



IVY TOUCH

Affect Control and AI

by Freya Hattenberger

Feelings are an inner matter. Organic, intertwined. Hidden beneath layers, growing under the ivy. They are processes within our bodies that help us to be in touch with the world—even without words. Ivy, too, cannot exist without clinging on. While AI excels in many areas, emotions that guide and direct us are at the heart of our humanity.

Currently, AI is primarily used to automate routine tasks, generate ideas, and enhance creative processes. We think of AI as a means to simplify our everyday concerns—a modus operandi of “no need”. No need to do the dirty jobs, so we can focus on the more enjoyable or important tasks in life. Well, all magic comes at a price.

AI systems that are capable of recognizing, interpreting, and reacting to human emotions can lead to a scenario akin to a science-fiction novel. And yet, it is moving ever closer to the realm of possibility: affect control through artificial intelligence.

With the development of GPT-4 and specifically the addition of visual capabilities (GPT-4V), an even more powerful platform for potential manipulation is emerging. GPT-4V can expand the possibilities for emotional manipulation significantly. By combining text and image analysis, GPT-4V and subsequent systems with implemented generalized emotion recognition (GER) can generate targeted emotional messages. Multimodal AI can also be used in political communication to subtly and effectively influence public opinion.

The visual component enhances the emotional impact and increases the potential for manipulation at both individual and societal levels.

Social-media platforms and AI systems already collect and analyze vast amounts of intimate and personal data to compile emotional profiles of users. AI's ability to interpret and generate text and images increases the risk of misuse.

Social-media algorithms are designed to prioritize content that evokes strong emotional responses to boost user engagement, often promoting posts that evoke or amplify specific emotional states to an extreme. The loss of control over one's own feelings and decisions poses a fundamental threat to personal autonomy. There is a growing concern that people might become emotionally dependent on AI systems, relying on them to regulate their emotions, which could lead to alienation from their own feelings and impair their ability to self-regulate and develop emotional resilience.

It is crucial for us to regularly ask ourselves what we are actually doing and how we feel about it. Such questions cannot be answered by a black mirror. AI has no consciousness; it lacks a level of reflection. Creativity, deeply rooted in human experience, emotion, and intuition, remains beyond AI's grasp. The word creativity is derived from the ancient Roman goddess of agriculture, Ceres, and the word “crescere”, meaning “to come into being, to be born, to multiply, to grow.” In a world in which machines seem to be able to imitate and even surpass more and more abilities, human creativity is more important than ever.

Art does not aim to mirror reality; it transcends it, weaving realms beyond the confines of convention. One of its defining aspects is to transcend the real, the actual, and to create worlds

beyond given paradigms. It delves into the depths of the psyche, giving expression to hidden images. Artistic processing of the world is grounded in the real experience of the sensory world. Art has the power to embody. This creative process distinguishes us markedly from AI's mechanistic approach to generating images.

»In a world in which machines seem to be able to imitate and even surpass more and more abilities, human creativity is more important than ever.«

The real world in which we meet, in which we touch and feel, remains inaccessible to AI. Pure utilitarian thinking is intelligence without depth. It knows no freedom of mind. It will never touch the ivy.

Freya Hattenberger, a media artist based in Cologne, works across various mediums including photography, video, performance, installation, and auditory art. Her art explores the intersection between everyday life and artistic expression, challenging conventional social structures. Additionally, she has a keen interest in human-animal relationships and ecology. Freya Hattenberger also teaches art in the Studium fundamentale program at Witten/Herdecke University.

→ [freyahattenberger.de](https://www.freyahattenberger.de)



2 pictures of the series "Ivy Touch",
©Freya Hattenberger/VG BildKunst
The photos were taken without AI. Still images from
the video featuring two dancers were projected
onto a wall covered in ivy and photographed by the
artist. The choreographed actions revolve around
touch, relationship and emotional contact: Just like
ivy needs to hold on in order to grow, we humans
need contact and touch in order to grow both
internally and externally.

