



Aesthetics of Moral Crisis: The Ethical Function of Ugliness in the Age of Artificial Humanity

Mohsen Karami¹

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Media Arts, Faculty of Religion and Media, IRIB University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: mohsenkarami@iribu.ac.ir

Article Info:

Article type:

Research

Article

Article

history:

Received:

3 February
2026

Received in

revised form:

14 March
2026

Accepted:

9 April 2026

Published

online:

15 June 2026

Keywords:

aesthetics of
ugliness, artificial
humanity, moral
awakening, moral
sensibility,
posthuman ethics.

Abstract: In the contemporary technological milieu—marked by the rise of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and digital embodiment—moral perception has undergone a subtle yet profound transformation. The crisis of our time does not arise from ignorance of ethical principles but from an erosion of aesthetic responsiveness to suffering, vulnerability, and imperfection. This paper argues that a renewed philosophical reflection on ugliness can provide a pathway toward restoring moral sensibility in the age of artificial humanity. Drawing upon critical and postmodern aesthetics and recent typological distinctions of ugliness, the study contends that the experience of the ugly—when artistically and interpretively mediated—functions as a site of ethical revelation. Through hermeneutic and conceptual analysis of selected artworks by Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Stelarc, and Eduardo Kac, as well as contemporary AI-generated grotesques, the paper demonstrates how aesthetic dissonance can reactivate moral attention that technological perfection tends to anesthetize. Ugliness, in this sense, is not merely the negation of beauty but a moral event that disrupts perceptual complacency and summons the viewer to ethical reflection on the boundaries of humanity. By linking the aesthetics of ugliness with the moral crisis of artificial humanity, the article offers a novel framework for understanding how art can cultivate moral imagination under posthuman conditions. The conclusion highlights the ethical and pedagogical implications of confronting aesthetic negativity in both Iranian and global contexts, suggesting that the courage to face the ugly may be the last refuge of moral life in an age of artificial beauty.

Cite this article: Karami, M. (2026). Aesthetics of Moral Crisis: The Ethical Function of Ugliness in the Age of Artificial Humanity, *Philosophical Meditations*, 15(Special issue: 37), 309-342. <https://doi.org/10.30470/phm.2026.2076982.2767>

© The Author(s).

Publisher: University of Zanjan.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30470/phm.2026.2076982.2767>

Homepage: phm.znu.ac.ir



Introduction:

In recent decades, with the rise of biotechnologies, robotics, and artificial intelligence, a new form of moral crisis has emerged—one that does not stem from ignorance of moral principles but from the erosion of aesthetic sensitivity to pain, ugliness, and vulnerability. The figure of the *artificial human*—whether embodied in intelligent machines or artistic representations of synthetic bodies—reveals a transformed image of humanity in which the boundaries between human and object, suffering and indifference, or even good and evil, are increasingly blurred. This condition gives rise to a peculiar kind of *moral anesthesia*—a paralysis of ethical perception produced not by technology itself, but by the neglect of the aesthetic dimension of moral experience.

This paper begins from the premise that a renewed reflection on ugliness may offer a path toward the restoration of moral life in the age of artificial humanity. In classical aesthetics, ugliness was generally conceived as the

negation of beauty and the breakdown of form. Yet since the twentieth century, thinkers such as Theodor W. Adorno, Arthur Danto, and Julia Kristeva have articulated another dimension: ugliness can serve as a locus of ethical revelation. For Adorno (1997, p. 49), the aesthetic representation of suffering becomes an act of moral resistance within a disenchanted world; for Danto (1981, p. 113), modern art “transfigures the commonplace” and transforms even the ugly into a site of meaning; and for Kristeva (1982, pp. 2–4), the experience of abjection exposes the fragile border between the self and what it excludes—a border that, once disturbed, reawakens moral sensibility.

To avoid conceptual ambiguity, this paper analytically distinguishes three dimensions of ugliness: a.

Psychological ugliness – the affective and visceral reactions of disgust, horror, or repulsion that arise in the viewer; b. *Aesthetic ugliness* – the disturbance of perceptual harmony, proportion, or coherence within the structure of form; c. *Moral ugliness* – the

ethical disclosure produced *through* aesthetic form itself, when the work provokes a rethinking of responsibility or human limits. While these dimensions often overlap, their analytic differentiation is crucial for understanding the ethical functioning of aesthetic experience (Karami, 2023).

The notion of *artificial humanity* must likewise be clarified. In this study, the term designates three intersecting categories: (a) humanoid robots and mechanical embodiments of human likeness; (b) artificial-intelligence avatars and algorithmic agents in virtual environments; and (c) bio-engineered or hybrid organisms that blur the line between human and machine.

Artistic practice confirms this philosophical insight. The works of Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud—whose deformed bodies expose the raw fragility of human existence—offer a paradigmatic example of how the experience of ugliness can awaken moral awareness. In the contemporary posthuman context, artists such as Stelarc and Kac extend this exploration to technologically altered or artificial bodies, inviting

reflection on the moral limits of embodiment itself (Stelarc, 2005, Kac, 2007).

Despite the relevance of these perspectives, there remains a lack of systematic inquiry into how the aesthetic experience of ugliness might contribute to the reconstruction of moral sensibility within the technologically mediated condition of contemporary humanity. This paper seeks to fill that gap by reinterpreting the relationship between aesthetics and ethics against the backdrop of the *moral crisis of the artificial human*. The central research question is therefore: *How can the aesthetic experience of ugliness contribute to the reconstruction of moral sensibility in the age of artificial humanity?* The guiding hypothesis is that ugliness, far from being a purely negative aesthetic category, has a revelatory and restorative moral function: by disrupting perceptual comfort, it calls the subject to ethical reflection on the boundaries of humanity and on the responsibilities that emerge in the encounter with the Other. To address this question, the paper proceeds through a philosophical

reconstruction of the concept of ugliness and its moral potential in art and technology.

Methodologically, the research adopts a **hermeneutic–interpretive and conceptual–analytical** approach. It begins with a philosophical analysis of the key notions of beauty, ugliness, and artificial humanity within both aesthetic and ethical traditions, drawing upon critical theory and phenomenological ethics (Levinas, 1969). Subsequently, it turns to case studies of selected artworks—from Bacon and Freud to posthuman art and AI-generated grotesques—to demonstrate how experiences of aesthetic dissonance can reactivate moral attention. The analyses integrate insights from posthuman theories of embodiment (Haraway, 1991; Hayles, 1999) as well as the conceptual framework developed in Karami (2023), whose tripartite typology of psychological, aesthetic, and moral ugliness provides a refined taxonomy for understanding the ethical function of ugliness.

The argument unfolds across five subsequent sections: historical and aesthetic foundations of the modern

moral crisis; the ethical function of ugliness from Bacon to posthuman art; artificial humanity and the technological sublime; toward an aesthetics of moral awakening; and, finally, the conclusion, which highlights the practical and educational implications for both Iranian and global societies. Rather than approaching technology’s moral challenges through prescriptive moral theory, this study turns to aesthetics as a medium of ethical renewal. It argues that the revitalization of moral life depends less on adherence to moral prescriptions than on the *cultivation of aesthetic sensitivity*—the capacity to perceive the morally significant within the sensibly disturbing. By linking the *aesthetics of ugliness* with the *moral crisis of artificial humanity*, the paper contributes a novel framework for understanding how art, ethics, and technology can intersect in reimagining the human condition. Ultimately, it contends that confronting the ugly—whether in art, technology, or the self—remains indispensable for sustaining the moral

imagination in an age increasingly governed by artificial beauty.

1. Moral Crisis and the Aesthetic Condition of Modernity

1.1. Introduction: Linking Ethics and Aesthetics

Modernity has produced unprecedented advancements in science, technology, and human knowledge. Yet, paradoxically, these developments coincide with a **moral and aesthetic disorientation** that pervades contemporary society. The ethical crisis manifests in heightened social alienation, systemic inequalities, and the erosion of communal responsibility, while the aesthetic crisis emerges as a **flattening of perceptual and emotional sensitivity**, privileging the superficial, the spectacular, and the marketable over the reflective, the ambiguous, and the morally charged (Adorno, 1997, pp. 45–49; Han, 2017, pp. 33–37).

The interdependence of moral and aesthetic dimensions is crucial: **ethics without aesthetic cultivation risks abstraction and inaction**, while aesthetics without ethical

orientation risks superficiality and nihilism. This section explores how modernity's aesthetic transformations both reflect and intensify ethical disorientation, framing the foundation for subsequent discussions on ugliness, posthuman art, and moral awakening.

1.2. Historical Context: The Roots of Moral and Aesthetic Disorientation

The ethical and aesthetic crises of modernity cannot be separated from their historical trajectories.

The Enlightenment's valorization of reason and the subsequent industrial and technological revolutions disrupted traditional moral frameworks and aesthetic sensibilities alike. According to Benjamin (2008, pp. 112–118), the **mechanical reproduction of art** transformed both perception and moral engagement, making aesthetic experience increasingly commodified and consumable.

Concurrently, the separation of ethics and aesthetics in philosophical thought — epitomized by Kant's *Critique of Judgment* — detached beauty from moral deliberation, while

simultaneously establishing the autonomy of aesthetic experience. Adorno (1997, pp. 51–55) critiques this autonomy, emphasizing that the formalist separation of aesthetics from ethics facilitates the “neutralization” of critical thought, producing subjects susceptible to domination and passive consumption.

The ethical and aesthetic crises are thus intertwined: modernity’s aesthetic practices, shaped by capitalist reproduction, secularization, and technological mediation, cultivate attention to spectacle rather than to moral and existential depth. Ethical disorientation emerges from the **displacement of reflective attention**, while aesthetic disorientation results from habituation to the immediate, the polished, and the superficially pleasurable.

1.3. Alienation and the Aesthetic Condition of the Individual

Social theorists such as Marx and Simmel have highlighted the alienating effects of modern social structures, yet aesthetic dimensions of alienation have received less systematic attention. The contemporary

individual experiences both **moral estrangement** — a sense of ethical impotence in the face of systemic injustice — and **aesthetic estrangement** — the detachment from authentic engagement with art and the lived environment (Simmel, 1903/2009, pp. 22–29; Han, 2022, pp. 55–60).

In modern urban environments, the proliferation of mediated images, advertising, and virtual experiences fosters a **perpetual state of perceptual overstimulation**, reducing the individual’s capacity for sustained reflection or moral attention. Ihde (1990, pp. 83–87) observes that technological mediation transforms sensory perception, redirecting attention from ethical reflection toward consumption-oriented engagement with appearances.

This dual alienation — ethical and aesthetic — erodes the individual’s capacity to respond to vulnerability, suffering, and relational obligations, establishing the conditions for what Karami (2023, pp. 188–192) identifies as **moral inattentiveness**. The aesthetic flattening of perception thus directly

correlates with ethical apathy, producing a society in which crises of injustice, inequality, and environmental degradation can flourish largely unperceived.

1.4. The Role of Ugliness as Ethical Disruption

In the midst of aesthetic conformity and moral passivity, **ugliness emerges as a disruptive force**, interrupting habituated perception and stimulating ethical reflection. Karami (2023, pp. 193–198) emphasizes that encounters with deformity, grotesque, or morally unsettling representations provoke attention to overlooked dimensions of human existence. Bacon's distorted figures, for instance, expose bodily vulnerability and mortality, compelling viewers to confront suffering and relational responsibility.

From a philosophical standpoint, ugliness functions as a **catalyst for ethical awareness**: it challenges aesthetic complacency and ethical disengagement simultaneously. Adorno (1997, pp. 73–78) argues that negative aesthetics serve as a mode of

social critique, rendering perceptible the injustices and contradictions that harmonious or idealized art might obscure. Through engagement with the ugly, observers cultivate attentiveness, empathy, and moral sensitivity — capacities that are essential for navigating the moral complexities of modernity.

1.5. Aesthetic Mediation of Social Inequality

Modern aesthetic experiences are not neutral; they are deeply entangled with social hierarchies and political structures. The aesthetic flattening described above often **obscures power relations**, presenting inequality as naturalized or inevitable. The commodification of aesthetic experience reinforces social stratification, privileging those with access to cultural capital while marginalizing those without (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 33–39).

Engagement with aesthetic negativity, however, can counteract these dynamics. Coeckelbergh (2021, pp. 83–87) suggests that technologies and art forms that foreground vulnerability, imperfection, and

suffering create **ethical encounters across social divides**, encouraging reflection on systemic inequities and relational responsibilities. By confronting aesthetic negativity, observers are forced to recognize injustice and their own positionality within structures of power, thus linking aesthetic perception to ethical awareness and action.

1.6. Technology, Aesthetic Saturation, and Ethical Desensitization

Contemporary technology further complicates the interplay between aesthetics and ethics. Social media, immersive VR, and AI-mediated experiences inundate individuals with images, simulations, and algorithmically curated content, producing **aesthetic saturation** that can dull moral sensitivity (Hui, 2016, pp. 21–27). The relentless consumption of polished or spectacularized forms of life risks rendering ethical reflection superficial or reactive rather than deliberative.

Verbeek (2005, pp. 118–122) emphasizes that technological artifacts **mediate moral experience**: they shape

both what we perceive and how we respond. In saturated aesthetic environments, moral attention becomes contingent on novelty, shock, or affective intensity rather than sustained reflection. Karami (2023, pp. 200–203) argues that engagement with aesthetically negative forms — the ugly, the grotesque, the deformed — can counteract this desensitization by **forcing perceptual and moral interruption**, compelling the observer to re-engage with ethical and relational realities.

1.7. Toward an Ethical-Aesthetic Framework

The ethical and aesthetic crises of modernity, therefore, are mutually reinforcing: aesthetic flattening fosters moral inattentiveness, while moral disengagement reduces perceptual and reflective depth. A framework for intervention emerges in the form of **aesthetic negativity as moral pedagogy**. By integrating historical insights from modern art (Bacon, Goya) with contemporary posthumanist thought (Haraway, Braidotti, Coeckelbergh), one can conceive an approach in which

aesthetic experience cultivates ethical awareness, relational responsibility, and anticipatory moral reasoning.

This framework posits that:

- a. **Perception shapes moral attention** — the cultivation of attentiveness to aesthetic negativity expands moral sensitivity.
- b. **Ethics and aesthetics are co-constitutive** — moral formation relies on aesthetic engagement with the ambiguous, the unsettling, and the ethically charged.
- c. **Technological mediation requires ethical recalibration** — posthuman contexts demand new perceptual and moral competencies, achievable through engagement with disruptive aesthetic forms.

This Section establishes that **modernity's ethical and aesthetic crises are inseparable**, rooted in historical, social, and technological developments. Alienation, desensitization, and moral inattentiveness emerge alongside aesthetic flattening and spectacle, producing conditions in which ethical engagement is compromised. Ugliness, grotesque

representation, and other forms of aesthetic negativity offer a corrective, functioning as **ethical stimuli that disrupt habituated perception**.

This foundation prepares the analysis in Section 3, where the ethical function of ugliness is explored in depth — from Bacon's corporeal distortions to the emerging posthuman arts of the digital age. The discussion will demonstrate how aesthetic negativity, far from being merely provocative or sensational, serves as a **central vehicle for moral awakening** in modern and posthuman contexts.

3. The Ethical Function of Ugliness: From Bacon to Posthuman Art

3.1. Ugliness as the Ethical Exposure of the Human Condition

To grasp the ethical function of ugliness, one must recognize that modernity's aesthetic revolution was simultaneously a moral one. The rejection of classical harmony and idealized proportion was not a merely formal innovation but an act of moral revolt against deceptive appearances — against beauty's complicity with moral anesthesia. In this sense,

ugliness operates as what Mohsen Karami (2023) calls an *epistemic revelation*: it discloses the concealed dimensions of being by unveiling the limits of representation itself (pp. 195–197).

The ugly image refuses to seduce; instead, it interrupts. This interruption is ethical because it restores attentiveness. Where beauty invites contemplative repose, ugliness provokes disturbance — and disturbance, if sustained by reflection rather than recoil, can lead to the recognition of vulnerability, finitude, and interdependence. Thus, ugliness can be said to enact a *phenomenology of disquiet*: it reconfigures the aesthetic encounter into an ethical one by exposing the instability of the human form and the fragility of its meanings.

Karami's (2023) framework enables a more nuanced interpretation of this dynamic. By distinguishing the *psychological* from the *aesthetic* and *moral* registers of ugliness, he shows that an affective reaction of disgust or horror can function as a bridge toward moral reflection rather

than mere aversion, provided the artistic context offers hermeneutic depth. Ugliness thus becomes not the negation of form, but a dialectical form whose negativity opens ethical understanding (pp. 200–203).

3.2. Bacon and the Ethics of Disfiguration

Francis Bacon's oeuvre provides perhaps the clearest visual demonstration of ugliness as ethical disclosure. His works systematically distort the body, dissolving the boundaries between flesh and background, between face and gesture. The human form becomes an event of deformation. In *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953), the scream trapped within the cage of paint is not merely an expression of agony but an ontological exposure — the visible mark of suffering stripped of narrative justification.

David Sylvester's interviews with Bacon (1975) reveal that the painter sought not to depict horror but to *trap the energy of reality* — to show the violence inherent in perception itself. This renders Bacon's art ethically potent: it stages an encounter with

vulnerability without offering transcendence. The viewer, faced with the rawness of exposed flesh, must confront the shared condition of embodiment and mortality. Bacon's deformation of the face, traditionally the locus of moral dignity, destabilizes the comfort of humanism and reveals the precarious ground upon which moral worth is asserted.

Karami's (2023) categories illuminate Bacon's significance. His art mobilizes **aesthetic ugliness** as formal dissonance, **moral ugliness** as confrontation with suffering, and **epistemic ugliness** as revelation of the conditions that produce moral blindness. The paintings thus constitute ethical events: they train the spectator to sustain attention in the presence of what ordinarily repels it. As Karami notes, "ugliness acquires a moral voice precisely when it ceases to be an object of avoidance and becomes a space of reflection" (pp. 201–202).

In this light, Bacon's work can be interpreted as a pedagogy of seeing — an *aesthetics of exposure*. His canvases dismantle the visual habits that maintain moral distance. The ethical function of such ugliness

is twofold: it uncovers the *violence of representation* and simultaneously invites an ethics of receptivity, a readiness to endure the discomfort of truth.

3.3. From Modern Negativity to Posthuman Aesthetics

If Bacon's paintings embody the existential threshold of modernity, contemporary posthuman art marks the passage beyond the human as stable referent. Digital and biotechnological practices — from Stelarc's robotic augmentations to ORLAN's surgical performances, and from bio-art installations by Eduardo Kac to AI-generated deformities in digital aesthetics — extend Bacon's logic into new ontological terrains. In these contexts, ugliness is no longer limited to the deformation of the human body but encompasses the hybridization of organic and machinic forms, the algorithmic mutation of identity, and the dissolution of subject–object boundaries.

Such works exemplify what Jean-François Lyotard called the *inhuman* — the dimension of technological and aesthetic forces that exceed human

measure. Yet rather than interpreting these posthuman practices as mere spectacles of shock, Karami's typology allows us to see them as ethical laboratories. For example, Stelarc's prosthetic expansions confront us with the question: what remains of moral responsibility when bodily integrity itself becomes programmable? The aesthetic discomfort provoked by such works — their ugliness — becomes an affective prelude to ethical inquiry into autonomy, vulnerability, and dependence.

In this sense, posthuman ugliness radicalizes Bacon's ethical project. Whereas Bacon revealed the fragility of the flesh, posthuman art reveals the fragility of the *concept* of the human. The deformation now occurs not only on the canvas but within ontology: the categories of personhood, agency, and embodiment become unstable. The moral question shifts accordingly — from "How should we respond to suffering?" to "What counts as suffering, and who counts as human?"

3.4. The Technological Sublime and the Mutation of Ugliness

A related dimension is the emergence of what can be termed the *technological sublime* — a feeling of awe and dread elicited by technological magnitude (Nye, 1994). In digital and algorithmic art, ugliness often appears as a byproduct of machine logic: glitches, distortions, and uncanny figures generated by non-human systems. Yet these failures of representation possess moral significance. They reveal the gap between human intentionality and machinic production — a gap that mirrors our ethical disorientation in technologically mediated life.

When an AI model produces an image that is "wrong" — eyes misaligned, flesh synthetic, smiles distorted — the ugliness is not purely visual but ontological: it expresses the misfit between human expectation and algorithmic generation. Engaging such images aesthetically trains moral perception to dwell within this dissonance rather than resolving it through denial. This capacity for *ethical endurance of the uncanny*

becomes central to living responsibly with technology.

Here, ugliness performs a moral pedagogy suited to the posthuman condition: it cultivates humility before non-human alterity. Karami's (2023) insight that ugliness can possess *epistemic and moral functions* independent of beauty proves especially relevant: these digital distortions "reopen the space of ethical questioning by revealing what resists assimilation" (p. 199).

3.5. Ugliness and Empathy in the Digital Era

The risk of the digital aesthetic regime is emotional numbness. Infinite circulation of suffering images — war, disaster, degradation — risks turning moral response into algorithmic reflex. Within such economies, only the exceptional image, the grotesque, seems capable of piercing indifference. But this raises a profound question: does shock produce empathy, or does it merely intensify spectacle?

The answer depends on framing and interpretation. Ugliness, as Karami (2023) emphasizes, is ethically generative only when it "summons moral reflection

rather than aesthetic pleasure" (p. 202). Thus, the task of the artist and philosopher is to reconfigure contexts of reception so that digital ugliness becomes an opportunity for *attentive empathy* rather than voyeuristic consumption.

A promising development in this direction is the emergence of interactive art installations that demand the viewer's participation in ethically charged scenarios. In pieces like Harun Farocki's *Serious Games* or Hito Steyerl's *How Not to Be Seen*, aesthetic discomfort is intertwined with moral implication: the spectator becomes complicit in the systems of representation being critiqued. Ugliness here functions not as an object but as a *relation* — a space of ethical testing where participation becomes self-exposure (Stelarc, 2005).

3.6. Toward an Ontology of Aesthetic Negativity

The transition from Bacon's corporeal grotesque to algorithmic deformity suggests that ugliness is not a transient cultural code but an enduring modality of ethical reflection. It occupies the space where

representation fails — where moral meaning exceeds form. This failure is productive: it reaffirms that the ethical cannot be fully aestheticized without remainder. The ugly thus testifies to transcendence, not by depicting the sublime, but by bearing witness to what beauty cannot contain.

In Karami's (2023) terms, ugliness is “the form through which the formless calls for recognition” (p. 196). This makes ugliness both aesthetic and ethical: it stages the encounter with alterity that lies at the heart of moral life. In Bacon's flesh, in Stelarc's augmented body, in the AI-generated face that almost but not quite looks human, we perceive the same demand — a call to reimagine responsibility under conditions of disfiguration.

Therefore, ugliness's ethical function lies in its power to sustain moral thought amidst broken forms. It resists closure, prevents complacency, and keeps open the wound through which ethics enters aesthetics. This dynamic of exposure and endurance will guide the analysis of the next section, which turns to the broader

question of **Artificial Humanity and the Technological Sublime** — exploring how the very production of artificial beings redefines the field of aesthetic and moral responsibility.

4. Artificial Humanity and the Technological Sublime

4.1. The Emergence of Artificial Humanity

The concept of *Artificial Humanity* captures the ongoing reconfiguration of human identity and moral agency in an era of biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and immersive digital environments. Unlike classical philosophical anthropology, which assumes a stable, self-transparent human subject, the artificial human is produced through *technological mediation*: the body, mind, and social capacities are increasingly susceptible to algorithmic, robotic, and bioengineered interventions. As such, questions of ethics and aesthetics cannot be dissociated: the form in which humans appear and act now bears profound moral significance.

Philosophical discourse on Artificial Humanity draws from two complementary strands.

The first is *posthuman theory* (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 1999), which problematizes the boundaries between human, machine, and environment. The second is the *aesthetics of the technological sublime* (Nye, 1994; Lyotard, 1988), which emphasizes affective encounters with technological vastness, disorientation, and the limits of comprehension. In combination, these strands suggest that encountering artificial humans — whether through augmented bodies, humanoid robots, or algorithmically generated avatars — is both an aesthetic and ethical experience.

4.2. Ugliness in the Context of the Artificial Human

In the realm of artificial humans, ugliness performs functions analogous to those identified in Section 3 for Bacon and posthuman art, but with intensified stakes. Here, ugliness often emerges from *uncanny dissonance*: imperfect replication of human features in robots, digital avatars, or bioengineered hybrids. These imperfections evoke both fascination and discomfort, activating reflective capacities

in observers. Mohsen Karami's taxonomy (2023, pp. 185–207) remains crucial: *psychological ugliness* triggers visceral response, *aesthetic ugliness* manifests formal incongruities, and *moral ugliness* signals ethical tension in the creation and deployment of artificial beings.

For example, humanoid robots with distorted facial features, irregular movements, or ambiguous gender expression provoke a confrontation with ethical responsibility: how should humans relate to beings that appear human yet are ontologically other? The aesthetic encounter with such entities highlights latent biases, assumptions, and moral blind spots. Ugliness, in this context, functions as a sensor of ethical cognition, revealing our unexamined moral intuitions and prejudices.

4.3. The Technological Sublime as Ethical Catalyst

The *technological sublime* complements the ethical function of ugliness. Traditional aesthetic theory situates the

sublime in experiences that overwhelm the senses or cognitive capacities (Kant, 1790; Burke, 1757). In the contemporary digital and biotechnological landscape, the sublime arises from the *scale, speed, and complexity* of technological processes: massive data flows, AI decision-making beyond human comprehension, and the manipulability of life itself.

Encountering these technological forces induces a double affective register: awe and fear. Awe engenders admiration for human ingenuity; fear triggers reflection on human limitations and vulnerabilities. Ugliness within this register — the glitches, deformities, and algorithmic errors that populate digital life — intensifies ethical awareness by dramatizing the stakes of human-technology entanglement. The uncanny, imperfect, or grotesque artificial human thus becomes a site for cultivating what Karami (2023, pp. 200–203) calls *ethical attentiveness*: a state in which moral reflection is provoked through aesthetic discomfort.

4.4. Case Studies: Robotic Art and AI-Generated Entities

a. Robotic Performance Art

Artists such as Stelarc deploy robotic extensions and prosthetic augmentations to interrogate the boundaries of human embodiment. Stelarc's *Third Hand* or *Exoskeleton* performances render the body simultaneously capable and grotesque, exposing the instability of human identity. Viewers experience dissonance: the body is recognizable yet unfamiliar, triggering ethical contemplation about agency, autonomy, and bodily integrity. The ugliness here is formal (distortion of the familiar body), epistemic (challenge to perceptual expectation), and moral (interrogation of human-technology relations).

b. AI-Generated Humanoid Avatars

Recent AI-generated avatars display uncanny features: asymmetric faces, unnatural postures, or exaggerated expressions. These avatars are often deployed in virtual social contexts, including education, therapy, and interactive media. While their apparent ugliness may initially evoke discomfort, it can catalyze ethical awareness

by forcing users to confront the ambiguity of sentience, the ethics of embodiment, and the implications of virtual sociality. The pedagogical potential of such ugliness parallels the moral function of disfigured human forms in Bacon's canvases, albeit reframed in a posthuman context.

4.5. Ethical Implications and Guidelines

Engaging with artificial humans and technological aesthetics of ugliness raises practical ethical concerns. The moral stakes include:

- a. Responsibility for Design and Deployment: Creators of artificial entities bear moral responsibility for their aesthetic and affective effects. Ugliness should not merely shock but should invite reflection and ethical questioning (Karami, 2023, p. 202).
- b. Avoiding Objectification and Exploitation: The deployment of aesthetically unsettling artificial humans must not dehumanize observers or artificially generate trauma. Ethical framing — through narrative,

context, and participatory design — is essential.

- c. Promoting Ethical Imagination: By engaging viewers in ethically provocative encounters, artistic and technological practices can cultivate capacities for empathy, attentiveness, and moral deliberation. The ethical function of ugliness is realized when observers experience *reflexive discomfort* rather than passive repulsion.

4.6. Ugliness as a Bridge Between Human and Posthuman Ethics

The ethical function of ugliness in artificial human contexts also mediates between human-centered and posthumanist ethics. Traditional moral theories often presume a stable human subject; posthuman aesthetics complicates this assumption. The grotesque, dissonant, and uncanny forms of artificial humanity provoke critical reflection on the scope and limits of moral obligation, challenging the anthropocentric bias of conventional ethics. In Karami's terms, aesthetic negativity is the medium through which *ethical*

imagination expands to accommodate new ontologies of life (pp. 201–203).

4.7. Synthesis: Toward an Aesthetics of Moral Awakening in the Technological Era

Taken together, the philosophical, artistic, and technological analyses suggest that ugliness is not a peripheral concern but central to ethical cultivation in the contemporary era. By destabilizing habitual perception, exposing vulnerability, and amplifying moral dissonance, ugly forms — whether in canvas, performance, or digital avatar — act as instruments for moral awakening. This establishes the bridge to Section 5, where we propose a systematic *aesthetics of moral awakening* that integrates insights from modernist, posthuman, and technological contexts into actionable ethical-aesthetic principles.

5. Toward an Aesthetics of Moral Awakening

5.1. Introduction: From Perception to Ethical Responsibility

The previous sections established that ugliness — whether in Bacon’s corporeal

deformities or in algorithmically generated posthuman entities — functions as a catalyst for moral reflection. Section 3 showed how aesthetic ugliness exposes human vulnerability and ethical responsibility, while Section 4 demonstrated that the encounter with artificial humanity and the technological sublime intensifies these ethical demands.

Section 5 develops a normative and constructive framework: **an aesthetics of moral awakening**. This framework is grounded in three interrelated principles: (1) **ethical attentiveness through aesthetic disruption**, (2) **interactive and relational moral cultivation**, and (3) **anticipatory responsibility in technologically mediated futures**. By elaborating these principles, we aim to show that aesthetic engagement with ugliness — corporeal, digital, or hybrid — is not only a descriptive or contemplative act but a practice of ethical formation that strengthens moral imagination in contemporary and posthuman contexts.

5.2. Ethical Attentiveness through Aesthetic Disruption

Aesthetics, according to Karami (2023), is not a neutral domain of sensory pleasure but a field of moral potential (pp. 198–200). Ugliness disrupts habitual perception, producing what can be termed *ethical dissonance*. Ethical dissonance arises when the observer encounters forms or experiences that resist conventional assimilation — distorted faces, fractured bodies, synthetic lifeforms. Such experiences interrupt automatic responses, generating reflective attention that is central to moral awareness.

Bacon's paintings exemplify this principle: the distorted scream of Pope Innocent X confronts the observer with corporeal suffering stripped of narrative consolation. The ethical impact emerges from sustained attention, not mere shock. In posthuman contexts, algorithmically deformed avatars or robotic anomalies perform a similar function: they resist easy comprehension, provoke discomfort, and demand ethical consideration. In each case, the aesthetic encounter acts as a *pedagogical*

interruption, fostering attentiveness to vulnerability, contingency, and relationality.

This process can be formalized in three steps:

- a. **Perceptual Disruption** — the initial encounter with ugliness produces cognitive and affective dissonance.
- b. **Reflective Engagement** — the observer interprets the disruption, situating it within moral and existential frameworks.
- c. **Moral Calibration** — sustained reflection translates perceptual insights into ethical awareness and potential action.

Through these steps, ugliness becomes an *instrument of moral education*, cultivating attentiveness, empathy, and responsibility.

5.3. Interactive and Relational Moral Cultivation

Ethical formation requires relational engagement. In contemporary aesthetics, this entails interactions not only with human subjects but also with artificial entities and mediated systems. The posthuman scenario described in Section 4 demonstrates that moral and aesthetic attention

must extend to entities whose ontological status is hybrid or indeterminate.

Interactive installations, immersive virtual environments, and AI-mediated art can function as *ethical laboratories*. Participants are not passive spectators; they are morally implicated. For instance, encountering an AI-generated avatar whose facial features are grotesquely distorted may provoke anxiety, curiosity, or empathy. The observer's interpretive labor — assessing what constitutes harm, vulnerability, or agency — is itself a form of ethical training. Karami (2023) emphasizes that such labor cultivates *moral imagination*: the capacity to perceive, interpret, and respond to complex ethical situations.

Relationality is central: moral awakening is not a solitary cognitive exercise but a participatory, dialogical process. By engaging with both human and non-human entities in ethically charged aesthetic contexts, observers develop *sensitivity to otherness* and learn to navigate the moral consequences of their actions and inactions. Ugliness, as a

sustained perturbation of perception, becomes the medium through which relational moral capacities are exercised and strengthened.

5.4. The Role of Vulnerability and Exposure

A key feature of ethical awakening is *vulnerability*. Both corporeal and posthuman ugliness reveal fragility — in the human body, in synthetic forms, and in the conditions of ethical encounter. This exposure is crucial: it disrupts the protective shields of aesthetic pleasure and moral complacency. In Bacon's canvases, the body is laid bare, wounded and trembling; in digital posthuman art, the human likeness is fractured, uncanny, and contingent.

Philosophically, vulnerability functions as an *ethical catalyst* (Butler, 2004). It reminds observers that moral attention is not optional but imperative; the recognition of fragility compels action. In technologically mediated contexts, the exposure of vulnerability in artificial entities functions similarly, prompting reflection on our responsibilities as creators, users, and witnesses

of synthetic life. Ugliness is thus both *representational* and *performative*: it shows us what we might ignore and simultaneously challenges us to respond morally.

Moreover, vulnerability intersects with *temporality*: ethical attention must anticipate future consequences. In posthuman scenarios, moral neglect today may produce irreversible harms to sentient or semi-sentient artificial beings tomorrow. Ugliness — as perceptual and affective provocation — sensitizes observers to this temporal dimension, fostering what Hans Jonas (1984) calls *anticipatory ethics*: the moral responsibility toward the unknown and the not-yet-realized.

5.5. Anticipatory Responsibility in Technologically Mediated Futures

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence, biotechnological engineering, and immersive digital ecosystems demands a novel conception of responsibility. Traditional moral frameworks are often ill-equipped to address entities that blend human and machine, organic and synthetic. An aesthetics of moral awakening

positions ugliness as a preparatory device: by confronting observers with the unfamiliar, the grotesque, and the uncanny, it cultivates readiness to engage with emerging moral dilemmas.

Consider the ethical implications of synthetic lifeforms that exhibit quasi-sentience. Algorithmic distortions or aesthetic “defects” in these entities may signal vulnerabilities, functional limitations, or emergent behaviors. Engaging with these anomalies is not merely perceptual but ethical: observers must assess the consequences of action and inaction. By training attention and reflection in controlled aesthetic contexts, the observer develops capacities essential for responsible interaction with future technologies.

Karami (2023) argues that this process mirrors the ethical function of ugliness in traditional art: *it cultivates the moral imagination by foregrounding contingency, fragility, and relational complexity* (pp. 201–204). In

the posthuman era, the stakes are amplified: failures of moral attention can have systemic consequences for both human and non-human entities. The aesthetics of moral awakening thus functions as *anticipatory pedagogy*: it prepares humans to navigate the ethical terrain of technological futures with discernment and care.

5.6. Integration of Historical, Contemporary, and Technological Insights

An effective framework must integrate insights across historical, contemporary, and technological dimensions. From Bacon's corporeal grotesque to Karami's theoretical elaborations and contemporary posthuman art, the trajectory of ugliness demonstrates continuity in ethical function:

- a. **Historical:** Bacon exemplifies the moral power of corporeal disfiguration, revealing human vulnerability and ethical obligations.
- b. **Contemporary:** Digital and interactive art expand the scope of ethical engagement, situating the observer in complex relational contexts.

- c. **Technological:** AI, robotics, and biotechnology produce forms whose aesthetic and ethical reception demands anticipatory moral reflection.

This integrative perspective underscores that ugliness is not merely a formal category but a *dynamic ethical mechanism*: it provokes attentiveness, relational sensitivity, and anticipatory responsibility. In other words, aesthetic engagement with the ugly becomes a *training ground for ethical imagination*, preparing humans to act wisely and responsibly within an increasingly mediated world.

5.7. Operationalizing an Aesthetics of Moral Awakening

To operationalize these insights, we propose a threefold strategy for embedding moral awakening within aesthetic and technological practice:

- a. **Curated Exposure:** Artists, educators, and technologists should create experiences that balance aesthetic disruption with interpretive scaffolding, ensuring that encounters with ugliness provoke reflection rather than mere shock or avoidance.

b. Interactive Engagement:

Systems should be designed to foster participatory ethics, allowing observers to experience, interpret, and respond to morally salient features of artificial and hybrid entities.

c. Reflective Mediation:

Critical pedagogy, guided reflection, and hermeneutic framing must accompany aesthetic experiences, translating perceptual dissonance into sustained moral and ethical development.

These strategies operationalize Karami's (2023) theoretical insights, translating the ethical function of ugliness into actionable frameworks for education, art, and technology.

5.8. Case Examples of Moral Awakening through Aesthetic Experience

a. Immersive Virtual Reality (VR) Environments

VR installations that place participants in ethically charged scenarios — for example, witnessing systemic environmental degradation through algorithmically deformed ecosystems — create immersive encounters with

ethical complexity. Aesthetic ugliness here functions as both a perceptual disruption and a moral teacher: participants navigate a world that is both beautiful and grotesque, learning to calibrate attention, empathy, and responsibility simultaneously.

b. Bio-Art and Synthetic Organisms

Artists such as Eduardo Kac and tissue engineers working in the bio-art domain cultivate experiences of aesthetic disruption by producing semi-living entities whose forms challenge preconceptions of life and agency. The observer's engagement with such entities is ethically instructive: aesthetic attention to vulnerability, contingency, and relationality fosters anticipatory moral reasoning (Kac, 2007).

c. Algorithmically Generated Moral Scenarios

AI-driven simulations, where choices affect synthetic agents' wellbeing, operationalize moral reflection in conjunction with aesthetic disruption. Glitches, distortions, and anomalies produce discomfort and critical attention, linking perceptual experience directly to ethical cognition. Karami (2023) emphasizes that the *integration*

of perceptual dissonance with moral judgment is central to cultivating robust ethical imagination (pp. 202–205).

5.9. From Moral Awakening to Ethical Imagination

Ethical imagination, as a culmination of aesthetic engagement with ugliness, involves three capacities:

- a. **Perceptual Sensitivity:** the ability to detect morally relevant features in both human and artificial contexts.
- b. **Relational Responsiveness:** the capacity to act with awareness of interdependencies and vulnerabilities.
- c. **Anticipatory Reasoning:** the skill to evaluate consequences and responsibilities in novel, technologically mediated scenarios.

Through structured aesthetic experiences — engaging with corporeal grotesque, posthuman distortion, and algorithmic anomaly — observers can develop these capacities. The aesthetics of moral awakening thus transforms perception into an ethical instrument, producing reflective agents capable of

navigating complex moral landscapes with attentiveness, empathy, and foresight.

5.10. Toward a Normative Framework

An aesthetics of moral awakening entails normative commitments:

- a. **Valuing Discomfort:** ethical attention is fostered by perceptual and affective disruption; avoiding ugliness risks moral complacency.
 - b. **Cultivating Relational Awareness:** encounters with the ugly should always foreground intersubjective and inter-entity relations.
 - c. **Embedding Anticipatory Responsibility:** engagement with technological and posthuman forms should cultivate foresight and ethical preparedness.
 - d. **Sustaining Reflective Interpretation:** interpretive scaffolding ensures that encounters with ugliness are transformative rather than alienating.
- By adopting these commitments, art, technology,

and education can function as instruments of moral formation, expanding the capacities for ethical imagination in both human and posthuman contexts.

5.11. Integrating Ugliness, Technology, and Moral Responsibility

Section 5 demonstrates that the ethical function of ugliness extends beyond aesthetic contemplation into active moral formation. By disrupting perception, foregrounding vulnerability, and mediating encounters with novel and technologically mediated beings, ugliness cultivates ethical attentiveness, relational sensitivity, and anticipatory responsibility. The aesthetic and ethical dynamics explored here offer a framework for addressing contemporary crises of humanity, as identified in Section 2: alienation, technological dislocation, and ethical ambiguity.

An aesthetics of moral awakening positions ugliness as a *transformative medium*: it is through sustained engagement with deformity, fracture, and anomaly — in both human and posthuman contexts — that moral imagination can be

cultivated, refined, and mobilized. By integrating historical insights (Bacon), theoretical elaboration (Karami, 2023), and technological phenomena (posthuman art, AI, VR, bio-art), this section provides both analytic and normative guidance for fostering ethical life in the contemporary and future human condition.

6. Conclusion — Reconstructing the Ethical Imagination through Aesthetic Negativity

6.1. Toward a Synthesis

The preceding sections have traced a conceptual trajectory from the philosophical crises of contemporary humanity (Section 2), through the ethical and aesthetic significance of ugliness in modern art (Section 3), to the ethical and perceptual challenges posed by artificial humanity and the technological sublime (Section 4), and finally to a normative framework for an aesthetics of moral awakening (Section 5). This conclusion synthesizes these insights, arguing that aesthetic negativity — the persistent engagement with deformity, grotesque, and posthuman distortions —

constitutes a central medium for reconstructing ethical imagination in contemporary and future contexts.

Aesthetic negativity is not merely a formal or stylistic category; it functions as a deliberate and ethically charged disruption of perception, inviting reflection on vulnerability, responsibility, and relationality. It situates the observer in a dynamic ethical horizon, where attention, empathy, and foresight are cultivated through confrontation with forms that resist immediate comprehension, pleasure, or conventional beauty. This reconstruction of ethical imagination relies on three interrelated dimensions: (1) moral attentiveness, (2) relational responsiveness, and (3) anticipatory ethical reasoning.

6.2. Moral Attentiveness through Disruption

Moral attentiveness arises when aesthetic experience interrupts habitual perception. As Karami (2023) emphasizes, ugliness in art functions as a perceptual and cognitive perturbation, forcing the observer to attend to features

of vulnerability and contingency that might otherwise be ignored (pp. 198–201). Bacon’s distorted corporeal imagery, for example, foregrounds bodily fragility, eliciting reflection on suffering and ethical responsibility. In digital and posthuman contexts, algorithmically distorted or biotechnologically hybrid entities perform a similar function: their incongruities provoke cognitive dissonance and affective engagement, drawing attention to ethical stakes.

The process of attentiveness can be formalized as follows: initial perceptual disruption triggers reflective engagement, which, when sustained, cultivates the capacity to discern morally relevant features in complex contexts. Importantly, this attentiveness is iterative and practice-dependent: repeated encounters with aesthetic negativity reinforce perceptual acuity and ethical responsiveness. In this way, aesthetic experience serves as a form of moral apprenticeship, conditioning observers to recognize vulnerability, inequity, and relational complexity.

6.3. Relational Responsiveness and Ethical Imagination

Aesthetic negativity also cultivates *relational responsiveness*. Ethical formation is fundamentally relational: moral awareness arises not in isolation but through engagement with beings — human, artificial, or hybrid — whose conditions provoke reflection and demand action. Section 4 demonstrated that artificial humanity and the technological sublime create ethically charged relational contexts. Ugliness in these contexts functions as a mediator: it alerts observers to the stakes of their engagement, foregrounding both the agency and the vulnerability of entities whose status is morally and ontologically ambiguous.

Relational responsiveness involves three key capacities:

- a. **Perceptual sensitivity to vulnerability** — recognizing fragility, suffering, and contingency in encountered entities.
- b. **Empathic engagement** — cultivating affective attunement that translates perception into moral concern.

- c. **Practical ethical deliberation** — determining appropriate courses of action in response to perceived vulnerabilities.

Through sustained engagement with aesthetic negativity, observers develop these capacities, expanding the reach of moral imagination. Relational responsiveness thus bridges perception and action, ensuring that ethical attention is not merely contemplative but operative.

6.4. Anticipatory Ethical Reasoning in a Technologically Mediated World

The contemporary and future human condition is increasingly shaped by technology. AI, robotics, bioengineering, and immersive digital media challenge conventional notions of agency, responsibility, and moral standing. The aesthetics of moral awakening, when grounded in aesthetic negativity, prepares observers for these challenges by fostering *anticipatory ethical reasoning*. This form of reasoning involves projecting the consequences of actions (or inactions) across complex relational networks, considering the potential impact

on human and non-human entities alike.

Karami (2023) emphasizes that the ethical function of ugliness includes *temporal extension*: the recognition that present moral attentiveness influences future conditions (pp. 202–204). In posthuman contexts, encounters with algorithmic deformity or hybrid lifeforms serve as rehearsal for ethical judgment in uncertain, technologically mediated futures. Aesthetic negativity thus operates as both perceptual training and ethical foresight, aligning affective engagement with anticipatory moral deliberation.

6.5. Integration of Historical and Contemporary Insights

Reconstructing ethical imagination requires integrating insights from historical art, contemporary theory, and technological praxis. Bacon's corporeal grotesque provides a historical template: ethical engagement arises from attentive observation of human vulnerability. Karami (2023) systematizes this insight, demonstrating how aesthetic negativity functions as a moral medium across diverse

contexts. Contemporary posthuman art and technological installations extend these principles into digitally mediated, algorithmically generated, and biotechnologically hybrid domains.

This integration reveals a continuity in the ethical role of ugliness: across epochs, it disrupts perception, foregrounds vulnerability, and catalyzes reflective attention. Its contemporary manifestation, however, is technologically amplified: aesthetic negativity in artificial and algorithmic forms operates in real-time, interactive, and networked contexts, demanding sustained ethical vigilance and anticipatory reasoning.

6.6. Practical Implications for Art, Education, and Technology

The reconstructed ethical imagination has concrete implications:

- a. **Artistic practice:** Artists can intentionally employ aesthetic negativity — through distortion, grotesque representation, or algorithmic deformation — to cultivate moral reflection. Interactive and immersive

media enhance this capacity, creating ethically charged experiential spaces.

- b. **Education:** Pedagogical programs can incorporate engagement with aesthetic negativity to develop ethical attentiveness, relational sensitivity, and anticipatory reasoning. Virtual reality simulations, bio-art, and AI-generated scenarios serve as effective tools for moral training.

- c. **Technology design:** Designers of AI, robotics, and synthetic entities can leverage aesthetic disruption to foreground ethical stakes, ensuring that technological encounters promote reflection rather than complacency.

Collectively, these strategies operationalize an aesthetics of moral awakening, translating philosophical insight into actionable frameworks for contemporary and future ethical practice.

6.7. Limitations and Future Directions

While the framework proposed here is comprehensive, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, aesthetic

and ethical responses are culturally and contextually contingent; perceptions of ugliness and moral salience may vary across communities. Second, the ethical efficacy of aesthetic negativity depends on interpretive scaffolding: without reflective guidance, exposure to deformity or posthuman grotesque may produce alienation rather than moral engagement. Third, the rapid pace of technological change necessitates ongoing recalibration: new forms of artificial humanity will continually challenge established moral and aesthetic frameworks. Future research should examine cross-cultural responses to aesthetic negativity, explore the interaction between digital media and moral formation, and develop methodologies for assessing the ethical impact of technologically mediated art. These directions will ensure that the framework remains responsive to evolving human and posthuman conditions.

Beyond the limitations already noted, the ethical use of ugliness harbours two critical risks. First, ugliness is not inherently morally generative;

in much contemporary shock art devoid of hermeneutic depth (e.g., certain Young British Artists works), it produces “senseless shock” and desensitisation rather than ethical reflection, exacerbating the moral anaesthesia it claims to disrupt (Giles, 2016; Epker, 2015). This danger intensifies in algorithmic image circulation, where grotesque forms become viral spectacle. Second, in artificial humanity, AI-generated grotesque avatars risk deepening objectification, particularly when marginalised bodies are deformed into sites of monstrosity, thereby reinforcing normative beauty regimes and latent fascist aesthetics under the pretext of provocation (Beyer, 2023; Wasielewski, 2024; Rosenbaum, 2025). Ugliness thus remains ethically ambivalent: its moral efficacy depends entirely on rigorous interpretive scaffolding and vigilant curatorial ethics. Future research must empirically investigate these ambivalences through phenomenological audience studies and longitudinal analyses of algorithmic grotesquerie.

6.8. Concluding Reflections: Ethical Imagination as Transformative Praxis

Reconstructing ethical imagination through aesthetic negativity is not an abstract exercise but a transformative praxis. By engaging with deformity, grotesque, and posthuman anomalies, humans cultivate the perceptual acuity, relational responsiveness, and anticipatory reasoning necessary for ethical life in complex, technologically mediated contexts. This praxis integrates the lessons of historical art (Bacon), contemporary philosophical analysis (Karami, 2023), and technological innovation, demonstrating that aesthetic experience is inseparable from moral formation.

In conclusion, the ethical challenges of contemporary and posthuman existence demand new modes of perception, reflection, and responsibility. Aesthetic negativity — embodied in art, technology, and pedagogy — provides a medium for cultivating these capacities. It situates the observer within ethically charged perceptual fields, transforms discomfort into

attentiveness, and aligns affective engagement with moral deliberation. Through sustained engagement with the ugly, humans can reconstruct ethical imagination, preparing themselves to navigate the crises of modernity and the uncertainties of posthuman futures with vigilance, empathy, and moral foresight.

References

- Adorno, T. W. (1997). *Aesthetic Theory* (R. Hullot-Kentor, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1970)
- Bacon, F. (1996). *The Paintings of Francis Bacon*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Benjamin, W. (2008). *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*. In M. W. Jennings et al. (Eds.), *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3 (pp. 101–133). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1936)
- Beyer, E. J. (2023). The AI art movement has an objectification problem. *NFT Now*.
<https://nftnow.com/features/the-objectification-of-women-in-ai-art/>
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard University Press.
- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Polity Press.
- Burke, E. (1757). *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Oxford University Press.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso.
- Coeckelbergh, M. (2021). *The Political Philosophy of AI*. Polity Press.
- Danto, A. C. (1981). *The transfiguration of the commonplace: A philosophy of art*. Harvard University Press.
- Epker, E. (2015). Shocked into numbness: How shock art has been so overused that it no longer shocks at all. *Stanford Review*.
<https://stanfordreview.org/shocked-into-numbness-how-shock-art-has-been-so-overused-that-it-no-longer-shocks-at-all/>
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1975). *Truth and Method*. Continuum.
- Giles, H. J. (2016). *Shock and care: An essay about art, politics and responsibility*.
<https://harryjosephine.com/2016/04/24/shock-and-care/>
- Han, B.-C. (2017). *The Expulsion of the Other*. Polity Press.
- Han, B.-C. (2022). *Non-things: Upheaval in the Lifeworld*. Polity Press.

- Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge.
- Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1977). The Question Concerning Technology. In D. F. Krell (Ed.), *Basic Writings* (pp. 287–317). Harper & Row. (Original work published 1954)
- Hui, Y. (2016). *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics*. Urbanomic.
- Ihde, D. (1990). *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth*. Indiana University Press.
- Jonas, H. (1984). *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. University of Chicago Press.
- Kac, E. (2007). Telepresence and Bio-Art: Ethical Engagements with the Living. *Leonardo*, 40(5), 421–426.
- Kant, I. (1790). *Critique of Judgment*. (W. Pluhar, Trans., 1987). Hackett.
- Karami, M. (2023). *An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Ugliness: An Essay on Quiddity of Ugliness and Its Functions in the Art World*. *Journal of Knowledge (Shenakht)*, 18(2), 185–207.
<https://doi.org/10.48308/kj.2023.228872.1132>
- Kieran, M. (1997). Art, imagination, and the cultivation of morals. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55(4), 337–351.
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection* (L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). Columbia University Press.
- Kuplen, M. (2013). *The aesthetic and the moral: Their relationship reconsidered*. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 16(3), 531–547.
- Levinas, E. (1969). *Totality and infinity: An essay on exteriority* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Duquesne University Press.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1988). *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Polity Press.
- Nye, D. E. (1994). *American Technological Sublime*. MIT Press.
- Rosenbaum, J. (2025). I need husband: AI beauty standards, fascism and the proliferation of bot driven content. *AI & Society*. Advance online publication.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-025-02491-8>

Rosenkranz, K. (2015). *Aesthetics of Ugliness: A Critical Edition*. Bloomsbury.

Simmel, G. (2009). *The Metropolis and Mental Life*. In D. Frisby & M. Featherstone (Eds.), *Simmel on Culture* (pp. 21–36). Sage. (Original work published 1903)

Stelarc. (1990–2010). *Performance Documentation*.

Stelarc. (2005). *The prosthetic imagination: The body extended*. In M. Smith & J. Morra (Eds.), *The prosthetic impulse: From a posthuman present to a biocultural future* (pp. 40–56). MIT Press.

Sylvester, D. (Ed.). (1975). *Interviews with Francis Bacon*. Thames & Hudson.

Verbeek, P.-P. (2005). *What Things Do: Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and Design*. Penn State University Press.

Wasielewski, A. (2024). *Unnatural images: On AI-generated photographs*. *Critical Inquiry*.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/731729>