, as it reduces the failing act as something that exposes a mechanical body with a skeleton that is not theirs. In the Latourian sense, Boyle might be correct. Revealing the in-between that is commonly under a veil does expose the agentic processes of actors that are in a sense 'building' an entity, but the networks that built the entity that produce the glitches are more than its relations- it is, as I argued through Bakhtin earlier, only a piece of discourse that has *meaning* we interpret as encounters of selves.

In fear of what 'failed ethos' might imply, I have chosen to name the ethos inspired by this conceptualization of *Arête Glitching Ethos*. Glitching is not necessarily failure, though it is often perceived as such. It does however signify change, unexpected outcomes and dependent faultiness. So, when considering how *Arête* can be conceptualized for in a modern setting, I suggest it to mean the ability to change and mold with influxes without losing a sense of self/ceasing to exist. Though there can be many other ethos' derived from *Arête*, this is just one way to open of further discussion and thoughts on what it means to be helpful, have virtue, to change and possess *Arête*.

5.3.2 Phronesis

As previously stated, phronesis is about the expertise or practical wisdom of a rhetor. That expertise or practical wisdom is reflective of knowledge that complements what Aristotle named *techne* and *episteme*; technically and scientifically oriented approaches (Kinsella 2012). That is often assumed to be linked with peoples effectiveness, for example how managers at certain companies perform an identity that constantly strives at being perceived as 'being effective' in their role (Bardon, Brown, and Pez   2017). A contention in phronesis is how any level of expertise is meant to be measured. Moriarty and Mehlenbacher observe that publics are often not equipped to assess a rhetors level of expertise based on prior knowledge, which means that it is up to the presentation itself that the ethos is invented (2019). That could explain why effectiveness is often tied to expertise, as it can often be deduced that effectiveness must be the result of prior knowledge and competence. That does not mean preconceived notions are not still highly applicable, just that in the case of ethos in digital ecosystems, knowledge of other rhetors is not always a given. That presentation can be based on input from *other* actors. In the case of Moriarty and Mehlenbacher, they highlight the ethos that is generated by other users' input, such as karma scores, post points and ranking algorithms on the message board Reddit (2019, 515), but input that generates output does not necessarily have to be human made. In the case of other types of digital artefacts, I could make the example of sensors measuring wind, moisture and temperature that generate a more stable and safe flight either for model or real airplanes could be such input.

From the exploration of the keywords mimesis and mirror, I would posit that practices taking place must take into consideration the *umwelt* the artefact lives in, what I argued earlier through Hayles which means considering what an actant knows about *how* it knows things. For this I draw from Kinsella's piece *Practitioner Reflection and Judgement as Phronesis: A Continuum of Reflection and Considerations for Phronetic Judgement* (2012). She suggests that phronesis can be reinterpreted as a reflective practice. Her work is an elaboration of the work of Donald Sch  n (1968; 1987, 1992) that focused on reflective practice in light of Aristotle's phronesis. She states that while practical wisdom necessitates reflective prowess implicitly, bringing reflectivity to the forefront should be the *modus operandi*. By making explicit certain criteria by which actors make decisions, we might gain further insight into this aspect of ethos that generates a trusting relationship between

actors. The reflectiveness of actors highlights the perceived inner life of the actors and the consequential social powers they inhabit.

Kinsella and Schön propose a constructivist worldview that emphasizes *intentional* reflection that foregrounds that worlds are made, not found based on the symbols we make and our understanding of them (2012, 38). As I discussed earlier, true intentionality that necessitates a conscious mind versus perceived intentionality is not necessarily a dealbreaker in the context of reflective practices in digital artefacts. It matters to be sure, and must be taken into consideration, but knowledge, trust and reflection are capabilities that defy the human non-human binary. Kinsella writes that “Schön notes that skillful practice may also reveal a kind of knowing that does not stem from a prior intellectual operation but is revealed through intelligent action (knowing-how), or tacit knowledge.” (Kinsella 2012, 39), which I believe can be understood in and through humans and technological actants. For example, we know that certain chatbots like ChatGPT generates its responses through sifting through millions of documents in a database, but we trust it to “know” how find the appropriate content to match our input (even if it is sometimes what is just a best guessed-scenario (Chomsky 2023)). That kind of trust is based on the algorithmic processing power and its accuracy that is ultimately down to its designers. But that is not where the ethos is placed; it is placed in the software itself. Intelligent action is characterized through *embodied* reflection, which is outside the realm of intentional reflection. According to Schön, embodied reflection is in the action of the performance and the knowing-how, or what Kinsella characterizes as *embodied modes of reflection* (2012, 41). Her work through Schön differs, however, in that she argues that the construction of meaning must be influenced by historical, cultural context and discursive practices, something she states Schön only briefly mentions without elaborating on (Kinsella 2012, 43).

“While individual reflection is important, one of the critiques of reflective practice is its focus on the individual practitioner’s constructions of knowledge without adequately attending to the material, social, or discursive dimensions of practice knowledge” (Kemmis in Kinsella 2012, 43).

Like Hayles’ *umwelt* and Kinsella’s reflective practices, we must not only consider the internal milieu that facilitates the knowing, but also the potential outside milieu that could influence it. Some creative digital artefacts are presented in museums, galleries and pop-up

spaces, while others are explored in the comfort of a home; these things matter. What they are connected to matters; what types of databases or other actors are they connected to? What influences the outcomes? These are the building blocks of reflective practice.

Kinsella continues to present thoughts on ways in which we can locate meaning in practice. She notes that while Schön emphasizes the individual characters dimensions, it is of equal important to consider that thought is both an individual *and* collective practice (2012, 43-44). That is because basic assumptions usually come from societal factors, and what sort of person we are supposed to be (self-representational) and what kind of representation we expect from *others* is rooted in preconceived notions in cultural and societal values. That is why we must pay attention to both individual and collective thoughts when analyzing phronesis.

There is also distinction between reflection and reflexivity. Taken from Sandywell (1995) and Bourdieu (1992), reflection does not take into consideration that objects can be more than things. For reflexivity however, things carry with them signification that is the outcome of social construction and translation processes which is their reason for existence and source of credibility (Kinsella 2012, 45). That means that when considering the reflective nature, creative digital artefacts and the self-representation that is experienced with and through it, both reflection and reflexivity must be considered.

Ultimately, what phronesis can be translated into today is both reflective and reflexive. It reflects what is known, how things are known, how that knowing is implemented in interactivity and what values are reflected. I chose to name the conception of ethos based off Phronesis *intersubjective ethos*, as it encapsulates the reflective, reflexive and perceived cultural values that represent the actants.

5.3.3 Eunoia

To Aristotle, good will is a natural element of human interaction that comes from respect and recognition of another person (Holdier 2016, 56). Aristotle sees eunoia as a necessary condition for friendship as well as public engagement in order to create trust and kinship between actants. However it is not the same as friendship; “for one may have goodwill both towards people whom one does not know, and without their knowing it”

(Aristotle in Holdier 2016, 56). Cicero claimed that *eunoia* was especially important at the beginning and end of a speech, an important technique for “capturing goodwill” in building social and political alliances (Porter 2017, 177). Therefore, *eunoia* can be seen as more than good will and friendliness.

Porter suggests that we look to Confucian rhetoric to find different conceptions of how virtues of courtesy, politeness and friendliness assist in building relations with others. In Confucian rhetoric, the relationship between the self and the other is governed by *shu*. *Shu* means to put oneself in others shoes, but most importantly it refers to the character of a rhetor; “*Shu* is not something the rhetor “uses” in a discourse; it refers to the respectful and concerned nature of the rhetor’s “being in relationship” with “others”.” (2017, 180). It is therefore concerned with the true nature of a self, it’s stable presence that confirms an authentic self that can be relied on. Halloran notes that “to have ethos is to manifest the virtues most valued by the culture to and for which one speaks” (1982, 62) and that notion of goodwill is about the sincerity of the rhetor to which I will argue that good intentions and good will towards fellow beings can be juxtaposed with concepts of reliability and authenticity, especially considering digital environments. Knappe posits that Aristotelian ethos does not even necessarily mean ethics or morality, but the personal image of an orator conveyed by the spoken text in the moment of performance (Knappe 2021, 20), to which I read that the positioning of a good “will” is merely the trust in someone-or thing being what it claims to be; authentic.

When putting trust and confidence in someone- or thing, a rhetor’s authenticity can make or break an impression and either confirm or negate those feelings. Authenticity can mean different things depending on the context, especially when considering human and nonhuman actants. To say that a human is authentic can mean that one is true to oneself and that a person acts in a way that aligns with their values. Authentic technology can mean that the data and processes that is in question originated from its purported source. These conceptions of authentic are generally exclusive, as saying a child is authentic only if it originated from a certain parent would be strange and archaic. To say that a computer is true to itself and acts in alignment with its values is closing in on being an oxymoron.

So, what can we use to define authenticity? According to Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher, the authentic self is the true, individual essence of a person that is

uncovered through self-reflection and introspection (Heidegger 1962). While that can be compared to the reflective nature (phronesis), I will argue through Heidegger that it is different in the sense that authentic selves authenticity also must be considered in relation to its *Dasein*. In critique of the Cartesian subjectivism, Heidegger proposes a *Dasein* that refers to the experience of being-in-the-world. Not as an individual person, but as the structure of every existing individual and what makes any individual possible (Mansbach 1991, 67). In an analysis of Heidegger's self, authenticity and inauthenticity, Mansbach writes that Heidegger sees the *Dasein* as a transcendental subject that is relational rather than substantial, meaning that it pertains to *how* it exists in the world rather than *what* it is. Importantly, Mansbach notes that *Dasein* thus enables the manifestation of *being* (lowercase) and of *Being* (Capitalized), which refers to the concept of *Being* itself as a fundamental aspect of reality, versus *being* as individual entities that exist in the world similar to Latours ANT, thus taking a leap towards the elimination of the subject/object dualism (1962, 69). It is a state of being with other beings, and that being, or "self" has two modes of existence: authentic and inauthentic. The authentic self refers to a constancy of self. A self that "maintains itself as something identical throughout changes in its experiences and ways of behavior, and which relates itself to this changing multiplicity in so doing" (Heidegger in Mansbach 1991, 71). According to Wrathall, Heidegger means that authenticity is the ideal of human existence, because inauthenticity would mean concealment of ones true self from oneself (Wrathall 2014, 194). That is displayed through the autonomy of the self, which relates to the conditions that makes an agent, or self, the "determinative cause" of an action (2014, 194).

So, if we conceive of authenticity as what is the underlying force of action as well as what is perceived as the determinative force of action, I suggest we start looking at what or who is supposedly the focal actant of a large cluster of actions. In Latours ANT, we see actors in networks, but we also acknowledge that the actions that manipulate and make the network flow and move is often perceived as a singular unit; the *embodiment* of the network. That embodiment relates to the extension of self in its material form. As Haraway enduring question reminds us; "why should our bodies end at the skin?" (1991, 178), philosophies of technologies have always had a sensitivity to the materiality of things. Those materiality's are seen, heard, *felt*, and they always *present*, in relation to other materialities

and immaterialities. The mode of inquiry then becomes if that embodied practice is in line with its other actions, or its *stable existence* in the world. *How* a self exists refers to the materiality, but also the embodiment of that materiality; the visible form of a self. It's textuality. *The embodied ethos* gives the human a spirit or self in the machine, and the machine a spirit that is up for interpretation by any-one or -thing that enters its narrative.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Concluding Thoughts

The goal of this thesis was to explore and suggest new thinking regarding how we view, interpret and interact with technological actants. The goal of new technologies usually has the purpose of improving life for humans either directly or indirectly, but new technologies have become more than tools as they provide a sense of belonging, and a sense of self through new kinds of communication. They are interactional, and because that interaction provides discourse, it is inevitably perceived as rhetorical. That is something that is usually separated to mean something either *for* humans or *by* humans, and rarely gains any attention as a singular entity or focal actor with separate, self-representational qualities. That needs to change as technology continuously asserts itself into being something we relate and communicate with, instead of as tools for us to manipulate.

Assigning rhetorical value to non-humans as the source of persuasion means assigning them self-representational qualities. That results in a variety of questions regarding what a self even is. By utilizing Posthuman and Actor-Network Theories, I have attempted to frame a way of thinking that breaks conventional thought-processes on this topic by utilizing Actor-Networks materialist look at actors and their agency which effects the assemblages any-one or -thing is part of.

Approaching this meant evaluating what sort of value is put into discourse, and what sort of value we see in ourselves and others. Because ethos is a projection of inherent values, it means that the values in that framework must be unifying and flexible, yet still nonexclusive to human actants. Because ethos is something humans ascribe to discourse, it meant “de-anthropocentrizing” something that in its origin is anthropocentric. To do so meant focusing on the specific kinds of digital artefacts that present the types of characteristics one might associate with being more-than-things. That resulted in the taxonomy of Creative Digital Artefacts which presented an opportunity to focus on commonalities in types that created specific types of discourse instead of maintaining forced binaries. That evolved into exciting discoveries on the narrative properties of discourse that can be found in both subjects and objects. Creating narratives creates discourse, and discourse creates narrative. That has symptomatic functions of displaying how anyone or -

thing has influential power in any kind of circumstance, both in a grand perspective like ChatGPT and on a smaller scale like Taroko Gorge.

Using such different examples as ChatGPT and Taroko Gorge is perhaps the equivalent of comparing a Tesla and a car made of LEGO, but in doing so I hope to have illuminated a range of applicability that goes beyond chatbots and image-generators. They ultimately fall into categories of being that shape and create narratives. Being a part of a narrative also means being or observing an experience. Posthumanism and Actor-Network Theory both draw inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari who seeks to treat the world as if it were an object of experience. Not as being separate from it, but through interconnection. If we too open up possibilities of relation and connection to other entities that do not necessarily have a conscious cognitive, analysis of selves becomes new and exciting.

As it turns out, Posthuman and Actor-Network Theories have far more in common than first assumed. Though the outcome of their approach is far different, their initial approach to view the social world as a hot compost pile of humans and non-humans, or as rhizomes pulsating together are strikingly similar. Conscious actors/actants/rhetors/entities are nothing but pieces in a much grander puzzle, making the leap to assign self-representational qualities to non-humans not just understandable, but a needed development in the field of digital rhetoric and beyond.

Engaging with Posthuman and Actor-Network Theory led to fruitful findings for how to further engage with technological actants. Though my hypothesis was initially that they would be contrasting in many ways, Actor-Network and Posthuman theories often have conceptions that are sympathetic towards each other. While Actor-Network encourages categorization and analyses of action and connectors, it also relies so much on its high applicability and ability to encompass all things. To expand that into something encompassing rhetoric, selfhood and identity, posthuman theories provided frames of thinking that could take it further, into the non-materialistic matter. That includes discussions of embodiment, states of being, cyborgs and more.

Through cyborg-thinking one can allow oneself to become part of something bigger-something outside of themselves that is also connected to themselves, an assemblage. That is true for all Creative Digital Artefacts, which is demonstrated with ChatGPT and Taroko

Gorge, as interaction and becoming relies on actants becoming part of the “collective” that becomes “one”. That means letting go of previous notions of consciousness being, as Hayles suggests, the whole show when it is in fact only a minor sideshow. These have qualities that create modal manifestations of a self that have rhetorical value.

Self-representation and ethos are not about conscious activity, but about discovering the manifestation of discourse that emanates from an actant that possesses powers of generation, oscillation, connection and performance. These traits create narratives with which we assign a self that is up for interpretation. Though that interpretation can be related to many and all rhetorical terms and themes, the concept of ethos presents a good entryway into exploring ways technological actants assert and enact a persuasive appeal in their existence. That means inspecting ethos as a term and concept, and how it has been and is applied in different settings.

Classic rhetoric is by no means dead, but like most things, it needs to be updated to fit the current situation. While classic ethos surrounded oral speeches, I hope to have shown how its growth and interpretive flexibility to new contexts have inspired me to attempt a continuation of this tradition. As mentioned, because ethos and its qualities (Arête, Phronesis and Eunoia) have such focus on perceived values, it manifested an interest in me to see how it might be updated once more to be more inclusive, yet still remain its flexible and interpretive qualities that still encompass similar values. Reconceptualizing ethos meant acknowledging its current limitations of what it might mean and who or what it might involve.

I found that ethos does not need to be about making conscious choices to enact a persuasive appeal, it’s about structures of performance that lead to the perception of a persuasive self. It’s about possessing the ability to create change, whether that be politically, emotionally or otherwise, therefore nonhuman objects can become rhetorical actants in their own right. Non-human subjects or objects do not care about possessing or enacting some form of ethos, that is an entirely human affair. However, that does not mean they do not possess it. In line with Posthuman conceptions of what it means to be cyborg, connections through and with human and technological actants position ethos in all realms of being. The technological actant becomes a part of engaging actants self, and by extension

ethos. Not in the sense that it is lending or giving up a part of itself, but in the sense that human reality becomes a part of it, and it in turn becomes a part of the actant.

6.2 Way Forward

This thesis shows the dire need for the development of the terms and meanings of self-representation and ethos in technological platforms and innovations. With digital technology constantly changing, evolving in how we use and interpret these terms, we need to be mindful of their impact on our interpretation-of and being-with actants that break binaries. While this study provides an overview of some of the major themes and topics, this examination is by no means exhaustive. The analysis of ChatGPT and Taroko Gorge exemplify that rhetorical terms and applications can be adjusted. However, neither glitching, intersubjective nor embodied ethos are without flaws. This analysis is the start of a conversation that is grounded in a desire for a more inclusive conception of rhetoric that encompasses something more than humans.

My journey began by writing a Bachelor of Digital Culture report examining the ethos and self-representation of cross-platform influences, and has continued with this Master's thesis studying the prospective and possible development of self-representation and ethos in what I call Creative Digital Artefacts. The topic has become a passion project which I hope to pursue with continued study. I realize the scope of this analysis is vast, necessitated by the inclusion of a multitude of factors that influence outcomes. However, I believe this breadth showcases the need for further research that dives deeper into potential definitions and identification. Self-representation and ethos are so intrinsically linked, that the lack of research demonstrates the time and place is ripe for such studies. By scratching the surface, I believe I have identified opportunities for exploration – both by applications of classic and contemporary rhetoric.

In addition to a deeper exploration of these elements, further studies should question the rhetorical implications of technological actants, specifically when they encounter actants that are not “ideal users”, and how they are included or excluded in the continued development of the digital sphere. The persuasive appeal of these technologies is not without fault or warning. While I have presented several ethical and moral issues that

arise when technological actants provide problematic discourse, this study has by no means exhausted the potential perils, not their implications.

My research shows that studies involving AI, algorithms, and the like, tend to focus on the possibility for either imminent doom or salvation. Unfortunately, little effort is spent on discussing the rhetorical impacts these models pose. When involvement increases by interlacing human and non-human relations, the power dynamics are disrupted on both micro and macro-perspectives. Classic rhetoric cannot capture the complexity involved with current discourse, requiring a reassessment of rhetoric's impact on humans and non-humans.

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