

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

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Critical and Transmedial Promptship Theory as a Taoist Handbook for Ethical Issues in Generative AI for Fashion Image making.

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes the concept of critical and transmedial promptship as a methodological, cultural, and ethical framework for the advanced use of generative artificial intelligence in the development of fashion imagery. Moving beyond the reductive understanding of prompting as a textual command addressed to a machine, the paper argues that truly sophisticated AI-assisted creative practice should begin not with language alone, but with an original crafted visual input: a human-made image, composition, sketch, photograph, styling study, material experiment, or authored visual construction that embodies intention, aesthetic judgment, and situated authorship. In this sense, the first prompt is not a sentence, but a vision. Textual prompting, including positive and negative prompts, modifiers, and semantic adjustments, is repositioned here as a secondary and more limited operation, appropriate primarily within post-production processes of refinement, correction, and controlled variation.

The title deliberately evokes Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* in order to signal a critical distance from dominant narratives surrounding generative AI, particularly those that celebrate speed, convenience, and frictionless production. In contrast, this paper advances a more reflective proposition: that ethical and culturally meaningful AI practice in fashion, design, visual communication, and creative direction depends on preserving the primacy of human imaginative construction. Rather than delegating ideation to generic text-to-image automation, critical and transmedial promptship insists on a prior act of human authorship across media: image-making, collage, photography, drawing, editing, styling, spatial composition, material selection, and narrative sequencing. The term transmedial is therefore central, as it identifies prompting not as a linguistic technique but as an intermedial passage between formats, surfaces, and expressive systems, where the creative process moves from visual conception to computational transformation without surrendering authorship to algorithmic default.

Within this framework, generative AI is approached less as an originator of images than as a responsive environment for translation, re-elaboration, and augmentation. The paper argues that when a crafted visual artifact serves as the initial input, the generative process remains anchored in an authored aesthetic logic, reducing the risk of visual homogenization, derivative patterning, and culturally flattened outputs. By contrast, reliance on text as the primary source of generation often privileges statistical approximation over creative specificity, producing imagery that may be formally seductive yet conceptually generic. Positive and negative prompts, mask-based selection areas, and local interventions are thus reinterpreted as post-production tools: useful for tonal balance, detail adjustment, exclusion of unwanted artifacts, or region-specific transformation, but insufficient as foundational acts of creation.

To articulate the ethical dimension of this approach, the paper introduces the metaphor of a Taoist handbook, drawing on Taoist principles of restraint, balance, relationality, and non-coercive action. This perspective offers an alternative to extractive and hyper-productive models of AI adoption by proposing a creative methodology based on calibration rather than domination. In Taoist terms, the interaction between human and machine should not be governed by total control or passive surrender, but by a measured reciprocity in which intentionality, timing, and sensitivity guide intervention. Such a model is especially relevant for creative industries, where the value of an asset lies not only in efficiency or novelty, but in nuance, coherence, legitimacy, and cultural depth.

The paper ultimately argues for a shift from prompt engineering to prompt authorship, and more precisely toward a transmedial ecology of prompting in which original visual thinking remains primary. In doing so, it advocates for a more mature and ethically grounded use of generative AI: one in which creative assets emerge from human-crafted vision, and computational tools operate as instruments of sophisticated post-production rather than substitutes for imagination.