Evaluating Refusal

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Procreate's decision not to use AI

Creativity is made, not generated.

Generative AI is ripping the humanity out of things. Built on a foundation of theft, the technology is steering us toward a barren future. We think machine learning is a compelling technology with a lot of merit, but the path generative AI is on is wrong for us.

We're here for the humans. We're not chasing a technology that is a moral threat to our greatest jewel: human creativity. In this technological rush, this might make us an exception or seem at risk of being left behind. But we see this road less travelled as the more exciting and fruitful one for our community.

Where we stand

🖼 **No generative AI**
We deeply respect your hard-earned skills.

✋ **Your work belongs to you**
We do not have access to your art, by design.

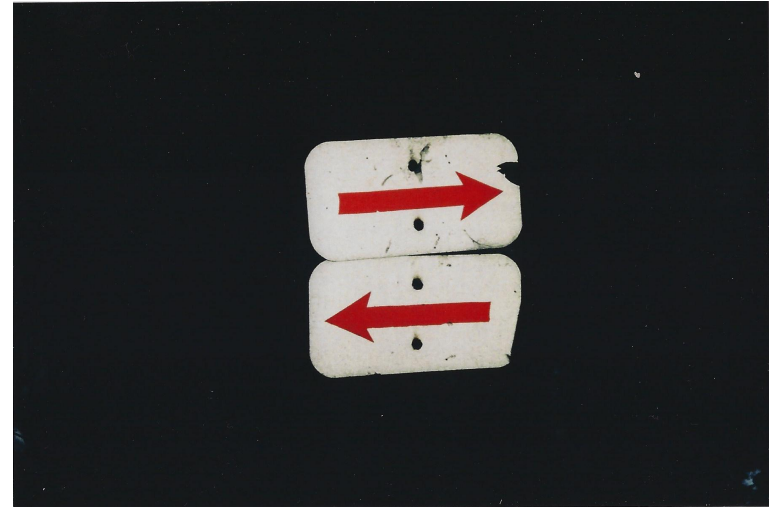🛡 **We take pride in privacy**
Your activity is not tracked in our apps.

excerpts from **Procreate's AI statement**

"I really hate generative AI. I don't like what's happening in the industry and I don't like what it's doing to artists."
—James Cuda, Procreate CEO

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Background: What is refusal?

- ## What is refusal?
  - "Saying no without being given the right to say no"[1]
  - Not just abstention: deliberate, targeted non-use with an explicit political bent
  - A way of **imagining better** futures & **articulating alternatives**
  - **A design methodology** [2]

[1] Ahmed 2017
[2] Zong and Matias 2024

Example of refusal: Procreate

- **Questions to ask**
  - What refusals are happening towards Generative AI systems? Why?
  - Who is refusing Generative AI systems? Why?
  - Can we learn from those refusing? How?
  - Can we incorporate these critiques into evaluation practices?

AI is not our future. Creativity is made, not generated.

Generative AI is ripping the humanity out of things. Built on a foundation of theft, the technology is steering us toward a barren future. We think machine learning is a compelling technology with a lot of merit, but the path generative AI is on is wrong for us.

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—Procreate AI Statement

Our provocation: Incorporating refusal into evaluations

- ● Refusal is...
  - ○ a lens through which to critique existing evaluations
  - ○ a way to imagine better evaluations
  - ○ a way to set productive limits

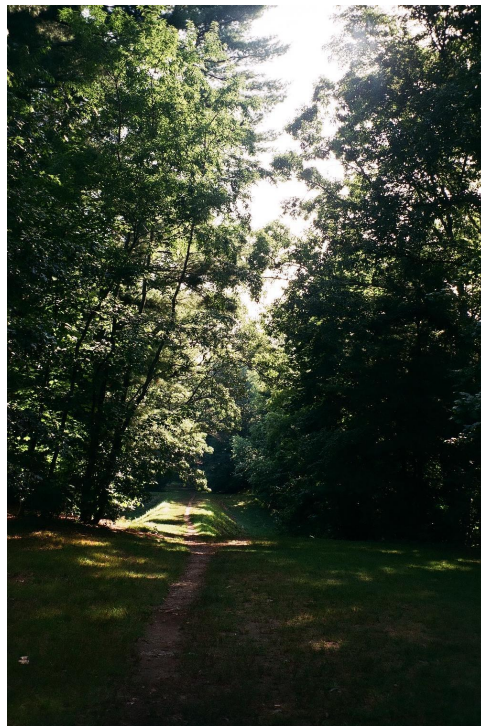# Implications: What can including refusal in evaluations do?

- **Platform refusal as a possibility**
  - Reduce stigma of refusal & reorient discourse in AI towards concerns of refusers
- **Place onus on institutions to move concerns upstream**
  - Encourage "more reciprocal relationships between institutions and individuals"[3]
  - Make addressing concerns more proactive rather than reactive
- **Foster evaluations of GenAI systems that respond to power relations and user concerns**

[3]Benjamin 2017

Takeaways: Our calls to action for evaluators of GenAI

- Focus on a long-term goal rather than incrementalist improvements
- Decenter tech and academia as arbiters of truth
- Support evaluations that encourage real user agency
- View refusal as generative!

Thank you!

If you enjoyed this presentation, please read [our paper](#)!

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References

Besides screenshots, all images are scanned versions of 35mm film photographs by Shira Abramovich.

[1] Sara Ahmed. 2017. No. https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/06/30/no/

[2] Chelsea Barabas. 2022. Refusal in Data Ethics: Re-imagining the Code Beneath the Code of Computation in the Carceral State. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4094977

[3] Ruha Benjamin. 2016. Informed Refusal: Toward a Justice-based Bioethics. *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 41, 6 (Nov. 2016), 967–990. https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243916656059

[4] Procreate. 2024. Creativity is made, not generated. https://procreate.com/ai

[5] @Procreate. "We're never going there. Creativity is made, not generated. You can read more at http://procreate.com/ai ✨ #procreate #noaiart." X, 7:17pm, August 18, 2024. https://x.com/Procreate/status/1825311104584802470

[6] Irene Solaiman, Zeerak Talat, William Agnew, Lama Ahmad, Dylan Baker, Su Lin Blodgett, Canyu Chen, Hal Daumé III, Jesse Dodge, Isabella Duan, Ellie Evans, Felix Friedrich, Avijit Ghosh, Usman Gohar, Sara Hooker, Yacine Jernite, Ria Kalluri, Alberto Lusoli, Alina Leidinger, Michelle Lin, Xiuzhu Lin, Sasha Luccioni, Jennifer Mickel, Margaret Mitchell, Jessica Newman, Anaelia Ovalle, Marie-Therese Png, Shubham Singh, Andrew Strait, Lukas Struppek, and Arjun Subramanian. 2024. Evaluating the Social Impact of Generative AI Systems in Systems and Society. arXiv:2306.05949 (June 2024). http://arxiv.org/abs/2306.05949arXiv:2306.05949[cs].

[7] Jonathan Zong and J. Nathan Matias. 2024. Data Refusal from Below: A Framework for Understanding, Evaluating, and Envisioning Refusal as Design. *ACM J. Responsib. Comput.* 1, 1 (March 2024), 10:1–10:23. https://doi.org/10.1145/3630107