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# Walter Benjamin's The Destructive Character AI-fication

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## Abstract

This project presents an AI-generated experimental film adapting Walter Benjamin's 1931 essay "The Destructive Character," exploring its proto-accelerationist themes through the lens of contemporary technology. Utilizing text-to-image, text-to-video, and text-to-audio AI models, the 30-minute film transforms Benjamin's philosophical fragments into a provocative visual narrative that blends essay film, speculative documentary, and avant-garde cinema. Central to the work is Benjamin's notion of the destructive character who "sees ways everywhere." The film draws parallels between this destructive character, the relentless force of Capital, and the transformative power of AI, each embodying an entity that perceives possibilities where others see obstacles. By juxtaposing Benjamin's early 20th-century critique of progress with AI-generated imagery of technological upheaval, the film invites viewers to reconsider the relationship between destruction, creation, and historical change in our accelerating world. It explores how Capital, much like the destructive character, has found its ultimate expression in AI – a force that, like Benjamin's metaphorical "train of history without a brake," propels us forward with creative and destructive potential. This AI-generated artifact at the intersection of philosophy, technology, and art offers a unique perspective on Benjamin's enduring relevance and the philosophical implications of our AI-driven reality.

## 1 Description

This experimental film reinterprets Walter Benjamin's 1931 essay "The Destructive Character" through the lens of artificial intelligence, serving as both a companion piece and critical counterpoint to Nick Land's "Meltdown". Where Land's work portrays a frenzied vision of technological acceleration, this 30-minute visual essay employs Benjamin's prescient analysis to scrutinize and challenge accelerationist ideologies. By interweaving Benjamin's early 20th-century insights with AI-generated imagery depicting our current technological landscape, the film draws unexpected connections between Benjamin's forward-thinking philosophy, the inexorable logic of capital, and the transformative potential of AI. Blending elements of speculative documentary and avant-garde cinema, the work visualizes how these forces embody an ethos of perpetual change and creative destruction. In doing so, it not only unearths proto-accelerationist threads in Benjamin's thought but also offers a more nuanced critique of the unbridled technological optimism present in Land's early writings. This project invites viewers to reconsider the ethical ramifications and potential consequences of accelerationist thinking in our AI-saturated world, providing a reflective and critical examination of these influential philosophical perspectives.

## 1.1 AI-Augmented Artistic Approach

This visual interpretation of Benjamin's "The Destructive Character" harnesses a suite of AI technologies, pushing the boundaries of machine-assisted filmmaking: **Visual Foundation:** The essay's text serves as a springboard for AI image synthesis. Using Stable Diffusion via open-source Colab notebooks, the process generates a diverse visual palette, with each sentence inspiring a multitude of potential images. **Cinematic Evolution:** Runway's Gen 3 model transforms static imagery into fluid motion. This cutting-edge tool breathes life into still frames, necessitating extensive experimentation to achieve the project's distinctive aesthetic. **Soundscape Creation:** Stable Audio translates textual concepts into abstract auditory experiences. By processing paragraphs and sentences from Benjamin's work, the system crafts a soundscape that echoes the essay's philosophical depth. **Resurrecting Benjamin:** In a unique approach to narration, the project resurrects Benjamin's voice using AI cloning technology, working from a rare historical recording. Runway's Lip Sync Video tool then animates historical photographs, creating an uncanny yet compelling narration experience. **AI-Generated Handwriting:** Software from the Handwriting-Transformers project was used to mimic Benjamin's handwriting and generate the subtitles for the film, adding an intimate and authentic layer to the visual presentation. **AI-Enhanced Post-Production:** The toolkit extends to AI-powered image manipulation, including upscaling, colorization, and object manipulation, allowing for nuanced visual refinement. **Composition and Editing:** DaVinci Resolve serves as the canvas where these AI-generated elements coalesce. The film takes shape organically, mirroring the essay's structure and flow. This methodology blends algorithmic generation with human curation, resulting in a vast array of options for each moment of screen time. The artist's role evolves into that of a curator, selecting and arranging machine-generated content to align with the project's vision. As of now, this ambitious undertaking remains in progress, with completion anticipated by late November. This timeline allows for ongoing experimentation and integration of emerging AI capabilities, ensuring the final piece represents a vanguard example of AI-human collaborative artistry in film.

## 2 Artist biography

Kosmas Giannoutakis is a composer, media artist, computer musician, and researcher based in upstate New York. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Electronic Arts at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) with a focus on Live Coding and Electroacoustic music composition as transindividual collaborative practices, and Neo-speculative aesthetics of music in the technosocial milieu of Distributed Ledger Technology and Artificial Intelligence. Kosmas's work explores contemporary advancements in technology, as well as theoretical concepts including critical posthumanities and speculative materialisms.

Kosmas's artistic output spans a wide range of acoustic and electroacoustic music genres. These include acousmatic music, film music, robotic and interactive sound installations, audiovisual game performances, algorithmic and computer-generated compositions, concert installations, live-electronics, live coding, telematic performances, systematic processes of collaborative composition, and Machine-Learning generated media.

His works have been presented at numerous international festivals and conferences. Notable venues include inSonic at ZKM Karlsruhe, ALIFE 2018 conference in Tokyo, and Ecos Urbanos 2022 festival at EMPAC in Troy, NY. Kosmas has also showcased his work at the Matera Intermedia Festival, San Francisco Tape Music Festival, and LIPS (Laboratoire In(ter)disciplinaire de Prototypes Scéniques et Sonores) at GRAME in Lyon. His pieces have been featured at eviMus6 in Saarbrücker, [sound]Spectrum New Music Seminar in Bydgoszcz, Multimedia Festival Diffrazioni in Florence, and the IS IT WORKING? International festival of art, science and technology in Ljubljana. Additional presentations include Sound Campus at Kunstuniversität Linz, Junge SIGNALE concert series in Graz, Soundislands Festival in Singapore, and the Toronto International Electroacoustic Symposium. Kosmas's work has also been showcased at the New York City Electroacoustic Music Festival, Gaudeamus Muziekweek 2015 and ICMC 2016 in Utrecht, REAL/UNREAL BEAST FEaST 2016 in Birmingham, and klingt gut! 2016 in Hamburg. His artistic contributions have extended to the 13th Athens Digital Arts Festival, Sonic Realities 2018 in Aberdeen, Workshop-in-Exposition – Thresholds of the Algorithmic in Bergen, xCoAx 2017 in Lisbon, and "The Digital Body" International Exhibition in Bucharest.

## References

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