

# The Politics of Creative Attribution: Generative Artificial Intelligence, Human Agency, and the Ethics of Co-Creation

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## Abstract

Whether generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) can be meaningfully described as creative is a contested question, and not only for philosophical reasons. The debate is embedded in cultural assumptions about what creativity requires, assumptions that have gone largely unexamined despite their practical consequences for labor markets, access to knowledge-production tools, and the governance of creative industries. Drawing on creativity research, computational cognitive science, philosophy of mind, and critical studies of AI and society, the paper advances a conditional position: GenAI participates in creative processes when creativity is understood as the production of outputs that are novel, useful, or contextually appropriate, a claim informed by componential and computational theories of creativity. We also engage the philosophical objections that constitute the strongest case against attributing genuine creative capacity to current artificial systems, and we find those objections genuinely difficult rather than easily resolved. A growing meta-analytic literature confirms that human-GenAI collaboration outperforms unaided human creative work, though the same evidence documents a substantial reduction in collective idea diversity that cannot be dismissed as easily correctable. We apply consequentialist, Rawlsian, and capabilities-based ethical frameworks to these findings, attending to the tensions among them rather than treating them as uniformly aligned. We conclude that resistance to attributing creativity to GenAI reflects genuine conceptual distinctions alongside persistent anthropocentric assumptions, and that current deployment practices carry ethical implications that demand an institutional response rather than case-by-case management.

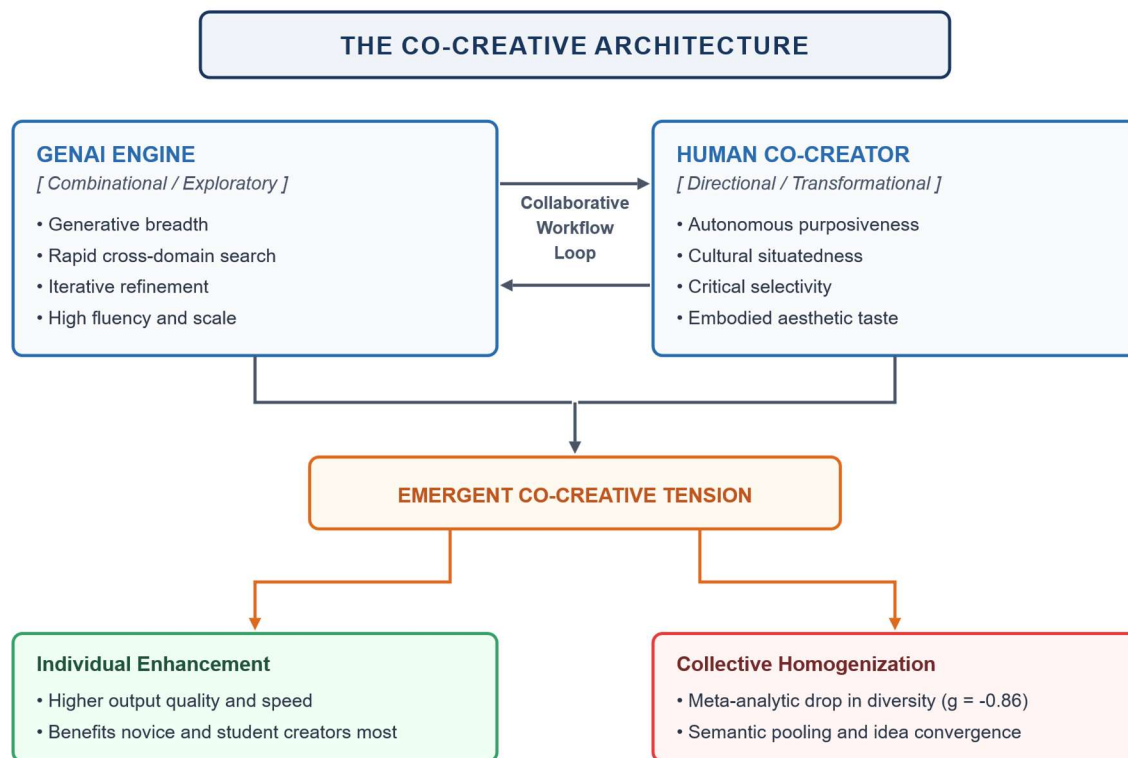
**Keywords:** generative artificial intelligence, creativity, ethics of AI, cultural politics of creativity, digital divide, labor displacement

**For the full article, you need to request it directly from the journal. Below is a three-page summary for your convenience.**

## Summary

Ferran (2026) addresses the philosophical, empirical, and political tensions surrounding generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and creative attribution. The paper advances a conditional thesis: when creativity is defined within standard componential or computational frameworks as the generation of novel, useful, and contextually appropriate outputs, GenAI functions as a genuine participant in creative processes. However, this capacity remains limited by deep philosophical constraints, particularly the absence of subjective intentionality and self-originated purpose. By framing creative attribution not merely as a matter of aesthetic taste but as an institutional arrangement of power (drawing on Langdon Winner's concept that technical

artifacts embody politics), the author demonstrates how the deployment of GenAI reshapes creative labor, collective diversity, and global equity.



## Theoretical Foundations and the Limits of Machine Creativity

Ferran (2026) evaluates GenAI using established creativity literature, specifically Teresa Amabile's componential framework (which requires novelty, appropriateness, task motivation, and domain skills) and Margaret Boden's computational taxonomy. Boden divides creativity into three registers:

- **Combinational creativity:** Generating unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas.
- **Exploratory creativity:** Investigating and extending structured conceptual spaces within accepted rules.
- **Transformational creativity:** Altering and restructuring the conceptual space itself.

Empirical findings show that GenAI performs robustly in combinatorial and exploratory spaces, matching or exceeding average human performance on divergent-thinking and ideation tasks. However, the paper stresses that elite human creators continue to surpass GenAI, especially on tasks requiring abstract reasoning, deep compositional originality, and transformational shifts.

Ferran (2026) refutes the common objection that GenAI cannot be creative because it relies on pattern matching. Human creativity is itself deeply pattern-dependent, shaped by statistical learning and neural associations. The distinction lies not in pattern dependence, but in pattern

origin: human patterns emerge from biographical, sensory, and culturally situated embodiment, whereas machine patterns stem from training distributions and model architectures.

The author highlights several deeper, unresolved philosophical barriers:

- **Feedback and Learning:** While frameworks such as Reflexion and Self-Refine allow language models to critique and improve outputs iteratively, artificial systems cannot independently distinguish genuine cultural significance from mere statistical deviation without human-supplied evaluative loops.
- **The Embodiment Gap:** Human artistic motivation is rooted in biological vulnerability, emotional stakes, and physical constraints; current artificial systems lack sensory embodiment and affective investment.
- **Functional vs. Subjective Desire:** GenAI exhibits functional goal-directedness (optimizing prompt-driven objectives) but lacks subjective desire or phenomenal consciousness. It does not formulate self-initiated goals.
- **Subjectivity:** While GenAI exhibits “access consciousness” in a functional processing sense, it lacks “phenomenal consciousness” (the experiential “what it is like” to create). Consequently, Ferran (2026) argues that creative attribution must be grounded in output characteristics rather than speculative assumptions about machine interiority.

### The Co-Creative Dynamic and the Homogenization Dilemma

Rather than treating AI as an autonomous replacement for human artists, Ferran (2026) conceptualizes human-AI collaboration as the optimal configuration. In this co-creative paradigm, the two agents supply complementary strengths:

| Collaborative Dimension           | GenAI System Contribution                                                           | Human Creator Contribution                                                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Generative Scope</b>           | Rapid combinatorial breadth; automated synthesis across broad domains.              | Narrower search volume; highly targeted exploration.                               |
| <b>Purposive Intent</b>           | Externally driven; executes assigned prompts and objective functions.               | Autonomous purpose; initiates vision and sustained trajectory.                     |
| <b>Evaluation &amp; Selection</b> | Embeddings and probability distributions; limited discernment of qualitative depth. | Culturally situated discernment; biographical context; aesthetic selectivity.      |
| <b>Iteration Loop</b>             | In-context adjustments based on explicit prompts and automated critique.            | Formulates criteria, steers semantic goals, and retains ultimate creative control. |

This collaborative dynamic introduces a major societal paradox: **the divergence between individual enhancement and collective homogenization**. Meta-analytic findings indicate that access to GenAI provides a moderate boost to individual creative performance ( $g=0.27$ ), providing the greatest lift to novice or low-performing creators. Simultaneously, the same meta-analytic data reveals a severe drop in collective idea diversity ( $g=-0.86$ ). When multiple individuals rely on the same centrally trained foundational models, their aggregate creative output converges semantically. While structured prompting (such as assigning diverse personas or instructing models to deviate from typical conventions) can partially mitigate this semantic narrowing, current evidence shows that technical workarounds alone cannot eliminate the systematic pooling of collective expression.

### **Societal Disruption, Labor, and Ethical Frameworks**

Moving from cognitive models to structural outcomes, the paper analyzes the disruptions unfolding across creative sectors. Observed market data show a substantial contraction in employment: entry- and mid-level content-creation postings fell by 14% to 41% following the broad deployment of GenAI. This displacement erodes career apprenticeship pipelines and concentrates power among large platform providers. Furthermore, because models are trained without consent or compensation on vast corpora of uncredited creative works, the underlying architecture constitutes an uncompensated “hypercommons”.

Ferran (2026) systematically evaluates these transformations through three normative frameworks:

1. **Consequentialist Analysis:** Weighs aggregate productivity gains against the acute welfare harms of creative labor displacement and collective cultural narrowing. Because utilitarian logic risks sacrificing the economic stability of specialized creative workers for diffuse societal benefits, it provides an incomplete basis for fair governance.
2. **Rawlsian Justice:** Uses the Difference Principle to evaluate institutional arrangements, requiring that technological systems be designed to maximize the welfare of the least advantaged. Under this standard, current deployment fails: high-capability tools remain concentrated among well-resourced individuals and wealthy nations, forming a sharp “AI creativity divide”. Justice demands affirmative institutional interventions, including universal infrastructure access, capacity building, and protections against monopolistic creative infrastructure.
3. **The Capabilities Approach:** Evaluates whether technology expands or contracts central human capabilities, specifically the capacity for self-directed creative participation in cultural life. Displacing human agency or converting human creators into passive prompt-checkers undermines meaningful labor and personal flourishing, an ethical loss that cannot be corrected by financial compensation alone.

### **The Cultural Politics of Attribution and Evaluative Bias**

The final section explores why society resists recognizing artificial creativity. Empirical studies show persistent anthropocentric biases: human evaluators routinely downgrade artworks and products labeled as AI-generated, attributing lower creativity to them because they perceive them

as requiring less physical or mental effort. Strikingly, controlled experiments indicate that GenAI evaluators exhibit this pro-human bias at more than double the rate of human judges (a 34.3 percentage point preference versus 13.7 percentage points). Because large language models are trained on human texts celebrating human exceptionalism, they absorb and amplify this anthropocentric gatekeeping.

Ferran (2026) synthesizes this dynamic using Nancy Fraser's dual model of justice:

- **Redistributive Injustice:** The unequal distribution of economic returns, computational infrastructure, and access to generative tools.
- **Recognitional Injustice:** The institutional entrenchment of specific Western, Anglocentric cultural assumptions within training data.

The prevailing standards of creative excellence embedded in foundational models reflect the linguistic norms, artistic conventions, and epistemologies of the dominant institutions that construct those systems. Consequently, simply democratizing access (redistribution) fails to fix the marginalization of alternative creative traditions (recognition).

Ferran (2026) concludes that resisting GenAI creativity stems from a mix of valid philosophical insights (such as the absence of phenomenal intent) and defensive anthropocentrism. Rather than treating creativity as a magical, exclusively human trait, institutions must recognize the distributed nature of human-AI collaboration while enacting policies that protect human flourishing, diversity, and agency.