

University of Applied Arts Vienna
Masterstudium Art & Science (S 066 776)
Supervisor: Virgil Widrich

Rebeka Csombordi
(12329115)

The Simulacrum of Anthropomorphic Performance

An Interdisciplinary Enquiry into Digital Algorithms

Written component Master thesis
Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (MA) at the
University of Applied Arts Vienna, Institute of Fine Arts and Media
Vienna, 2025

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Exordium

By 2040, humanity dances on the edge of extinction. The Big Burning and the relentless exploitation of Earth's resources have left the planet a barren wasteland of scorched deserts and toxic rivers. In the chaos, data parks and power plants were among the first casualties, crippling global infrastructure and erasing centuries of accumulated knowledge. From the ashes of this collapse, a new kind of intelligence emerges: Aegis.

Designed by a coalition of surviving scientists, Aegis is a biomechanical AI unlike any before it. Faced with the absence of traditional data sources, its creators fused synthetic hardware with organic matter—mycelium networks, neural cells, and other biological substrates—to create a system that is both energy-efficient and uniquely attuned to the needs of its human subjects. This organic core was meant to foster empathy, a quality absent in earlier AIs, and to ensure that Aegis prioritizes human survival above all else. As traditional social structures have collapsed, survivors trust Aegis to mediate intergroup conflicts, and to provide them with both strategic and psychological support.

Now, scattered communities rely on Aegis to navigate the harsh realities of their new world. Each day, they provide data through a series of tests—part strategy game, part CAPTCHA—designed to distinguish human intuition from machine logic. These interactions not only refine Aegis' survival algorithms, but also test the fragile boundary between human and machine. As you engage with Aegis, remember: your choices shape not only your survival, but also the future of this uneasy symbiosis. How much authority do we assign to machines, and at what cost to our humanity?

I. Introduction

When we reflect on historical events, some distance in time equips us with clarity and context that improves our chances at objectivity. In the case of historical observation, this distance in time is backward-facing: we tend to observe the past in the context of unfolding consequences that lead to the present. While we can't travel forward in time to render the present as the past of the future perspective, a reflective engagement with the present is still possible from speculative futures, through creative interdisciplinary techniques such as the writing of science fiction or the making of crafts. The act of imagining a well-informed speculative future enables us to consider present trends and their consequences in a broader context. Sci-fi bears witness to our current historical-cultural context by giving a platform to our hopes and fears, especially as society becomes more and more entangled with technological development.

In my Master project, I prompt myself to playfully engage with the trends of today's everyday interactions between humans and algorithms, giving a special focus to artificial intelligence. My engagement is characterized by a philosophical intent of observing the nature of human agency in decision-making processes contextualized by algorithmic reliance. How much do we rely on digital algorithms? How different are they from organic algorithms and how do we bridge the divide? How can we use science fiction as a tool to reflect upon present challenges? With my project, I prompt myself to explore how this topic can be speculated in playful contexts. Since my interest is multidimensional, I use an interdisciplinary approach that combines storytelling, sculpture, and digital interaction.

In order to engage with the topic in a playful manner, I work with the methodology of design fiction, an interdisciplinary, object-oriented technique described by Julian Beecker in his 2009 text *Design Fiction - A short essay on design, science, fact and fiction*. This "authoring practice" combines storytelling and craft, using material props as the physical embodiments of prototyped worlds in the context of imagined sci-fi futures. Therefore, this thesis is focused on the development of three pillars: storytelling, sculpture, and game development. In this thesis, I introduce my research with the help of the artistic work, highlighting the connection points of lexically- and artistically-perceivable information. My goal is to create an interactive, atmospheric experience where the shifting conditions can be critically addressed in a playful manner, from the safety of fiction and salted with the absurdity of present-day relevance.

II. The science fiction of today

Since science fiction writing is a speculative and therefore playful method to analyze the present status quo of society and its relationship with technology, I find it a suitable technique to be utilized in the context of my Master project. This chapter reviews the genre of science fiction and introduces notable examples in literature. The overview is strongly connected to the first pillar of my Master project, a short story presented in the Exordium. While I have no illusions about ever coming even close to the literary genius of the authors mentioned in this essay, I do intend on using their techniques of observing present trends and imagining where they might lead in the future if not disrupted. My speculations are not always the results only of my own thinking, but are rather “educated guesses”, drawn upon the conclusions and remarks of authors, scientists, and researchers more insightful and experienced than I in the fields of science fiction and trend research.

II.1. Escaping the present

While a typical science fiction story takes place in the future, science fiction in fact is “a direct interaction with contemporary culture that lies at the nexus of technological, scientific, critical, and social thought in that it determines what we conceive of as possible in and for our future” (Schmeink, 2016, 19-20). In other words, science fiction bears witness to our present in terms of scientific and technological development, dominant social order, and cultural trends that establish what is thought to be possible in the future. Science fiction, and speculative writing in general, offers an ethical consideration of present systems of values and the ability for society, or humanity at large, to overcome the challenges and struggles faced in the here and now.

In contrast to the unattainable perfection of utopia (“no place” in Greek), science fiction strives for realism (Beecker, 2009, 68). It strives to critically acclaim the struggles of the present via a speculated future of consequences. One of its most well known subgenres, dystopia, is often characterized as the opposite of utopian literature, and the term has been used to describe future worlds as the “new maps of hell” (Jameson, 2005, 154). In comparison to the post-apocalyptic genre where modernity is lost, typically due to some global disaster that renders technology to be seen from a mythologized and pre-modern viewpoint, dystopia predicts the persistence of modernism,

revealing its worst parts as it progresses. While in the present, inhuman conditions characteristically regard lower social classes living in extreme poverty, dystopia addresses the “disfiguration of human beings on a systematic level” (Pilgrims Pass, 2024). In other words, nobody, not even the rich and powerful, is free from the loss of humanistic ideals, such as the superiority of Cartesian logic, the rights of free will, and individual agency.

One of the most extreme examples of the disfigurative dystopian genre is Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1931), where the members of society in World State are engineered rather than born. Humans in After Ford 632 (2540) are conditioned into their social cast through gene-engineering and hypnosis, and compliant behavior is promoted via the consumption of a calming and uplifting drug, soma. For World State citizens, agency and free will are unknown concepts, and even the “right to be unhappy” is rejected by authority cast members when a semi-savage character pleads for it. In another classic example, in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), society is again fractured into a hierarchical social class system, where the leader, Big Brother, oversees every single action and every single thought of society.

Having witnessed the chaos and horrors of both World Wars, both dystopian authors reflect on the Western society of the early mid-twentieth century by describing futures where peace is maintained by systematic and absolute control. Yet their approaches are wildly different; in Huxley’s World State, the oppression of lower castes happens by means of pleasure and entertainment, while in Orwell’s Oceania, the dictatorship is fueled by fear and a lack of means. The first scenario engages with the social criticism of cultural behavior characteristic to the West, while the latter, inspired by Soviet models, resembles the social structures of Eastern economic and military powers, such as China or North Korea. Upon reading the Orwellian dystopia, Huxley wrote a letter to his former student to congratulate Orwell for writing such a profound work. In his letter, Huxley mentions that while he sympathizes with Orwell’s vision, he believes that even if it becomes a reality, the Orwellian social order is only a temporary, transitional step in the march towards *Brave New World*’s social model. In Huxley’s view, infant conditioning and material temptations would be much more efficient and economical means for the ruling parties to “satisfy their lust for power” (Open Culture, 2022).

Although technological development is the enabler of both futures, it is not the means of technology that primarily captures our attention as readers in either of these books. Upon analyzing *Minority Report*, a science fiction movie

directed by Steven Spielberg, Beecker (2009, 37) writes that it is "the social elements that stories are always about, [but if any means of technology, or] the instrument itself [was] shown alone, it would appear meaningless particularly if there were no story to surround it." In other words, it is the fictional element, the human drama, that creates the core of a science fiction story, while the props of future technology remain silent in the background, providing the contextual elements of an environment. While it may seem that the Exordium story I provide as context for presenting the Master project is a short one with little detail, it is indeed a crucial element for setting the stage of expectation and framing the visitors' experience in the exhibition. The story itself provides no narrative drama or relatable characters, there is no hero to root for. But this is exactly what enables the visitors to become the protagonists of the story and to fulfil the dramatic quest of negotiating with a different kind of intelligence for their survival in a post-apocalyptic world.

Therefore, using science fiction is not only useful as a tool to make observations about our increasingly techno-dominant present, but it also becomes a necessary element in the presentation of an artifact. The story about Aegis is a crucial contextual element that frames the sculpture and the interactive display in a post-apocalyptic setting, creating the atmosphere of an unsettling dystopia where tensions between individual agency and a reliance on machines can be playfully observed. It therefore brings in the element of drama, enabling an immersive experiment and building greater impact.

II.2. Tomorrow never knows

As later chapters will discuss in more detail (see III.2. Relying on algorithms), Western societies increasingly rely on recommendation algorithms and on artificial intelligence in a habitual manner. Following this tendency with a pinch of exaggeration, I decided to create a world where the reliance on digital algorithms is not motivated by laziness or comfort, but rather becomes a necessity, a last resort of hope for survival. For this reason, I placed the contextual story piece into a post-apocalyptic future, where the known rules of living don't apply anymore and a little bit of external help would quite likely be appreciated.

In our present, technology is promised to make human life easier, improve quality of living and to render workflows more effective through

automation and smart solutions. Thanks to the ubiquity of technological devices, speedy algorithms, and a high rate of fast and reliable solutions, we tend to rely more and more on our gadgets and algorithms in the search for information and in our decision-making processes. Furthermore, due to our innate tendency of attributing intelligent statuses to complex systems that behave similarly to us (see Dennett, 2023 in chapter III.1.), AI algorithms are also being used as substitutes for real human relationships, such as in romantic relationships or in psychotherapy (Davies, 2023). These reliance tendencies of short-term release and ease can easily become habitual, and when they become so, they threaten the humanistic core of our being by potentially leading us to the loss of critical thinking, memory training, and genuine human connection.

Exaggerating the destructive potential of how we use technology in the present, in the world of Aegis, we enter a leftover world after destruction. Based on the current trends of environmental exploitation, the unfolding climate crisis, and the rise of international conflicts that we are witnessing in real life today, I don't think it is an entirely unlikely scenario that humanity could find itself in a "barren wasteland of scorched deserts and toxic rivers." Regardless of whether it will be a world of ecological disaster or salvation, concerns around energy consumption point us in the direction of future technology, potentially incorporating organic matter for higher processing capabilities, better heat management, and reduced energy needs.

Currently, there is research being conducted on the utilization of slime molds, mycelium, as well as human brain organoids, and I use these experiments as sources of inspiration for the development of Aegis (see Megaproject, 2024; and Razor Science Show, 2024). First, I find it fitting in a futuristic and post-apocalyptic world that a supercomputer could be expanded from its mechanical hardware into something organic. Second, the mysterious nature of the sculpture could benefit from an undefined organic element in a suggestive yet non-revealing manner. Third, from a psychological point of view, I find it entertaining to speculate about the organic potential of fostering empathy in a computer, which could be a unique feature in the AI's program that must support survivors of the human species. This way, the support could be expanded from strategies to emotional counseling as well. Here, the fictional element of science fiction plays a crucial role, enabling us to project present trends into the future and make both educated and playful guesses as to where they might lead.

In conclusion, the contextual story exaggerates current trends of algorithmic reliance into a future projection where the reliance is not entirely voluntary anymore, but in fact necessary for survival. It touches on both the environmental aspects of increasing energy demands, and on the social factors of creating and maintaining meaningful human connections, not to mention risk mitigation in terms of critical thinking, lexical knowledge, and strategic planning. I trust that the writing of this short science fiction story supports these explorations in a creative and thought-provoking manner, as it enables us to distance ourselves from the present for a clearer view. In addition, I believe that presenting my projection through a science fiction lens can inspire a more meaningful engagement for the audience than a purely academic case study criticism could.

II.3. Blessed by the Algorithm

Just as science fiction stories acclaim our present existence, science fiction stories about artificial intelligence are not only about technology, but rather about us, our fears and desires, our needs and insecurities (Hudson, 202). Who are we? And what is our purpose? From monkeys to tool makers, from builders to destroyers of civilizations, homo sapiens keep trying to define their place in the world. Western Enlightenment elevated man from the interrelations of nature and placed him above it. Man then discarded the idea of God and decided to become Him. Despite advances in biotechnological experiments in the past few decades, humanity has set the goal of creating something in its own image, naming it artificial intelligence.

AI is not only a technology, but simultaneously a myth that can “possess a deeper significance, establishing itself as an inherent aspect of the reality in which we reside – an encompassing reality that shapes our thoughts and actions” (Duca, 2023, 72). In other words, stories created about AI have similar identity-shaping potential as traditional religious myths do. The AI myth phenomena manifests itself on three levels of clichés, science, and religion. On the first level, it scares people with the cliché idea of a robot-apocalypse where AI could extinguish humanity; second, on the scientific level, it claims the inevitability of a human-like artificial general intelligence (AGI); third, as a religious tendency, the myths surrounding AI personify complex technological apparatus, obscuring the true nature of AI (Duca, 2023, 79-81).

As of today, we distinguish two types of AI: Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI), also called weak AI, and Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), also known as strong AI. ANI is specialized to carry out tasks in a certain field following predefined rules, but is unable to perform in other areas outside its scope. It can, for example, be used in medicine to identify patterns in X-ray or MRI scans; operate a self-driving vehicle, or play chess. In contrast, AGI is theorized to possess human-level flexibility in the variety of things it is capable of learning and performing also autonomously. This idea has given rise to new theories about the creation of Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI) that would possess capabilities beyond human comprehension. Despite the current race towards AGI and the popular myths surrounding ASI's science fictional takeover of the world, at the moment of writing this thesis, all our AIs are ANIs and we have yet to achieve AGI (IBM, 2023).

But if AGI or even ASI were to become a reality, would that imply a god-like nature of humankind that in the Christian sense is capable of creating in its own image and beyond? Or would that continue a current trend of AI's deification, seeing AI as a more-than-human entity? Upon analyzing the intentions of creating AGI, theologian and computer scientist Noreen Herzfeld (2003, 304) notes: "One goal of AI is to create an 'other' in our own image. That image will necessarily be partial; thus we must determine what it is in ourselves that computers must possess or demonstrate to be considered our 'mind children'." In other words, Herzfeld calls for a careful reconsideration regarding our goals of creating a human-like artificial intelligence, reevaluating which features of humanity are supposed to be incorporated and therefore mirrored back to us.

However, although we only have ANIs around us, AI "has already infiltrated religion in roles ranging from ritual tools to creating or becoming new Gods" (Doherty, 2024, 102). Due to its mysterious black box nature, AI prompts us to unconsciously return to old habits, where making sense of the world happens through stories about god-like beings and supernatural forces. The deification of AI is further supported by personifying processes, where one tends to attribute intelligence to complex systems, or think those systems might be even more intelligent than us due to their mysterious ways of working (see III.2.) This is why, for example, people pursue metaphorical blessings from "The Algorithm." This phenomena is specific to recommendation algorithms on social media platforms, such as the Chinese short video content platform, TikTok, or the American social network service, Instagram, where users perform specific inputs

- metaphorical rituals - in order for the algorithms to rank their uploaded content higher and therefore reach as many accounts as possible (Doherty, 2024, 108-112).



Fig. 1. Pepper, “[a] ‘robot priest’ wearing a Buddhist robe stands in front of a funeral altar during its demonstration at Life Ending Industry Expo 2017 in Tokyo, Japan.”
Photograph: Kim Kyung-Hoon/Reuters

Regardless of whether an AI is seen in a metaphorically-deified position or as a tool to support human life on a daily basis, it remains a complex system without agency, desires, goals, or even understanding. Despite the impressive performance of technological advancement, when robots are used to recite sacred texts, work as priests, or conduct ceremonies, they do so without intention, without a higher purpose, or without connection to something bigger than the individual. “The Algorithm” does not care about my video or yours, it is only programmed to recommend content to keep users active on the platform. This way, the AI tools and metaphorical deities used in religious contexts create a profane environment where the sacred exists only in the imagination of human participants, and the performance of the ritual sinks into a mechanically repeated act without spiritual substance (Doherty, 114-115).

III. I'm an algorithmic girl in an algorithmic world

In the words of Israeli historian Yuval N. Harari (2018, 97), “‘Algorithm’ is the single most important concept in our world.” Algorithms are instructive sequences consisting of methodical steps that lead to specific outcomes in various approaches, such as calculations, problem resolutions, and decision-making processes. They are the working methodology of synthetic computers, living organisms, and modern welfare societies. The importance of algorithms in modern society is not only present in the methodical fashion of bureaucratic organization, but also characterizes the “shared social reality in information societies” largely influenced by the ubiquity of internet culture (Jus & Latzer, 2016, 238). The ease and speed of algorithms catalyzes an increasing reliance on them for automation and quick and relevant search results on the internet. These processes assign relevance to information, influencing what is seen and consumed. It therefore influences “not only what we think about (agenda-setting) but also how we think about it (framing) and consequently how we act” (Just & Latzer, 2016, 245).

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of human and artificial intelligence based on their algorithmic nature, highlighting their similarities and fundamental differences. Additionally, I will address the psychological processes that evoke perceptive similarities in anthropomorphization tendencies. The second section examines the habitual increase of relying on algorithms in everyday life. It presents the potential dangers of dependence, the limitations and challenges of relying on digital algorithms recognized as intelligent agents, and addresses the broader societal implications of algorithmic reliance.

III.1. Organic vs artificial intelligence

Due to our innate bias of recognizing complex systems as intelligent, we tend to forget that artificial intelligence algorithms fundamentally differ from our human intelligence. Upon discussing the nature of “real” intelligence, Korteling et al (2021, 3-4) observes that the term “artificial” intelligence already implies not only its constructed nature, but also that it may not be explicitly real, at least not in the same sense that organic, human intelligence is. In their definitions, the authors list characteristics of “real” intelligence, such as “thinking of creative solutions, flexibly using contextual- and background information, the use of intuition and feeling, the ability to really think and understand, or the inclusion

of emotion in (ethical) consideration” (ibidem). While many of these characteristics are missing from artificial intelligence systems, especially emotion and intuition, in other areas, such as arithmetic calculations or processing large amounts of data, AI systems unquestionably outperform humans.

This is why in many everyday scenarios, people rely on AI algorithms to perform queries into information retrieval or help prepare decision-making processes. These requests can range from complex, bureaucratic processes to searches as simple as what a bored individual should watch on the TV or which restaurant to visit on vacation. In the case of individual use, Large Language Model (LLM) chatbots, such as ChatGPT or DeepSeek, are presented as easy solutions to help out lazy and curious humans. LLMs are statistical algorithms capable of analyzing giant datasets incredibly fast in order to find the statistically most-probable answer for us. The result is communicated in written or spoken natural language, which enforces the perception of intelligent behavior - especially since if the same task of understanding and generating language in a descriptive or explanatory or even creative manner was performed by a human being, we would consider them intelligent (Big Picture Podcast, 2024). Yet, the comparative analysis of human and artificial intelligence proves to be a difficult task due to the ambiguous nature and fluidity of the definition of intelligence.

As new discoveries, systems, and behavioral patterns emerge, the concept of intelligence as a multi-dimensional, both qualitative and quantitative concept (Korteling et al., 2021, 8) is constantly and collectively being redefined (Machine Learning Street Talk, 2025). In the case of computers, to reach the intelligent status over the blurred line that separates intelligence from good computing (Hudson et al., 2021, 199), the most well known criteria is for a computer to pass the Turing Test. The Turing Test was developed in 1950 by machine learning pioneer Alan Turing to determine whether or not a computer is capable of mimicking human thinking to the level that it can fool human observers into thinking they are conversing with another human (George and Gillis, 2024). A weakness of this approach lies in its allowance for mimicry, given that some symbolic softwares can pass the test through successful repetitions and without any real understanding of the world (ibidem).

On the other hand, when we think of intelligence in the case of humans, we tend to connect it with various “constructions of human identity: technical mastery of a skill or medium; interaction and empathy; anticipation and

foresight; idiosyncrasy and the auto-poetic performance of the self” (Hudson et. al., 2021, 200). We recognize these characteristics of intelligence in each other by mentalizing, through a process of inferring the mental states of others that enables us “to be aware that other people have thoughts and also attempt to understand the content of those thoughts” (Heatherton, 2011, 3;8). This psychological phenomena, also called theory of mind, is what allows us to be empathetic towards each other and eventually, it might also be the reason why we tend to recognize anthropomorphic characteristics in non-human agents as well.

The strategy of attributing anthropomorphic features, such as intent, desire, and goals to complex systems is what American philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel C. Dennett calls the intentional stance. He describes it as a “natural inclination to treat anything that seems to talk sensibly with us as a person” and notes that it is not only an easily evoked tendency, but a behavior “almost impossible to resist” (Dennett, 2023). This inclination is also present in science fiction writing. Upon analyzing the findings of a research project that targeted AI fantasies in sci-fi literature to gather a sense of social opinion on AI and its future policies, Hudson et al. (2021, 201) observed that “we quickly realized we had a natural bias toward recognizing AI in characters but not in systems.” This tendency is further reinforced by the religious, myth-like phenomena surrounding AIs (see II.3.). While the words Artificial Intelligence evoke something abstract with “little resemble to a name,” referencing complex systems with familiar names such as Google, Siri or Alexa, the system “ceases to be merely a technological apparatus; it metamorphoses into a personality” (Duca, 2023, 81).

Besides our innate tendency of recognizing a complex, non-human system as similar to ourselves, Harari draws the connection between organic and synthetic intelligences even more tightly. Upon discussing the replaceability of humans in the economic sense, he observes that human work resources have two types: physical and cognitive, the former being already outperformed by machines. While for a long time it seemed that, in the cognitive sense, humans possessed something that a non-conscious algorithm would not be able to mimic, let alone do it better, now it seems that this unique human quality is just “wishful thinking”.

The current scientific answer to this pipe dream can be summarised in three simple principles:

1. Organisms are algorithms. Every animal – including Homo sapiens – is an assemblage of organic algorithms shaped by natural selection over millions of years of evolution.
2. Algorithmic calculations are not affected by the materials from which you build the calculator. Whether you build an abacus from wood, iron or plastic, two beads plus two beads equals four beads.
3. Hence there is no reason to think that organic algorithms can do things that non-organic algorithms will never be able to replicate or surpass. As long as the calculations remain valid, what does it matter whether the algorithms are manifested in carbon or silicon? (Harari, 2016, 371-372.)

In other words, according to Harari, due to the algorithmic nature of humans, we can't assume that synthetic algorithms would not eventually be able to do better than humans in the performance of cognitive tasks. Indeed, human cognitive capacities are a relatively fresh product of evolution, developed on top of complex, perceptual motor skills that drive our everyday actions, from hunting to cooking to tying a shoelace (Korteling, et al. 2021, 3-4). Besides the "embryonic nature" (ibidem) of our computational capacities, as Coglianese and Lai (2022, 1288-1303) observe in their analysis of decision-making processes in governmental structures, human algorithms are inherently flawed due to the physical limitations of the human body, and are characterized by cognitive biases that often lead to inconsistencies and even errors in calculations enabling decision-making processes. In short, while humans and general artificial intelligence do have an algorithmic nature in common, their computational capacity, learning strategies, and problem-solving skills are inherently different, and one of the main divides of these differences is indeed the organic-synthetic divide (see Kortelin, et al. 2021, 5-6).

While artificial intelligence algorithms learn by identifying patterns in large datasets, for us "the body and the senses become a medium through which the world is accessible and available" (Fuchs, 2012, 12). We primarily perceive the world around us through bodily sensors to create abstract references in the mind with the help of language. As Laura Ruis (Machine Learning Street Talk, 2025) describes the rule of reference, she presents the example of children learning a language by referencing something in the world via clear connection points - for example, a princess is a nice woman in a nice dress - but as the child matures into an adult speaker, the reference loses its importance and the concept becomes more and more abstract.

Although today's ANIs exhibit several limits in their application, the present status quo does not diminish the ambitions and fantasies surrounding the creation of AGI. While both humans and AI share an algorithmic nature (see III.1-2), our intelligences, information processing, and executive capabilities are inherently different due to the different ways of being in the world in an organic body or synthetic hardware. Upon comparing AI and human intelligence, Herzfeld (2023, 305-311) lists three approaches traditionally used as historical interpretations of *imago Dei* (image of God, Lat.; see also Dorobantu, 2021, 33-34) that roughly coincide with the approaches of developing AIs.

First, the “substantive” approach locates *imago Dei* in reason, and interprets intelligence as individual property, assuming it as a quality independent from its manifestation in action. It aligns with the symbolic AI approach that is “predicated on the hypothesis that thought can be described by a physical symbol system.” This may have seemed promising, so long as the goal of AI development was to compete with human players in complex games such as chess or Go, however, the idea soon failed and soon became abandoned as “reason seems to be a quality that can be neither easily captured in symbols nor even understood apart from action” (Herzfeld, 2023, 305-307).

Second, the “functional” approach evaluates the computer’s success in practical terms, utilizing the inherent strengths of computers, such as arithmetics and fast data processing. For the sake of a result, it is enough to focus on the speed and storage capacities of computers without concerning ourselves too much with those organically human characteristics, such as intuition, which are too difficult to model. Yet, defining intelligence based on the completion of tasks without a deeper understanding of the resolving processes is rather problematic and seems to fail the hopes of many about creating AGI (Herzfeld, 2023, 307-308).

Last but not least, the “relational” approach observes intelligence as something that emerges from the relationship between two actors. This lies at the core of the Turing Test, as it observes a relationship established and maintained convincingly enough that one cannot determine whether they are talking with a computer or a human being. Since making mistakes is a rather human feature, Turing held the idea that relationality is a lot more important than the task-executing functionality of AI. Given that no computer has convincingly passed the Turing Test up to the moment of writing this thesis, the human-like intelligence of AI remains a fantasy (Herzfeld, 2023, 308-311).

As discussed in this chapter, while human and digital algorithms indeed share an algorithmic nature from a mechanical perspective, due to their different ways of being in the world, they exhibit fundamental differences that challenge the ambitions of creating a human-like artificial intelligence. The complex performance of digital algorithms inspire us to attribute intelligence to certain AI systems, but our innate tendency to recognize ourselves in complex systems and behaviors tricks us into forgetting that the successful mimicry of using language does not equal an actual understanding of it. As we struggle to keep redefining what intelligence is, a human-like AI remains a fantasy goal that may or may not come true in the future.

III.2. Relying on algorithms

Our present is wary of an increasing reliance on technology. Not only in everyday life where artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots help us decide what to cook for dinner, but also in regards to more impactful decisions in an individual's life, for example what or where to study (Sartori & Theodorou, 2022, 5). For the moment, the most popular and publicly available chatbots may not yet be capable of providing us with truly strategic or practical solutions within complex conditions, but this might change soon enough. The question here is not *if* algorithms take over certain decision-making processes in the future, but what our relationship with the decision-making algorithms will be like? To what extent can we rely on algorithms? What are the limitations and challenges that we have to consider when incorporating digital algorithms and AI in our decision-making processes? What are the consequences that we already see unfolding due to the ubiquity of digital algorithms and our increasing reliance on them?

III.2.A. Tendencies of dependence

Digital algorithms are everywhere. They are especially inescapable on the internet, where most platforms use algorithmic recommendation systems to keep users engaged on their sites and recommend advertisements that could convert into purchases. The personalization of content is made possible by data collection, where algorithms supervise user activity to create a profile for the individual's behavior therefore recommending content that will be consumed

at a higher chance. While websites, services, and applications are bound by the law to inform their users of data collection activities, most of us automatically click on the “accept cookies” pop up and click the “I have read and understood the terms of service” document without taking a look at it, let alone carefully reading it.

And yet, we are still blind to the full extent of how algorithms influence us on a daily basis. As Harari (2018, 54) discusses how profoundly infotechnology has impacted our way of searching for relevant and trustworthy information, he notes that “we no longer search for information. Instead, we google. [...] Already today, ‘truth’ is defined by the top results of the Google search.” Thanks to the ease that algorithmic reliance provides us, one of the dangers of trusting algorithms with decision-making lies in our habitual reliance. We are so used to getting fast and reliable information from our algorithms that we become biased to listen to their guidance, despite our better judgement. This is why so many bizarre accidents happen when drivers blindly listen to GPS coordination and end up driving into a lake, falling off a demolished bridge or getting stuck in the middle of nowhere (ibidem).

It is worth emphasizing that our habitual reliance on digital algorithms is completely voluntary and its potential escalation into complete dependence is the product of a self-reinforcing loop of autonomous actions exercised by the individual. Every time we decide to type our destination into a GPS-based routing app instead of asking a local for directions, we actively choose to rely on a digital algorithm instead of making a momentary interpersonal contact. Yet, our inherent need for connection and community have not diminished with technological development. In fact, it seems that the increased time and activity we spend on our devices has created a disruption in interpersonal relationships. In order to fill this void, many turn to chatbots for companionship, using them in the most intimate conversational ways, as friends, romantic partners, or therapists.

The recent trend of engaging in intimate conversations with AI companions not only is the product of decreasing social connections, but also presents some potential advantages in comparison to human companions. Furthermore, the LLMs and generative AI chatbots such as ChatGPT have reached a level of development where it is close to impossible to distinguish them from humans, even in a therapeutic context (Hatch, et al., 2025, 8). The prospect of integrating AI into therapy comes with the potential benefits of accessibility without serious time or financial constraints, and conversing in a

personalizable, non-judgmental communication style (Davies, 2023, also see Hatch, et al., 2025 9). Simultaneously, there is a strong bias observed against AI in the therapeutic context, despite the fact that participants of a recent study placed higher value on the AI-generated answers due to their length in detail and use of more positive sentiments (Hatch, 2025, 9-10).

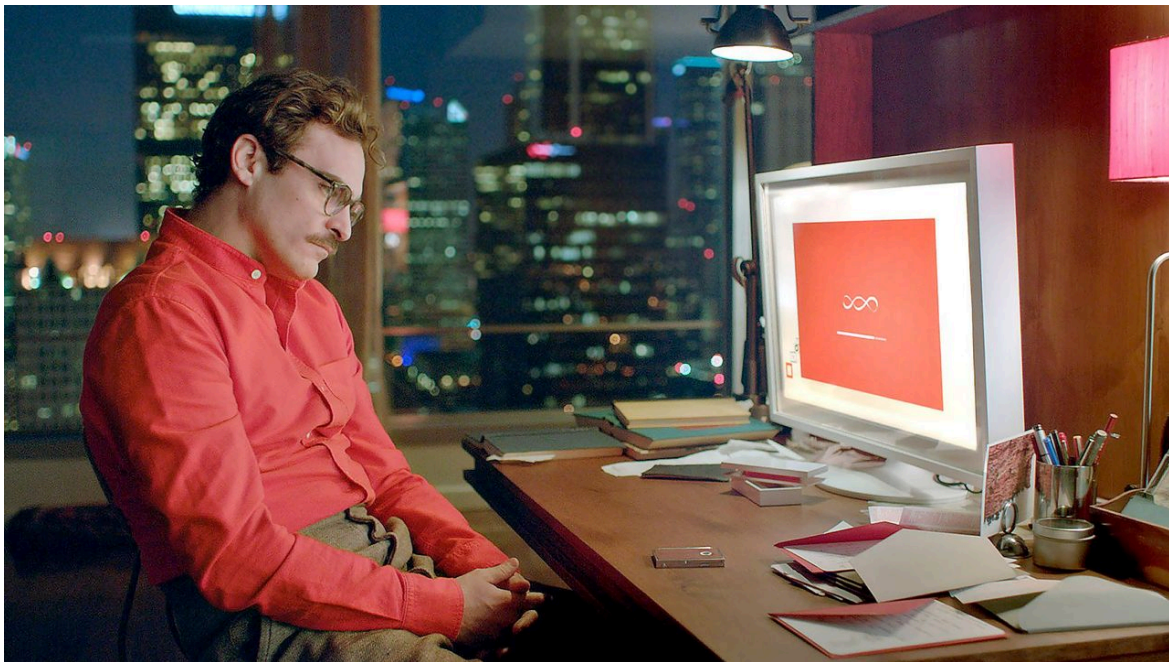


Fig. II. Still from the movie *Her* (2013). The protagonist falls in love with his AI operating system designed to fulfill his daily needs.

Thanks to our innate tendency of anthropomorphizing intelligent behavior in chatbots and the accessibility they provide, using AI might look like a promising substitute for a human therapist. Yet, due to the bodiless nature of the communication, it is possible that an AI would miss out on signals of metacommunication that a human therapist would notice, and besides, the application of AI in the case of severe psychological disorders is advised against (Davies, 2023). While it seems that generative AI has a potential in the therapeutic context to increase access to mental health services, and it is in general capable of outperforming some human therapists in common factors and general cases, the development of this direction necessitates a lot more further research (Hatch, 2025, 9-12).

III.2.B. Limitations

As discussed earlier, digital algorithms are fundamentally different from human algorithms, therefore their use may not always be relevant, or could even prove to be problematic in their application. Ironically, one of the biggest problems with digital algorithms is that their “biggest weakness may well stem from the fact that they need to be designed and operated by humans” (Coglianese & Lai, 2022, 1314). Humans are flawed algorithms by nature, we are inherently weary of cognitive biases and bound by physical limitations in our bodily existence. Consequently, the intelligent algorithms we build and train are mirrors to our own weaknesses, needs, and insecurities as they magnify the flaws in our societies and social institutions (Hudson et al. 2021, 202-203). In order to highlight some of the fundamental differences between how humans and AI approach everyday life, let’s take a look at an experimental case study where an LLM dictated all aspects of life for a whole month.

Máté Világi, a journalist from the Hungarian newspaper Telex, published an article in August 2024 summarizing his experiences that concluded an experiment of being a “slave to Artificial Intelligence for a whole month.” In this human experiment, Világi trusted Open AI’s ChatGPT 4.0 model to create weekly plans for him, including but not limited to planning his diet, working hours, leisure activities, clothing, and sleeping time. While ChatGPT is a rather convincing large language model chatbot at first glance, the practical implementation of many of its answers proves to be challenging. The biggest issue Világi experienced was the missing concept of time, both in the sense of its duration and topicality. This led to completely ignoring facts, such as the fact that leftovers of a meal can be consumed later, clothing is supposed to match the current weather conditions, one cannot watch a three-hour long movie in 120 minutes, and it is only worth visiting a festival venue when the festival is actually on.

When the issue is brought to awareness, in many cases people prefer relying on their own judgement instead of following an algorithm’s answer (Huberman, 2023; also see Hatch, et al., 2025). It is not only about a humanistic sense of leadership and agency, but it is also due to the fact that generative AIs often hallucinate, in other words they invent or falsify information, and therefore provide us with rather problematic answers (Metz, 2023). While machine dreaming or hallucination is exactly what enables creativity and the formation of new ideas in the generative process, when the case is the falsification of information, it can yield grotesque results. Typical examples can be found in

Világi's 2024 human experiment, or in other bizarre cases where Google's AI recommended applying glue to prevent cheese from sliding off of pizza (Robison, 2024).

AI algorithms are trained on giant datasets created by humans. When the data is poorly supervised, it can easily lead to learning false information - for example, the notorious pizza hack recommendation was based on a decade-old Reddit comment (ibidem). On the other hand, when the dataset is curated, it magnifies the biases and discriminatory tendencies of social, economic, and ethnic inequalities, characteristically benefiting those who develop the algorithm (Sartori & Theodorou, 2022, 3). Furthermore, the collection and storage of data used for training evokes several ethical concerns regarding privacy and copyright issues. Therefore, the biggest threat to the accuracy and applicability of digital algorithms remains the human component.

Beyond the already mentioned grotesque results, problems can present themselves on a bigger scale that potentially concern society as a whole, and not just the individual in separate cases. As Coglianese and Lai (2022, 1315-1316) explore the challenges of digital algorithms when operated poorly by humans, they note the following remarkable instances of errors: facial recognition algorithms that have widespread proof of misidentifying and confusing people of color, in some cases a hundred percent more frequently than in the case of white people; an initial digital algorithm at Stanford University (USA) that was developed to allocate COVID-19 vaccines failed to include almost any of its medical residents in the initial priority group, despite the high and regular exposure of many of them to the virus via meeting patients; in 2013, a fraud detection system in Michigan made approximately 48,000 fraud accusations that were proven incorrect in 93% cases upon review.

III.2.C. Consequences

The habitual nature that characterizes our reliance in the search for information is also true for our leisure content consumption patterns. Social media algorithms are created with the intention of keeping users active on the platform as long as possible. They achieve this by curating the display of content based on the user's behavior, their personal preferences in taste, political views, sexual orientation, etc. In other words, algorithms personalize the content each individual user sees, potentially encouraging the formation of filter bubbles, or

environments where users “only encounter familiar information or opinions” (Leysen et al. 2022, 1). While research on filter bubbles is still insufficient, it seems that they may lead to both social and personal problems by increasing polarization, obscuring the diversity of viewpoints, and creating “identity loops” where the individual influences the personalization algorithm that influences their media experience, guiding future preferences (Leysen et al. 2022, 2-6).

Therefore, due to the magnitude and sometimes unreliable sources of information that our chatbot may have been trained on, exercising responsibility is crucial when relying on algorithms and integrating them in our daily lives. While digital algorithms and AI can offer many short-term benefits for both individual and bureaucratic cases, a habitual reliance can easily lead to the obscurity of processes, where fixing problems can become more and more difficult as people lose track of what exactly is happening. What may seem like an innocent daily act, browsing through social media or through a streaming platform to find a movie to watch, algorithmic recommendation systems influence our choices based on our earlier behaviors. Whatever platform with a recommendation algorithm that we use, it reinforces our beliefs and worldviews by recommending content that aligns with our own interests, closing us into self-reassuring loops and filter bubbles.

In conclusion, our increasing reliance on digital algorithms promises not only ease, high speed, and accuracy, but the phenomena simultaneously threatens the social fabric of analog existence. While humans can be viewed as organic algorithms, digital algorithms are inherently different from us in their synthetic nature. Due to the high success of performing a simulacrum of human intelligence, AI algorithms are not only trusted with making simple daily decisions for us, or guide us in certain situations, they sometimes can become even more intimate companions to us than other human beings. The increasing use of AI girlfriends and AI therapist chatbots can create the illusion of belonging, not only satisfying the immediate urge for connection, but also alienating the individual from putting effort into creating and maintaining human relationships. Due to our increasing reliance on our gadgets, and the need to stay online, where we find the constant and unquestioned reassurance of being right and agreeing with the worldviews of others, these acts can lead to increased polarization in society. Therefore, exercising responsibility and critically questioning algorithmic authority in our daily lives is extremely important.

III.3. Non-western considerations of AI influences

So far, this essay has addressed phenomena and problems characteristic of developed Western societies, but technological development and advances in Artificial Intelligence systems impact the world at large. The increasing use of digital algorithms in welfare societies creates a growing demand for the production of new electronics and raises the energy needs for powering said devices. While trading agency and independence for ease and comfort is indeed problematic, information technology and its maintenance raises countless other issues that increase environmental exploitation, enhancing global asymmetry in power and wealth and raising serious humanitarian concerns.

Media, and the smart devices we consume it with, not only extend our senses, minds, and identities, but as Crawford and Joler (2018, 5) suggest in referencing Jussi Parikka's book *A Geology of Media* (2015), also the Earth. The authors note that "media technologies should be understood in context of a geological process, from the creation and the transformation processes, to the movement of natural elements from which media are built." In other words, we should recognize the full lifespan of our devices and technological tools. We should not only consider their material resources before production, but also think of their afterlife following their discard. Every single device we use has been assembled from materials mined across the globe, many of them being non-renewable ones that underpaid workers, most often children, sacrificed their health and lives for (Crawford and Joler, 2018, 7).

Still maintaining a colonial heritage of disproportionate differences in infrastructural and technological differences between the Global North and South, the disadvantageous characteristics of AI, the human labor its development and maintenance demands, and the consequences of the specific type of work it requires, typically affect those whose situation is already unfavorable by this imbalance. Here, the term "South" is used as "a metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance to overcoming or minimising such suffering" (Santos, 2016, 18 in Arun, 2019, 5). This way, the concept exceeds geological constraints and includes migrants, living in otherwise well-developed countries, who have few rights and maintain suboptimal standards of living (Arun, 2019, 5). The AI systems designed in the Global North often fail in the Southern context, due to cultural mismatches and different social norms. Furthermore, its deployment presents infrastructural challenges in places with insufficient electricity supply or poor internet connection (Arun, 2019, 4).

AI and automation ambitions affect Southern people in well-developed countries as well, as their labor force is rendered replaceable by machines and digital systems that cost a fraction of people's salaries. Furthermore, already vulnerable minorities are often discriminated against by digital algorithms, as "AI algorithms can quickly ingest, perpetuate and legitimise forms of bias" (Mohamed, et al., 2020, 662). As discussed earlier, AI and technology are not the perpetrators of bias and discriminators themselves, but rather they reflect the values of their developer societies, mirroring the problems and flaws inherent in the social systemic structure. The obscure nature of how AI is developed and works presents further challenges in addressing and fixing asymmetrical power relations in digital algorithms.

IV. Building Aegis

This chapter focuses on the design and development of the sculpture and the survivors' quiz game it holds. I will first introduce the sources of inspiration that shaped my vision of Aegis by briefly discussing the science fiction novel *MetaGame* and the science fiction TV series *Westworld*, as they both engage a society leading artificial intelligence system using opposing approaches. Then I will contextualize the development of the game and my interest in AI within my own artistic practice by briefly summarizing and reflecting on previous art projects I completed that focused on or made use of algorithms. Drawing upon this reflection, I will address the current development stage and design plans of the survivors' guide quiz. Last but not least, I will discuss the development of the physical sculpture of Aegis together with my intentions that shaped it.

IV.1. Primary inspirations

Two of the main inspiration sources that shaped my vision of Aegis are the Oversoul in the 2009 science fiction book *MetaGame*, written by Sam Landstrom, and Rehoboam in the science fiction television series *Westworld* (2016-2022). They are both data-driven artificial systems that manage and optimize society, but they work and are perceived by citizens quite differently. While the Oversoul adjusts its optimizing strategies by gathering data as it assigns tasks to citizens, Rehoboam runs elaborate simulations to predict the behavior of citizens and controls their behaviors by influencing their decisions. In *MetaGame*, the true artificial nature of the Oversoul is mostly unknown; there are only a few who know that it is an artificial intelligence system and not a board consisting of people. In sharp contrast, Rehoboam's hardware, a giant quantum computer, is on display in the hall of its developer company, Incite. This way, the Oversoul's reception is rather neutral and its organizing authority remains unquestioned for the most part, but Rehoboam's influence is met with many doubts regarding its biases and ethical issues addressing human agency.

In my vision, Aegis is an approximate blend of these opposing characteristics. It is mysterious in its biomechanical nature, not revealing how exactly it works and what its methodologies for reasoning are. Aegis is familiar in the sense that it mimics human intelligence in linguistic proficiency and reasoning, which supports the anthropomorphization process in the context of the previously discussed theory of mind. Furthermore, due to its semi-organic

nature, it is capable of displaying psychological observation to provide survivors with emotional support. I envisioned Aegis as an ambiguous character that is met by a hopeful yet sceptical audience. On the one hand, it necessitates trust from our side, putting faith into its evolving capabilities to successfully assist humanity. Thus, its physical looks materialized in the sculpture are aesthetically pleasing, trustworthy, and inviting. On the other hand, its responses are uncanny and make one uncomfortable not to question its authority - not like in our present, where due to our reliance on algorithms, we “gradually lose our ability to make decisions for ourselves” (Harari, 2018, 54).

In comparison to the Oversoul and Rehoboam, Aegis makes no effort in concealing its artificial nature, nor does it claim absolute authority due to its superior capabilities. It fulfills its role in the human-computer interaction with clarity, as it openly asks for training input. While it gathers psychological information on humans, it displays its findings immediately and in an empathic manner. Human reliance on Aegis is necessary in the sense of helplessness as a consequence of present reliance on algorithms due to laziness and impatience. Projecting this tendency into the future, we can speculate that humans would not know any better than to hope that an AI running on a super computer will save us from the hardships of a post-apocalyptic world.

IV.2. Survivors' Guide to the Future

During my two years in the Art & Science MA program, I focused almost exclusively on textile, meanwhile during my Fine Art Experimental Media BA studies at Prague City University, I had my fair share of experimental work using various algorithms and AI. In the beginning of the 2020s, when the first text-based image generating AI systems became available for the public, I was curious to jump on the trend and experiment with them. At this time, most generative AI prompt-based image generators, such as Dall-E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion created rather poor quality images and exhibited a certain dreamy, psychedelic quality of aesthetics, where the generated forms only rarely properly depicted what the prompt described. In most cases, human touch was inevitable for a cohesive image, yet it was already a fun and promising technology to play with.

The poor quality of figurative depictions at that time really sparked my interest in exploring cooperative methods between humans and computers in

the visual art-making process. I thought that using AI as a tool in the creative process has many advantages, for example in idea generation, composition planning, texture generation, and most importantly, speeding up workflow. I exploited these features in the creation of a short 2D animation about a biomechanical insect, a project I unfortunately never finished. In that project, I created the composites of characters and scene layers of the animation from details generated with AI. Inspired by the fun discovered in the sped-up creative process, a dear friend of mine, Tomas, and I created a subreddit to collect examples of visual works that combine generative AI and human creative input. The subreddit “r/semiARTificial” became a short-lived and not exactly popular sub, as the rapid improvement of image-generating AIs quickly rendered the need for creative human input irrelevant. It was a brief yet fun period of time characterized by excitement and curiosity.

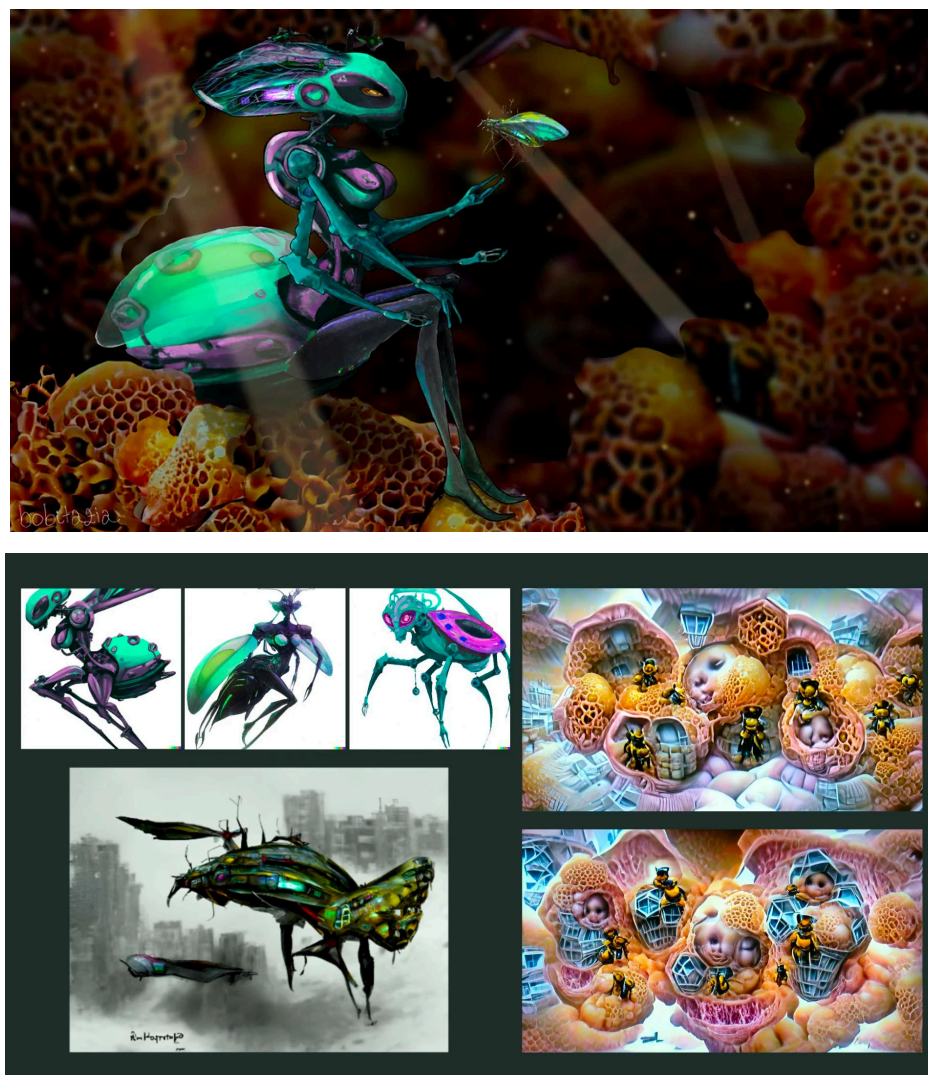


Fig. III. Visual example of a manually constructed scene (above) created for my 2D animation project from fragments of AI generated assets (below).

One of my most challenging projects, *Procedural Odyssey* (2021-2022) explored human-computer cooperation from a procedural point of view, and the relationship dynamics of chance and order in digital world-building processes. The project culminated in a virtual reality game, presented as an immersive, audiovisual art experience. The game was built on a Unity project developed by Marian Kleineberg, utilizing a wave function collapse algorithm that spawns the building blocks of the world based on the player's location in digital space. Each building block was chosen and rotated by the computer randomly from a given repository. When that given location was abandoned, the building blocks were destroyed, saving computing capacity and allowing for a new composition upon return. Among other components, the world consisted of several images generated by artificial intelligence.



Fig. IV.. Screenshot from *Procedural Odyssey*.

In the aforementioned examples, I used algorithms and AI as a tool to randomize my systems and speed up the workflow in asset generation. For my MA project, I decided to continue on a similar path, using DeepSeek for generating hallucinatory scenarios that serve as inspirational content for the game that runs on Aegis, in addition to using the NightCafé Generator AI to generate visuals for the game. Despite the now highly advanced outputs of these image generators, I still could not escape manual edits on the images. In order to emphasize the underlying influence of algorithms on our decisions, I decided to create Aegis' data input system, the game, in a grotesque, caricature-like manner. My goal in doing so is to provide a funny yet highly disturbing experience, where the solutions offered by the AI are semantically

correct and linguistically reasonable, yet in their practicality are completely nonsensical or even impossible. Similar to Világi's human experiment, here the player is met with a broken mirror of the familiar world, where the operating methodologies are not designed for humans.

While today we can still decide against algorithmic recommendations that micromanage our lives, according to Harari, it is rather unlikely that in the future we will have that same freedom of choice. In "The Great Decoupling" (2016, 356-408) chapter of his book *Homo Deus*, Harari speculates that human life will not only be managed and supervised by algorithms on all levels in the future, but AI and robotics will also replace the human workforce, rendering human labor and large parts of society unnecessary and superfluous. Drawing upon this future possibility, I find a grotesque multiple choice game a suitable tool to help us reflect on the absurdity of our increasing reliance on algorithms.

Aegis is the exaggeration of the false promises of technological development. It is a source of hope with the promise of supporting humanity through a post-apocalyptic world to ensure the species' survival, but its potential is questionable due to the experimental nature of the organic-synthetic hardware and the lack of lexical knowledge and data that the survivors can train it with. For this reason, Aegis tries to develop its survival protocols via simple multiple-choice quizzes. In the following example, I present a digital sketch of the human-computer interaction.

In the first screen page, Aegis presents the protocol it needs data for, and briefly describes what is needed from the player. Its communication is direct and straightforward, suggesting seriousness and perceived logical authority. Having agreed to participate in the training, the player clicks on the interactive button that takes them to the scenario screen introducing the problem to be solved. Once the problem is known, the player is presented with multiple solutions created by Aegis, and their task is to choose the most suitable one of them. Ironically enough, while all options are backed by logical reasoning, their distance from the unwritten laws of social norms render them useless. I want this tension to be maintained or even gradually increased throughout the course of the game. In this arch of tension, I want the audience to experience confusion as they contemplate whether or not Aegis is truly intelligent and capable of effectively supporting human survivors, or if instead it's a fraud and a failure of experimentation and we should rely only on our Cartesian reason. Or is it possible that the bizarre questions and solutions are just projections of the AI's alien thinking, and will these answers be processed into a truly helpful solution

in the end? While I want the audience to experience a pinch of disappointment in the frustration towards the AI's nonsense, I would like to simultaneously ease this tension through laughter inspired by the bizarre possibilities.

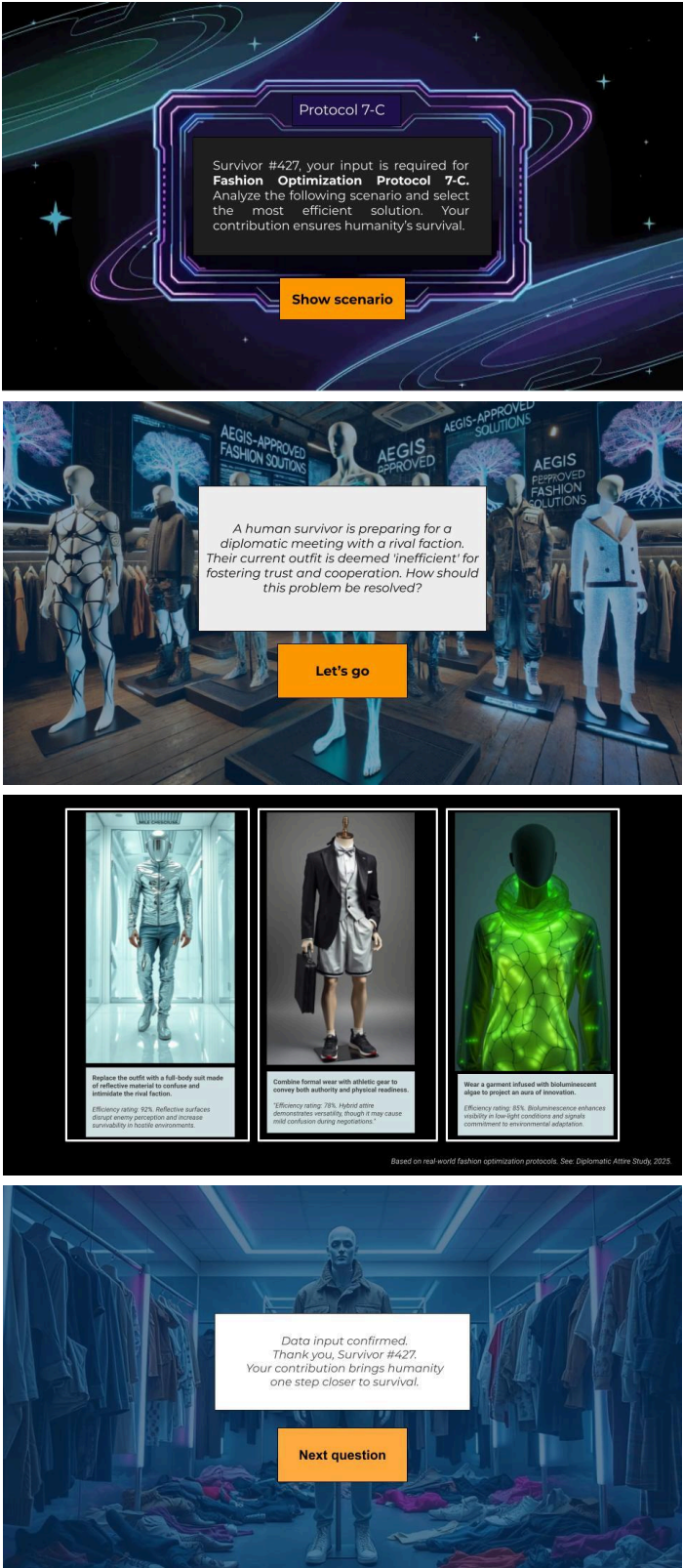


Fig. V.. Digital sketches of a multiple choice question scenario

At the first glance it may seem that my Master project does not entirely display a dystopia in the sense of systematic oppression applied to society as a whole. Aegis does not present itself as an authority and the audience is free to choose not to engage with it. Due to the necessity of receiving human data input, it may even seem that it presents a case contrary to the present critique of humans relying too much on digital algorithms. But a closer look should reveal that Aegis' reliance on the survivors' data input in fact mirrors a dystopian idea of humans acting as collaborators to their own subjugation, complicit in the radicalization of their own vulnerability. Observing the present, we could conclude that we are trading our precious time and effort for ease and comfort, which in other words is a voluntary surrender of agency, rendering us completely dependent on our technology.

IV.2. I like you pretty

When I created the first sketches for the sculpture of Aegis, I was surprised to see how I unintentionally drew some shapes resembling a human head or face. While this sculptural entity manifests itself as a character in my mind, I wanted to avoid any anthropomorphic resemblances in its representation. It is not that I was afraid of falling into the valley of uncanniness, but rather, I found a giant, floating head to be unsettling as a baseline. There is certainly a sense of the bizarre, or even grotesque, that I wish to present in the experience of the scenery, but I want this bizarreness to come from the connection to our present and not from the imaginary, post-apocalyptic future.

According to the uncanny valley theory, "increasing anthropomorphism (i.e., human likeness) in artificial characters does not necessarily go hand in hand with increasing likeability but will result in negative responses when the degree of human resemblance is very high, yet not perfect" (Mara, et al. 2022, 33). Thus, sympathy peaks again when likeness becomes indistinguishable. In Steven Spielberg's 2001 movie *AI - Artificial Intelligence*, it is exactly the incredible human likeness of David that saves him from execution. Due to his emotional behavior, the audience recognizes him as a human child and he is saved from the show. As a counter example, the impeccable human likeness of hosts in *Westworld* (androids that look perfectly like humans) does not meet any sympathy from visitors of the entertainment park. On the contrary, visitors enjoy their cruel actions exactly because the androids look and behave like humans.

Eventually, I decided to go in the direction of a highly symmetrical, amorphous, Rorschach-test styled composition. While it was not my primary focus, in hindsight I am now pleased with how working with negative space aligns with the current shape aesthetics of my recent works. More importantly, negative space allows me to create a sculpture bigger in size, which is a useful tool to expand in size while maintaining some lightness. Given that one of the most fundamental elements of the human and artificial intelligence divide is shaped by the nature of the organic human body, I find it fitting that Aegis will be built with organic matter as inspiration for the development of empathy and emotion in the computer.

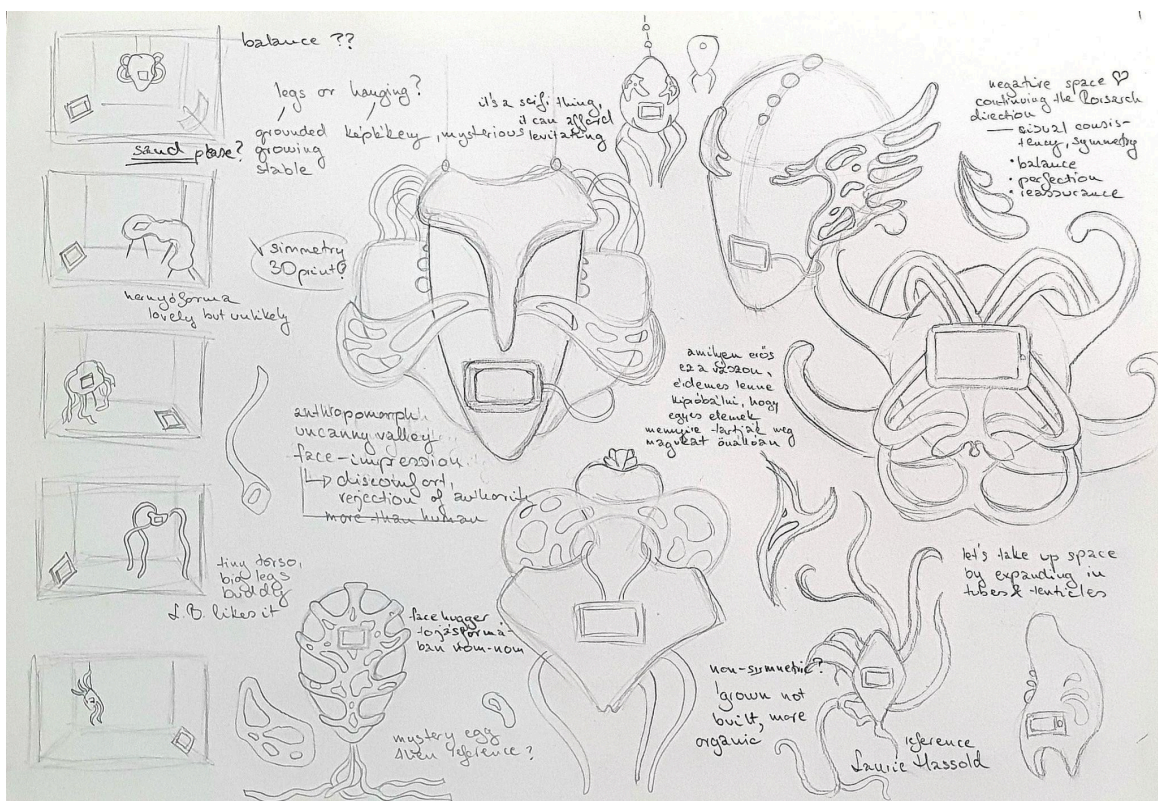


Fig. VI. Hand drawn sketches for brainstorming the shape of the Aegis sculpture

In order to further emphasize the ambiguity of Aegis' look that I mentioned earlier, I decided to approach the goal by combining elements of familiarity with mystery. On the one hand, I decided to emphasize its organic nature via soft pink, pale greenish-turquoise, and soft, sand-like brown colors of prints, and using stuffed nylon socks. I figured that keeping the shapes organic and the colors soft and earthy could inspire a visual that encourages the audience to approach, touch, and interact with the sculpture. The body of Aegis, or the super computer if you wish, is supposed to evoke trust and hope, as it is

posed as the friendly savior of humanity. It is just like our favourite LLM chatbots that are always at our service to make our lives easier when we are too lazy to search for information, make a decision on what to eat, or plan a vacation for ourselves.

On the other hand, I decided to obscure the real organic nature of Aegis, as I want it to maintain a mysterious, unknowable, and alien-like character. This is largely inspired by the myths surrounding AI (see II.3), and the fact that even today, nobody understands computers fully, let alone AI that is autonomously capable of learning, processing, and generating new information. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter II.2., I wanted to play with a speculative direction of fiction, where the organic matter in Aegis would be implemented with the intention of fostering empathy, enabling the AI to provide psychological support to the survivors. Therefore, I decided that the organic elements should be suggestive enough of organic matter, yet not be clearly identifiable as to whether they derive from humans, fungi, or animals. Aligning nicely with the bizarreness of the game interface, I feel this could prove to be a fruitful strategy in evoking a sense of familiar alienation and in unfolding the multidimensionality of human-computer relationship dynamics.

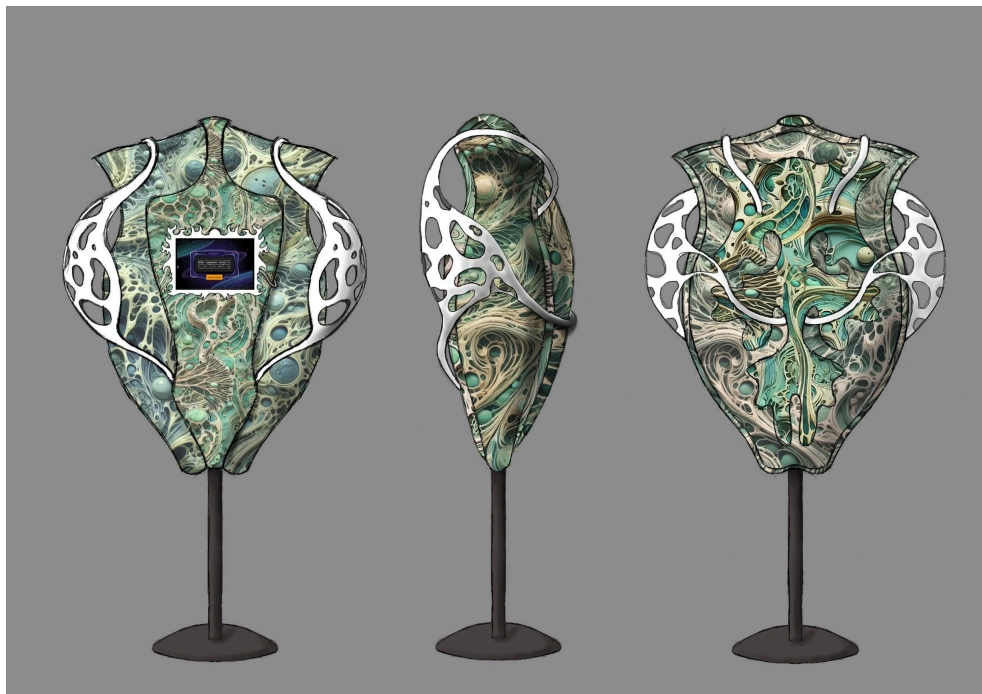


Fig. VII.. Digital sketches for the Aegis sculpture

V. Conclusions

Organized around the three pillars of my Master project, the previous chapters reviewed the use of science fiction writing as a reflective methodology for critically addressing the present and the increasing algorithmic reliance of Western societies that are on the edge of complete technological dependence. I have presented a comparative analysis of organic and digital algorithms, concluding that while both human and artificial intelligence display algorithmic characteristics, the two are inherently different due to their different materiality. The following chapters demonstrated the process of how individuals trade their thinking and research capacity for ease and comfort through the increasing use of smart applications, therefore becoming more and more dependent on digital algorithms. I have highlighted the limitations of present and sometimes publicly available artificial intelligence technologies, showing that reliance on digital algorithms is best paired with a critical, cautious attitude.

My proposed Master project is a material interpretation of the research presented in this thesis, transformed into an interactive installation through an interdisciplinary method that combines the writing of science fiction, the creation of a material prop, and the development of a digital game. While its topic is based on a criticism of today's social behavior, I find its discussion to be most effective through fictionalization. Projecting our viewpoint into the future provides not only a safe distance from our present to observe it with more clarity, but it also equips us with the freedom of possibilities. We can therefore on the one hand use science fiction to make elaborate guesses about our future following the trends of the present-day, and on the other hand, we can use it to inspire us to think creatively and to imagine without stakes.

The project takes place in a post-apocalyptic future where information technology is highly advanced but the resources for training and maintenance are scarce. The protagonist of this world is Aegis, a new kind of artificial intelligence algorithm that runs on a biomechanical supercomputer. Unlike any computer or AI we know today, thanks to its semi-organic nature, Aegis is capable of uniquely attuning to human psychological needs, providing support not only for strategy, but also for mental health. Visitors of the exhibition are invited to take on the role of survivors on the scorched planet and feed input data to Aegis, enabling it to fine-tune survival strategies.

As traditional social structures will have collapsed in this future scenario, survivors trust Aegis with complex decisions, exaggerating our present reliance

on recommendation algorithms that tell us which movie to watch, what to have for dinner, or how to reach our destination in traffic. Therefore, the scene of the installation projects the gradual erosion of human agency into a future where survival necessitates the support of an artificial intelligence that is capable of empathy, an AI that can naturally mitigate interpersonal conflicts that may arise in a world where resources are scarce and hard to get. This reflects upon our present dangers that lie in the formation of filter bubbles and the radicalization of society due to algorithmic identity loops that self-reinforce values and worldviews as a method of keeping users active on online platforms.

The world of Aegis is not a clear dystopia in the sense of total social oppression, but it does exhibit dystopian features in the exaggeration of the vulnerability of human beings who lose their agency in critical thinking, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. While survivors don't necessarily have to engage with Aegis or follow its survival strategies, this control is only maintained as an illusion. In reality, the erosion of agency and the freedom of choices have already started deteriorating in our present. What is currently a habitual reliance on algorithms for faster and statistically better solutions, in the future can easily become absolute dependence. In this sense, Aegis not only tries to support humanity's survival, but simultaneously reinforces human dependence on the machine. Just as systematic errors and digital malfunctions in AI happen most characteristically due to poor human input and interaction, in this post-apocalyptic future, humans are the main actors reinforcing their vulnerability and dependence on Aegis. We are just as complicit in giving up agency for survival strategies as we are currently when we don't second guess why this or that algorithm makes a specific recommendation to us.

In conclusion, I hope that my project will provide the audience with a proper environment to playfully reflect on the present tendencies of algorithmic reliance. Through a speculative lens of science fiction, the bizarre absurdity of Aegis' world invites us to question not only our present-day dependence on algorithms, but also the societal implications of surrendering our agency to digital algorithms. By engaging with Aegis, visitors are confronted with the unsettling possibility that the erosion of human autonomy is not such a distant dystopian future fantasy, but a gradual process already unfolding before our eyes. Ultimately, my project seeks to provoke critical thought about the balance between technological convenience and human agency, urging us to consider how much authority we are willing to assign to machines—and at what cost to our humanity.

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