



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

"You Need to Embrace It - It's Coming"

Perceptions of AI, Creative Autonomy, and Precarity in UK Animation

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates how cultural workers in the UK animation industry perceive and navigate the growing role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within creative production. While AI is increasingly adopted across the cultural sectors, much of the existing literature focuses on its technological capabilities and theorised effects rather than the lived experiences of practitioners. Addressing this gap, the study analyses seven semi-structured interviews with UK-based creative professionals directly involved in animation production. Through utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework and a social shaping theory lens, the findings reject a technologically deterministic interpretation. Therefore, they emphasise the co-construction of technology and society and provides cultural workers with agency.

The findings reveal four central themes. First, AI is predominantly viewed as a tool rather than a creator, adept at assisting with ideation and technical tasks, however demanding human collaboration for quality creative outputs. Second, AI is seen as intensifying precarity within an already insecure industry, thus contributing to anxieties around job stability and working conditions. Third, participants raised concerns surrounding the potential displacement of junior roles, noting them as critical to industry stability while most susceptible to automation. Finally, participant responses were characterised by an emotional ambivalence, presenting tensions between curiosity and ethical unease. This research contributes to cultural labour scholarship by foregrounding practitioner's voices. It illuminates that AI's perceived impact is felt unevenly across hierarchies, interconnected industries, and specific roles as it is negotiated within broader industrial dynamics. It also highlights the need to examine AI's impact not only through its capabilities, but through its implications to labour conditions and creative expression. Addressing the limitations of this study, this research features a small and selective sample. For this reason, future research could extend the study to a longitudinal or comparative approach across different sectors. Overall, this research offers a timely insight into the cultural and affective dimensions of AI in animation labour, revealing rich findings of the industry opinion at this current point in technological development and adoption.

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1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly emerging as an impactful technological development for the cultural industries, with animation highlighted as one of the most affected and debated sectors. Defined broadly, AI refers to systems which mimic human cognition capable of learning, adapting and reproducing content from vast data sets (Lawal, 2024; Wang, 2019). As Wang (2019) notes, AI lacks a singular definition due to its ever developing nature which requires researchers to clarify the specific application for their discussion. This dissertation focuses on generative AI systems, therefore, technologies that produce new content such as text, imagery or video from existing training data. These tools have captured global attention, particularly following the release of platforms such as ChatGPT, Midjourney and Stable Diffusion. Furthermore, controversy surrounds the capabilities of these technologies, such as the recent backlash to OpenAI's image generators, which can reproduce iconic artistic styles, sparking concerns surrounding authorship, copyright and creativity (Di Placido, 2025).

As Anantrasirichai and Bull (2022) note, AI development is attracting significant global investment from both public and private sectors. This indicates its growing cultural and economic influence. In the UK specifically, animation plays a vital role in this landscape. As of 2023, the UK animation sector is valued at £1.7 billion and employs approximately 16,000 individuals in over 800 production companies across an 'interconnected ecosystem' of various industries such as film, television, and advertising (O'Connor, 2023 p.3). This interconnection and reliance provide a particularly interesting area of AI research, as any disruption in animation labour or creativity may reverberate across adjacent industries (Tschand and Golstein, 2004). Animation is further identified as a compelling focus as it is a technology-intensive field, historically embracing innovations to fundamentally shift the nature of the industry (Bendazzi, 2015a; Bendazzi, 2015b). Exemplifying this, Yixuan et al. describe the animation industry's many eras of development, identifying the present as the 'intelligent era' (2024, p.416).

The animation industry also provides a rich site for exploring creative labour and its affective dimensions (Stahl, 2010). Indeed, cultural workers often pursue animation careers driven by a desire for creative expression, autonomy and personal meaning; Banks refers to this as the 'charms and allure of cultural work' (2007, p.60). As AI technologies continue to be utilised in animation production, from in-betweening to storyboarding (Izani et al., 2024; Gao, 2023), workers may face new pressures and uncertainties surrounding this creative control. To unpack these pressures, scholars such as Chow and Celis Bueno argue that studying 'labour is essential to properly grasp the question of creativity in the context of AI' (2025, p.7). Avoiding a technologically deterministic approach common to technology research, this study is grounded in social shaping theory which recognises that technologies emerge through and are embedded in social, cultural and historical contexts (Baym, 2015; Wajcman, 2015). In this way, AI cannot be framed as either a neutral or entirely disruptive force.

This reflects the necessity to move beyond the dominant discourses that focus solely on technological capabilities and adopt a social shaping perspective. This approach recognises how technologies and society co-produce one another through negotiation, adaptation and resistance (Baym, 2015; Wajcman, 2015). From this perspective, workers are not passive recipients of AI but active agents whose experiences shape and are shaped by its implementation in daily practices. Indeed, despite a growing body of academic literature on AI in the cultural industries (Narayan et al., 2022; Anantrasirichai and Bull, 2022), there remains a lack of empirical research centred on labour experience. Narayan et al. (2022) and Bender (2024) recognise this research gap, noting an overemphasis on technological capacity and policy discussion without exploring how practitioners perceive these tools.

My dissertation aims to address this gap by studying cultural workers directly involved in animation creation; those Hesmondhalgh distinguished as cultural 'symbol creators' (2019, p.93). Addressing time and resource limitations, I have selected the animation industry as a feasible and highly relevant case study. Positioned at the core of the

media industries (Westcott, 2010; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008), uniquely interwoven with many other sectors, animation is highlighted as a particularly pressing focus. To do so, this study adopts a qualitative research design in conducting seven semi-structured interviews with UK-based animation professionals across varied roles, seniority levels, and primary commissioning industries. A two-stage sampling process was employed to assess a range of perspectives within the industry. These interviews were then analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework to identify key patterns in how animators perceive AI's impact on their labour experience and creativity. This reflects a social shaping approach that considers not only what AI can do, but how it is utilised, reworked and resisted by practitioners (Baym, 2015; Wajcman, 2015). Ultimately, this research seeks to examine how AI is perceived and experienced by animation workers, with particular attention to its impact on their creative practices and labour conditions. As Atkinson and Baker argue, 'any discussion of AI and the future of creative practice should look at where and how AI-supported technologies are used' (2023, p.1056). Accordingly, I have chosen to foreground the lived experiences of cultural workers within this research.

1.1 Research Questions

As Clark et al. (2021) determine, to conduct appropriate research, clarity in research questions is essential to enable analysis. The following research question guides the project:

RQ: How do cultural workers in the animation industry perceive Artificial Intelligence (AI) within creative production?

This overarching question is supported by two sub-questions that connect the study directly to cultural labour theory:

RQ1: How do cultural workers perceive AI in relation to creative autonomy and expression?

RQ2: How do cultural workers consider AI in the context of labour precarity?

These questions focus the study on the social and affective dimensions of AI in creative practice, developed in light of existing relevant literature to ensure research is not conducted 'in isolation from theory' (Hansen and Machin, 2018 p.1).

2. Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of research on the animation industry and Artificial Intelligence (AI), situating the intersection of both within cultural labour scholarship. Accordingly, the theoretical framework is divided into four sections which contextualise the experiences of modern work within the cultural industries. First, I address the impact and development of technologies within creative sectors, thus presenting the conflicting scholarly understandings of the ramifications on cultural labour with specific reference to AI. To narrow the scope of the study, I then explore the unique relationship between AI and labour within the animation industry. Hence, I unpack its introduction, current uses and documented capabilities. Finally, this chapter delves into two concepts within cultural labour theory, precarity and creativity. In doing so, I detail the potential disruption or enhancement which AI provides to these concepts and how they manifest within animation labour at an industrial and personal level. This mirrors Bender's thematic approach to AI within the cultural industries, recommending the necessary consideration of both the 'industrial impact...and the threat to perceived meaningfulness of human-created work' (2024, p.2).

2.1 Cultural Industries, Labour and Technologies

When considering the potential impact of AI, it is necessary to situate the discussion within the history of technological advancement within the cultural industries. From the advent of radio to digitalisation, technological development has disrupted media distribution, consumption and production (McAlister et al., 2024; Trattner et al., 2022). From a commercial perspective, the historical adoption of technology has been prompted by market pressure to remain competitive and streamline labour costs (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024; Lee, 2022; Ali et al., 2024). This adoption is often justified by research into consumer response. For instance, when testing AI-produced content, Bakpayev et al.'s (2022) study into advertisement perception found consumers liked AI ads equally as much as human content. However, the generalisability of such studies could be questioned due to the small, demographically unrepresentative sampling and the controlled research conditions in which respondents were made

aware of AI use prior to testing, possibly shaping responses. Outside of controlled research, public responses to AI advertisements are often negative. For example, Coca Cola's 2024 Christmas advert was widely met with backlash (Marshall, 2024).

At this stage, it is important to acknowledge the 'complex ambivalences' in both industry discourse and academic research on technological advancement in the cultural industries (Narayan et al., 2022 p.117). Indeed, the research area features polarised perspectives, particularly around AI technologies. On one side, a form of technological utopianism highlights the distinctly transformative nature of AI within creative sectors, with scholars like Bender (2024) and Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2024) framing it as a positive, 'modern revolution' (Izani et al., 2024 p.57). This approach reflects what Chow and Celis Bueno term 'technological solutionism' (2025,p.8), in which AI is discursively framed as the panacea of all problems within cultural industries. On the other side, contrasting research features 'techno-pessimistic discourses on AI's catastrophic impacts' (Narayan et al., 2022 p.124), conforming to a historically common scepticism toward technological change. Erickson argues that this scepticism is particularly prevalent within AI research as the technology challenges concepts like judgement, creativity and autonomy which are traditionally understood as 'beyond the reach of automation' (2024, p.2). As such, AI may not only disrupt but also redefine these theoretical ideas.

Whether framed positively or negatively, it is imperative to understand that technology is one of many factors which impact the cultural industries so as to not fall into the practice of technological determinism. This deterministic view, common to technology studies, positions cultural workers as passive recipients of external change, oversimplifying causality through technological myths (Baym, 2015). Hesmondhalgh expands on this, recoinning the concept to 'technological reductionism' to describe the tendency to 'reduce complicated, interwoven webs of causality to a single driving force' (2019, p.110). Recognising this complexity, Park describes AI's role within the cultural industries as 'complex and contentious' (2024 p.1814), best understood as part of a wider industrial

ecosystem as opposed to single-handedly disruptive. In light of this, rather than viewing AI in isolation, it should be seen as a continuation of technological advancements such as labour displacement partly caused by the advent of the computer (Erickson, 2024). Baym's theory of technological domestication reinforces this, framing AI within a historical cycle of utopian and dystopian narratives which dissipate as technologies are normalised and societally embedded over time. What is distinctive to AI, however, is the unprecedented rate of its adoption (McAlister et al., 2024), providing particular research justification. Adopting the frame of social shaping theory as employed by Baym (2015) and Wajcman (2015), this study considers the coevolution of society and technological development. In so recognising the power for each to affect the other in a synergistic relationship.

2.2 The Cultural Industries and AI

Academic research around AI's impact on the cultural industries often centres on employment opportunities. From a utopian perspective, AI can be framed as a tool for labour democratisation. For example, Park (2024) argues that AI lowers industry entry barriers in facilitating creative work without specialist artistic skills. Similarly, Lee et al. (2024) and Ojiyi et al. (2021) theorise the rise of AI-driven creative roles to expand access to creative employment. This is evident in the emergence of 'Creative AI' job boards featuring roles such as 'Content Futurist', 'AI Animator', and 'Gen AI Artist' (Curious Refuge, 2025 n.p.). However, more sceptical perspectives highlight that these roles often require advanced digital skills, pointing instead to heightened barriers. Bhargava et al. (2021) and Erickson (2024) note the increasing pressure to upskill, while Anantrasirichai and Bull argue that AI could 'amplify the gap between those who can and those who cannot use new digital technologies', thus exacerbating inaccessibility (2022, p.635).

Alongside concerns over industry accessibility, much of the literature highlights the risk of job displacement, particularly for junior or low-skilled roles (Ali et al., 2024; Tiwari,

2023; Lee, 2022). Consequently, AI technologies are increasingly viewed as competitors to cultural workers, developed to 'encroach on new terrains of human activity' (Atkinson and Barker, 2023). A competition felt unevenly across creative actors and hierarchies (Lee, 2024). Some scholars, however, frame this reduction in human labour more optimistically. Indeed, Bhargava et al. (2021) suggest AI may ease employee workload by enhancing efficiency. Accordingly, 'AI presents a fundamental solution to the labour intensity of artists' (Lee, 2022 p.606). Yet this solutionist framing, as Wajcman warns, reflects the technologically deterministic 'speculative hyperbole' which positions advancement as the fix for broader social issues (2015, p.177). In contrast, Ali et al. (2024) found that AI use significantly increased stress, anxiety and burnout. Furthermore, Erickson (2024) illustrates the extensive creative and technological expertise required to use AI effectively. These pressures exemplify Wajcman's 'time pressure paradox' (2015, p.14), in which technologies utilised to speed up tasks are simultaneously blamed for the workers' hastened pace of life, driven by discourses such as the 'cultural allure of speed' (2015, p.182).

As an alternative to job displacement, Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2024) and Bhargava et al. (2021) propose the idea of job transformation, recognising the necessity of human oversight in AI use. This shift positions creative workers from the producers to the arbiters of content, thereby 'blur[ring] the boundaries between artist and tool by becoming a co-creator' (Park, 2024 p.1815). Lee et al. describe this as 'meta-creativity', where output is ultimately enhanced through human and AI collaboration (2024, p.14). Similarly, Erickson (2024) and Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2024) echo this creative capacity, highlighting the value of AI in the ideation stages of production. However, Atkinson and Barker (2023) caution that the means-ends logic on which AI systems operate could limit their creative potential, therefore constraining artistic expression. Lee (2024) echoes this concern, acknowledging AI's creative potential while noting the problematic consequences for autonomy as the artist loses control over their subjective style.

The intersection of AI technologies and the cultural industries is receiving significant academic interest (Anantrasirichai and Bull, 2022). However, much of the research focuses on the technological capabilities of AI products and therefore the theoretical uses. In overlooking how media practitioners actually use and perceive these tools, this presents a noteworthy gap in research. Scholars such as Narayan et al. (2022) and Atkinson and Barker (2023) highlight this gap, calling for a worker-focused approach. Moreover, in response to the prevalent technological pessimism in the literature, Bender (2024) advocates for exploring the aspects of AI that bring cultural workers joy. Thus, further demonstrating the need to understand cultural workers' feelings. Narayan et al. (2022) also criticise a tendency to overgeneralise findings across the cultural industries, rather than examining specific sectors. Whilst cross-industry studies provide great insight for comparison, it is necessary to unpack how these theoretical uses actually materialise in workers' practices within a specific context. This study addresses that need by focusing on the animation industry.

2.3 The Animation Industry and AI

This study focuses on the animation industry due to the unique and complex ways AI interacts with a sector deeply intertwined with technological advancement (Izani et al., 2024). While animation dates back to ancient civilisations (Wang and Zhong, 2024), contemporary practice relies heavily on computer technology (Tschand and Golstein, 2004). Tschand and Golstein (2004), detail Pixar's integration of new technology in each film as an example of the industry's historical embrace of innovation. Scholars such as Bendazzi (2015a; 2015b) and Wang and Zhong (2024) determine the pinnacle of this technological embrace at the advent of the computer, detailing the paradigmatic shift to the industry at the hands of digitalisation. Technological change has also been influenced by adjacent industries like film and television; the growth of satellite and cable technologies increased production opportunities (Westcott, 2010). Considering the economic context surrounding accessibility of technologies, modern mass production was integral to this embrace (Stahl, 2010). Furthermore, digitalisation enabled studios to outsource labour globally to decrease costs and scale production

(Sutrisno et al., 2024). Through computer development, tools like interpolation, cloud rendering and computer-generated imagery (CGI) greatly improved efficiency for both 2D and 3D production (Bendazzi, 2015b; Hamzah et al., 2020; Tschand and Golstein, 2004). These developments have profoundly shaped both creative and organisational aspects of animation.

Technological developments have had both positive and negative consequences for cultural labour. Increased accessibility to computer technologies arguably contributed to industry democratisation by enabling small studios to operate with limited budgets and staff (Bendazzi, 2015a; Bendazzi, 2015b). This, however, reduced the human labour required. Furthermore, whilst productivity improved, Okeda and Koike (2011) note that it also led to heightened labour expectations, thus diminishing work experience quality. Stahl (2010) further argues that outsourcing and outsourcing contributed to worker alienation. Conversely, Singh (2023) posits that technological advancement greatly improved the quality of creative output through an advancement of realism and complexity, though this view risks technological determinism. Still, such improvements demonstrate that technology has been a key factor in shaping creative output and expression. Technological adoption and advancement within animation is therefore complex but not novel. Indeed, it can be claimed that 'animation is a product of the fusion of art and technology' (Yixuan et al., 2024 p.416). Invoking a social shaping lens, AI should therefore be recognised as a continuation of this fusion, not as a wholly disruptive force.

AI within animation is a growing area of research, likely due to the industry's uniquely high adoption rate of AI technology (CVLEconomics, 2024). As a result, the recorded applications of AI products are plentiful. Sivakrishna Reddy et al. (2024), through their case study of *Coco*, found that using generative AI during scripting streamlined production and enhanced overall quality. Gao (2023) echoes this streamlining capacity, highlighting real-time editing and decision-making capabilities of generative AI. Beyond productivity, AI has been argued to enhance animation creativity. For example, aiding

brainstorming and prototyping character designs through accessing vast datasets (O'Connor, 2023). Moreover, Yixuan et al. (2024) detail the usefulness of AI products within storyboarding to generate preliminary sketches, motion video clip generation capabilities to enhance interpolation, and text-to-voice features allowing for generating voiceovers and background music without human talent. Whilst they acknowledge the drawbacks, such as the tendency for errors, emotionless delivery and content homogenisation, the focus remains on efficiency. For example, Disney's reduced labour costs are positioned as a 'remarkable achievement' (Yixuan et al., 2024 p.417). However, these studies largely overlook the problematic consequences for labour, such as the displacement of creative roles. Narayan et al. recognise this research gap, calling for deeper engagement with the 'ethical and practical challenges posed by AI' (2022, p.113).

2.4 The Animation Industry and Precarity

Whilst the technological applications of AI in animation are well documented, far less attention is paid to how AI intersects with structural labour conditions. Animation is globally characterised by labour-intensive production and high costs (Westcott, 2010), prompting organisation to mitigate risk through large-scale outsourcing (Tschand and Golstein, 2024; Okeda and Koike, 2011), flexible employment (Westcott, 2010; Matsunaga, 2022), and low-paid or unpaid work (Matsunaga, 2022). Much of the literature on these issues centres on Japan as the largest market (Morisawa, 2015), gaining a total revenue of £17bn in 2023 (Statistica, 2025). However, this dissertation aims to provide insight into the UK where similar trends persist. According to Animation UK (2019), 52% of the UK animation workforce are freelance, therefore conforming to the global norm of flexibilisation. Furthermore, the UK industry is dominated by independent studios dependent on commissions from other sectors of the cultural industries (Westcott, 2010). Many of which feature unstable employment structures, such as television (Ursell, 2000). This interdependence combines with precarity, a concept that refers to growing insecurity and alienation in work as roles become increasingly shaped or replaced by machines (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008).

Precarity is driven by globalisation, digitalisation and a neoliberal landscape which prioritises profit over worker experience (Gill and Pratt, 2008). Precarity is also marked by individualisation, where risk is transferred from organisations to the worker through flexibilised employment such as temporary and freelance work (Caves, 2000; de Peuter, 2011; Zoellner and Lee, 2020). This insecure environment couples with an oversupply of labour, whereby competition for limited opportunities is high (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009).

In a precarious environment, the consequences for cultural labour are palpable. Individualisation fragments the workforce, limiting collective action such as unionisation (Deuze, 2016; Brienza; 2016). This helps to entrench a culture of self-blame and self-reliance (McRobbie, 2002; Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009), where looking out for number one becomes the norm. Such conditions are upheld by the discourse of entrepreneurialism (du Gay, 1996; Banks, 2007), a discourse instilled in creative industries policy promoting self-governance and deepening worker alienation (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008). As a result, workers are expected to constantly upskill to remain employable (Lee, 2012; Mackenzie and McKinlay, 2021). In this context, exploitation is rife. This is evident in systemic poor pay, long hours (Hesmondhalgh, 2010; Zoellner and Lee, 2020) and unpaid overwork (Blair et al., 2001). This flexibilised gig-economy places immense mental pressure on workers, with respondents noting a fear of replaceability as ultimately 'you're only as good as your last job' (Blair, 2001 p.149). In this way, precarity becomes a 'synonym for the insecurity and exploitation' embedded in the cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008 p.100).

The intersection of technological advancement and labour precarity in animation predates AI. Tschand and Golstein (2024) argue that the emergence of 3D animation software in the early 2000s intensified precarity, contributing to the closure of many 2D animation studios. This precedent signifies the need to examine how AI intersects with creative labour. For example, due to unequal labour supply to demand, creative work is

often 'underpinned by scarcity', with AI positioned as a potential new competitor (Atkinson and Barker, 2023 p.1066). While academic research on animators' perspectives remains limited, non-academic sources provide great insight into this dynamic. In an interview with the animator Dofresh, Hatton (2023) reports how he had only been hired because an in-house AI technician was unavailable, suggesting AI-centric roles are encroaching on traditional ones. Furthermore, adjacent research of the VFX industry by Narayan et al. (2022) found that workers viewed AI as intensifying competition in an already high-pressure environment. While scholars have praised AI's democratising potential, such as lowering costs for smaller studios and enabling non-specialist production (Izani et al., 2024; Singh, 2023), some researchers argue it may exacerbate competition and devalue skilled labour. This potential devaluation is particularly relevant in the UK, as 93% of workers are highly qualified (Animation UK, 2019).

Considering the environment of overwork and exploitation, researchers have theorised complex consequences for the use of AI technologies. Yixuan et al. (2024), Singh (2023) and O'Connor (2023) propose ways to alleviate pressures through automating menial tasks, thereby freeing time for creative work. However, from a social shaping theory perspective, these studies reflect Wajcman's (2015) critique of efficiency-focused innovation. A problematic philosophy where technologies are deemed successful if they reduce human input and save time at any cost to experience. What these studies often fail to explore is whether animators actually experience improved workloads or labour conditions. As Okeda and Koike (2011) observed with digitalisation in the 1990s, technological change may instead raise labour expectations. One such expectation is the need to upskill, a recurring theme in research on AI integration (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024; Bhargava et al., 2021; Izani et al., 2024). Erickson's (2024) case study research found that while this pressure was recognised, it did not increase stress as workers were used to continuous learning from digitalisation. However, interviews were not held to confirm or deny these presumptions. Furthermore, there is a lack of consideration for an industry in which freelancing is the dominant form of employment; if

workers are to upskill, it will be on their own time, thus contributing to unpaid overwork. Compounding this, Izani et al. (2024) note that underdeveloped AI tools increase workloads as animators must fix the incorrect outputs. This becomes an important area of research to ask practitioners whether AI truly helps or hinders their workload. Within VFX, Narayan et al. (2022) found evidence of both; participants noted time saved on manual work like crowd generation, as well as increased labour in the refining of AI content.

Beyond worker experience, employment stability is a key concern in the context of AI adoption within a precarious animation industry. Significant job displacement has been theorised across sectors due to AI integration (Tiwari, 2023), with low-skilled and junior animation roles, such as in-betweening, particularly at risk (O'Connor, 2023; Singh, 2023). Tremayne-Pengelly (2023) suggests that animators who employ a specific artistic style are more susceptible to job replacement. This fear surfaced in the media backlash to OpenAI's new AI image generator capable of imitating Studio Ghibli's animation, potentially undermining the value of its creative workforce (Di Placido, 2025). Singh (2023) suggests that the extent of labour displacement in animation production also depends on labour placement; with industries such as advertising, which prioritise cost efficiency, more likely to adopt AI without animator input than industries like film and television. Chow and Celis Bueno's (2025) support this theory through interviews with film production managers, who noted hiring fewer staff due to the availability of AI technologies. However, conflicting research contests this. Gao's case study of *The Dog and the Boy* emphasised the irreplaceability of human intervention, as AI technologies were only able to provide a 'coarse' first drawing for refinement (2023, p.150). These contrasting findings suggest that while AI may threaten animation job stability, complete replacement remains uncertain.

This need for collaboration suggests not job displacement, but possibly job transformation. From this perspective, 'the role of the animator is evolving into one of supervision, direction, and creative control over AI tools' (Izani et al., 2024 p.60). This

reflects social shaping theory, which sees technology and society as 'co-evolution[ary]' rather than one dominating the other (Wajcman, 2015 p.13). Yixuan et al. (2024) similarly echo this, theorising an emerging synergistic relationship between animators and AI technology. However, Narayan et al.'s (2022) interviews found that while VFX workers currently view human labour as irreplaceable, they also fear future displacement as AI technologies improve. Therefore, AI can be established as impacting employment stability in both the transformation and displacement of creative roles. This dissertation explores how these dynamics are experienced by animation professionals, illuminating their perspectives to better understand the practical implications for creative labour with AI.

2.5 The Animation Industry and Creativity

As well as uncovering cultural workers' perspectives of AI in a precarious labour environment, this dissertation also aims to investigate workers' perspectives of the relationship between AI use in animation production and creativity. These two avenues of research overlap considerably, as the job transformation proposed arguably shifts the extent to which workers can or are expected to express their creativity. How workers feel about this will be a central focus of this study. This is a unique and significant topic for consideration, as creativity can be identified as a key driver for labour. Banks describes this as the 'charms and allure of cultural work', that the motivation to pursue a career in the cultural industries is prompted by a 'desire to be artistic, autonomous, creative and self-directed' (2007, p.60). Extending this theory, Banks details a longing for creative autonomy in cultural workers stemming from a 'utopian vision of artistic freedom', in which the power to creatively express oneself is essential to workers' experience (2010, p.254). In return for creative autonomy and expression, cultural workers can utilise work as a source for self-actualisation (McRobbie, 2002; Lee, 2012). Thereby, intimately linking their identity and sense of self to their work (Deuze, 2016; Brienza, 2016). This need for creative self-expression highlights cultural labour as deeply affective, spurring workers to care deeply about what they do (Deuze, 2016).

The consequences of such affective labour can be complex. Ross (2003) and Stahl (2010) argue that the discourse of creativity pressures cultural workers into tolerating unpaid work, as the gratification from producing art should provide sufficient internal rewards. Lee (2012) similarly notes how passion can lead to patterns of overwork and overattachment to work, patterns exploited by managers. As Banks (2007) and Hesmondhalgh (2010) propose, the opportunity for self-realisation may only be possible through self-exploitation and acceptance of oppressive conditions. This intimately links the concepts of precarity and creativity within cultural labour. However, the affective nature of cultural work can also be fulfilling. Lee (2012) and Stahl (2010) recognise the emotional pleasure from creative expression, as their work provides meaning to their lives. Banks and Hesmondhalgh (2009) reinforce this, detailing how creative work can counter alienation of workers by enabling self-development through their labour.

Research that centres on media practitioners' perspectives, as this dissertation intends, highlights the importance of self-realisation in sustaining creative careers. In animation specifically, Okeda and Koike found that artistic expression was the top motivation for young freelance Japanese animators, as many described it as providing a 'purpose in life' (2011, p.268). While these findings are somewhat limited in generalisability due to their national and demographic limitations, they are arguably emblematic of an identity attachment sustained through creativity, which is reflected across the wider industry. Eikhof and York's (2016) interview with a UK writer similarly highlights the opportunity for self-understanding as central to sustaining a creative career. Baines reinforces this in a larger study of UK creative freelancers, finding that over 90% of respondents agree that 'there is more to work than making money' (2002, p.24). Whilst this study spans multiple cultural sectors, its larger participant base increases generalisability and further supports the integral role of creativity in meaningful labour experience.

Having established creativity as central to cultural labour, it is crucial to examine how AI may enhance or constrain its expression within animation. One enhancement lies in AI's streamlining capabilities, which free time for creative endeavours. Izani et al. (2024)

note that less-creative, time-intensive tasks such as in-betweening and lip syncing can now be automated. However, these tasks are often conducted by junior staff, which raises concerns of potential lost job opportunities and a future creativity deficit over time. Despite this, Izani et al. (2024) present a technologically optimistic view, suggesting creativity is ultimately enhanced through increased time allocation. O'Connor (2023) and Yixuan et al. (2024) also emphasise the value of AI during character design and conception, as vast datasets are condensed for inspiration beyond human capacity for research. Singh (2023) and Hutson (2023) reinforce this potential, arguing that AI pushes both efficiency and creative conceptual boundaries as they offer 'awe inspiring storytelling that push[es] the limits of this dynamic art form' (Singh, 2023 p.3). Gao's (2023) case study of Soul further illustrates this in practice, where OpenAI's GPT-3 aided the narrative through thematic prompts. Similarly, Narayan et al.'s (2022) interviews with VFX practitioners found that creators view generative AI as useful for initial ideation.

While AI has been argued to enhance creativity, concerns remain about its potential to constrict it. O'Connor warns that overreliance on AI can lead to a homogenised output, where the 'human touch in artistry could be compromised' (2023, p.9). Lee et al. (2024) echo this, suggesting AI use could lead to creative stagnation and the diminishing of artistic novelty. Similarly, Gao (2023) and Yixuan et al. (2024) caution that homogenisation could risk reproducing copyrighted, stereotyped, or biased content. This, therefore, raises ethical concerns and questions of rightful authorship. These critiques align with Chow and Celis Bueno's argument that the reproductive nature of AI means animators are no longer expected to be creative at all; fundamentally changing labour processes from artisanal to 'articulation work' (2025, p.8). While this view reflects technological pessimism in failing to capture arguments of essential human creative collaboration, such as Izani et al. (2024), a partial loss of creative autonomy is a valid concern, as creative control is now shared. Indeed, Atkinson and Barker (2023) suggest that this shifting of creative roles from producers to output selectors could be common across the cultural industries more broadly.

These tensions between AI and creativity highlight the complexity of its integration into cultural industries, suggesting that its impact cannot be fully understood through assessing technological capabilities alone. It is therefore imperative to seek the perspectives of animation practitioners to comprehend how these technologies are used in practice, an area within the existing literature often left unexplored. As Narayan et al. (2022) and Bender (2024) suggest, labour-focused research is imperative to critically analyse the realities of AI implications in the animation industry. This dissertation responds to that gap by investigating how UK animation workers perceive and navigate AI's role in their everyday cultural labour.

3. Methodology

This study explores how cultural workers in the animation industry perceive Artificial Intelligence (AI) in creative production and how the technology interacts with creative labour practice, creativity and precarity. Following Atkinson and Barker's (2023) call to examine the lived experiences of AI in creative settings, this research endeavours to situate AI within cultural labour studies in unpacking workers' uses and judgements. Aligning with Narayan et al. (2022)'s approach, who narrowed their scope to a sector-specific focus as the literature is dominated by cross-industry research, the interviews conducted address this gap in foregrounding the workers' perspectives in the animation sector. This chapter outlines the methodological design of the research, justifying the chosen methods. First, detailing the two-fold sampling technique, the process of data collection and analysis is then demonstrated. Subsequently, the ethical considerations and limitations of this research are considered.

3.1 Research Focus and Design

The research method is guided by the study's central question (Flick, 2022). As this study explores perceptions, a qualitative approach is most appropriate due to its capacity to examine attitudes, behaviours and experiences within their broader social, political and cultural contexts (Babbie, 2021; Brennen, 2022; Ormston et al., 2013). Unlike quantitative studies, which strive for generalisable truths through systematic and standardised methods, qualitative studies recognise the individualised nature of experiences (Brennen, 2022). Whilst this subjectivity may reduce generalisability, particularly with a small participant sample, it allows for rich and detailed data that would otherwise not be possible considering time and resource restrictions (Clark et al., 2021). Furthermore, researchers can significantly lessen their impact on findings by adopting reflexivity and triangulation (Ormston et al., 2013; Brennen, 2022). This is demonstrated through cross-checking the literature with participant responses to find themes for corroboration, thus enhancing validity. Though the study cannot claim to be representative of the collective standpoint of all cultural workers, it can illuminate rich and meaningful perspectives corroborated by multiple participants.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

To explore cultural workers' views of AI in the animation industry, I employed semi-structured interviews to engage in 'focused, purposeful conversation' with respondents (Brennenn, 2022 p.32). This method enables rich insight into participants' values, feelings and opinions (May and Perry, 2022), making it the most common method of data collection in qualitative research (Clark et al., 2021). While interviews can be undertaken in both quantitative and qualitative research, semi-structured interviews are qualitative in that there is a rapport built through which I can gain elaboration and clarification from participants (May and Perry, 2022). Although I prepared an interview guide, the flexible and dynamic format allows for positive diversions to reveal unexpected insights and opportunities (Babbie, 2021; Clark et al., 2021). In this way, the rich and meaningful data previously described becomes possible.

Justifying the chosen approach, semi-structured interviews are reasonably the most appropriate for my research through their balance of structure and flexibility. Indeed, the standardised and closed questioning featured in structured interviewing arguably limits expression (Hansen and Manchin, 2018), while unstructured interviews can be too unpredictable for theoretical analysis (Flick, 2022). Therefore, whilst semi-structured interviews cannot 'elicit codifiable information', our aim is to collect 'data reflect[ing] not what is but what is perceived' (May and Perry, 2022 p.150). Thus, through these interviews, rich and meaningful perspectives were collected and considered within their context.

3.3 Data Collection

As Flick (2022) describes, the atmosphere and environment of semi-structured interviews are of great importance to the responses received. I conducted my interviews via video call utilising Microsoft Teams. Contrary to the problematic financial and time

constraints of face-to-face interviews (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014), video call interviews offered logistical flexibility as many of my participants were geographically dispersed (Brennen, 2022). Interestingly, even in cases where in-person interviews can take place, some participants feel more at ease during an online interview which enhances the dialogue (Clark et al., 2021). Nevertheless, I made sure to establish a comfortable rapport prior to online interviews through email communication as this can help to dispel any limitations (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014). As Clark et al. (2021) instruct, I was also mindful to remain vigilant of technological problems such as poor wifi connection and kept both my audio and camera on to ease discomfort. To structure the interviews, I mirrored Brennen's (2022) suggested schedule to move from icebreaker questions, to probing, and finally to more difficult questions (Appendix D). As Babbie (2021) recommends, questions were carefully worded to resist steering answers, thus protecting research validity through avoiding bias (Babbie, 2021). Each session lasted around 1 hour, in which I remained flexible with the schedule and employed active listening to elicit interesting findings (Flick, 2022).

1. I built an initial rapport with participants via email communication to encourage interviewee comfort. During which, I provided a consent form (Appendix C) and information sheet (Appendix B) which detailed an overview of research topics, ethical considerations and interviewee expectations.
2. During the interview, I began by reminding participants that they were free not to answer any questions they did not wish to. I then asked open-ended questions about their roles within the animation industry.
3. I then progressed to more in-depth questioning on the central research themes, conducting theory-informed probing when necessary or particularly interesting.
4. At the end of each interview, time was allocated for final reflections and participant questions. Participants were then thanked for their time, asked if they would like to see the dissertation project once finished, and reminded of their withdrawal rights.

3.4 Data Analysis

Following each interview, I transcribed the recording immediately to maintain accuracy and capture key insights while fresh in my mind (Brennen, 2022). To do so, thematic analysis was selected as it allowed me to encode my qualitative data for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon at hand (Boyatzis, 1998). I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage iterative process, encoding each transcript individually and then in comparison with others to identify overarching themes in light of existing academic literature. As will be discussed in the following discussion chapter, this process of analysis illuminated the following four central themes in the research: AI is viewed as a tool as opposed to a creator, AI intensifies the insecure and unstable nature of a precarious animation industry, AI contributes to the displacement of junior roles, and the rise of AI contribute to a distinct emotional ambivalence in industry professionals.

3.5 Sampling Technique

To gather data from a variety of cultural workers' perspectives, the sample includes a range in hierarchy, genders and locations within the UK. However, for specificity and relevance to theoretical concepts, only cultural workers directly involved in the production of cultural texts were included (Appendix A). Hesmonhalgh distinguishes these workers as 'symbol creators', defining them as the 'primary creative personnel' and 'creative managers' of the cultural industries (2019, p.93). Therefore, the accountants or lawyers within an animation company for example, no matter how essential to the running of the business, would not be studied for clarity of research. Furthermore, only those directly involved in what Ryan (1992) describes as the creation stages of cultural production will be included, distinguishing from the circulation stages of marketing and distribution.

I conducted a two-step process to identify the sample for my semi-structured interviews. Firstly, to identify initial participants, I used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a

type of non-probability sampling common to qualitative research which requires researchers to select 'information-rich' participants for analysis based on specific criteria (Clark et al., 2021 p.377). This is sometimes also referred to as 'judgemental sampling' as the researcher must decide how useful and representative the study participants may be (Babbie, 2021 p.193). Due to this researcher selectivity, a critique of this sampling method is that it can lead to a loss of generalisability and representativeness in the findings (Miyahara, 2020). Whilst this should be acknowledged, it is through this sacrifice that researchers can gain an in-depth understanding from a smaller sample of participants (Higginbottom, 2004). For a dissertation project, it is simply not possible to access every possible cultural worker within animation. Therefore, purposive sampling can be determined as 'strategic' as it 'allow[s] the researcher to learn as much as possible about the phenomena of interest' from fewer participants (Clark et al., 2021 p.379). To locate the initial participants, they were contacted through the professional network of my stepfather, who is their employer. Although he was not interviewed, this should ethically be acknowledged due to his position of authority. For these respondents, care was taken to ensure participation was entirely voluntary and free from influence. From my perspective, respondents presented as comfortable and mostly did not acknowledge this relationship. Thereby confirming the limited impact this connection had on the research validity.

Once these initial participants had been selected, I employed a second sampling technique of snowball sampling. This non-probability sampling method works whereby each person interviewed is asked to suggest additional participants for inclusion in the study (Babbie, 2021; May and Perry, 2022). Through this repetitive, cumulative nomination process, researchers can access participants through the contact information provided to them (Noy, 2008). This is essential to studies where members of a population can be difficult to locate (Babbie, 2021; May and Perry, 2022). Similar to my research focus on the animation industry, in their study of VFX artist's perspectives of AI, Narayan et al. (2022) located participants through the researcher's network. Due to my lack of connections to the animation industry, this was not possible. However, this

sampling technique was particularly useful for studying the cultural industries as they are network-centric (McRobbie, 2002). Indeed, central to the cultural industries is the model of 'network sociality' (Wittel, 2001 p.51), where contracts are most often achieved through professional connections (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010). The necessity of networking means cultural workers maintain and sustain close relationships with other workers (Gregg, 2010), a unique dynamic I could harness through snowball sampling. Additionally, the recommendation feature added a sense of ease to participants, thus facilitating the comfortable rapport required in qualitative research (Babbie, 2021). Moreover, this technique puts pressure on the researcher to better prepare for interviews so that participants are happy to refer others (Noy, 2008). Consequently, the preparation and quality of each interview was continually improved, strengthening findings. One limitation I had to acknowledge was the potential of only accessing certain perspectives, thereby 'omit[ting] the voices and opinions of others who are not part of a network of friends and acquaintances' (May and Perry, 2022 p.151). To account for this, the two-step sampling technique was employed to make sure the initial participants were diverse in characteristics, including location, gender, and hierarchy. This further mirrors Narayan et al.'s (2022) sampling, however, my sampling was diverse regionally as opposed to globally.

My total sample consisted of seven participants, ranging in gender, location and seniority. Furthermore, reflecting the animation industry's interconnectedness with other cultural sectors, participants' primary sources of production commissions span across multiple industries (Appendix A). These variances exemplify how different vantage points can present a variety of perspectives; through employing a 'diverse and multifaceted' sample, a phenomenon can be explored 'in all its complexity and depth' (Ormston et al., 2013 p.21). One example of this reflected in the study is the ability to gain varied perspectives of technological developments within animation through interviewing different age groups. For future research, I believe this study could also benefit from a larger sample which could look more intricately at the comparative differences between the gendered perspectives of AI in cultural labour for men and

women. Due to the ever-advancing nature of AI, as Narayan et al. (2022) recognised, this study could also be strengthened through a longitudinal research design to evaluate participants' perspectives over time.

Despite the benefits of this two-stage sampling technique, several challenges were encountered. Identifying and recruiting participants required significant planning and time to coordinate interviews. This somewhat reduced the sample size due to time constraints. However, rich findings could still be identified as previously acknowledged. Furthermore, while snowball sampling provided access to a network of individuals otherwise hard to reach, it presented challenges for gaining a representative sample as participant networks often shared similar hierarchical positions and demographic traits. To address this imbalance, I guided participants to suggest future respondents from underrepresented demographics. For example, junior participants were requested from senior participants.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

When undertaking social research, it is important researchers address many ethical considerations at every stage; 'ethics should, without doubt, be at the heart of research' (Webster et al., 2013 p.78). An ethical approach means conducting research in the most moral and just way for both the researcher and participant (Babbie, 2021). Therefore, acknowledging that there are limitations to research that cannot be circumvented (May and Perry, 2022). Ethical considerations are particularly relevant to interview research as there is a power imbalance between researchers and participants, therefore it is of the utmost importance to protect them from either emotional or physical harm (Brennen, 2022). First and foremost, as a piece of academia under the University of Leeds, it was imperative that the University of Leeds' Research Ethics Policy (2025) was adhered to. For this reason, an ethical review form was filled out and signed by my supervisor (Appendix E).

Prior to interviews, it was imperative I gained informed consent from my participants. Therefore, without potentially contaminating their answers, participants should be given sufficient information on the aims of the research prior to agreement (Clark et al., 2021). And that the decision to participate should be free of pressure of coercion (Webster et al., 2013), particularly as the questions in social research may be sensitive and therefore emotional for the participant (Babbie, 2021). To address these concerns, a consent form had to be signed prior to research (Appendix C). Included in the form was also an agreement from the researcher to protect the participant's anonymity and confidentiality. As Babbie (2021) details, both must be explicitly agreed to by the researcher; to offer the removal of identifiable information and to not divulge any sensitive information with any other party following research. During the interviews, participants were offered to remain anonymous through pseudonyms to reduce the chance of identification. However, all participants chose for their names and information to be included.

In conjunction with anonymity and confidentiality, the 'duty to protect the privacy of participants' is extended in expressing the participant's right to not answer any questions they do not feel comfortable with (Clark et al., 2021 p.120). I was then respectful of participants in not probing if questions were rejected and did not repeat any information outside of the study. Additionally, it is imperative researchers offer to share or delete any information of the participants should they wish (Brennen, 2022). As shown in the interview schedule, both were explicitly stated at the beginning and end of the interview. These details were also included in the consent form (Appendix C) and information sheet (Appendix B) with details of how their data was managed.

4. Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the key findings from seven semi-structured interviews with cultural workers in the UK animation industry. Analysed using a thematic analysis approach informed by Braun and Clarke (2006), this research aimed to explore how cultural workers perceive the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within animation production. As noted in the literature review, AI research is a growing area of scholarship. However, the discussion of its technological capabilities is a disproportionately studied topic of thought with far less attention given to how it is actually experienced by practitioners. Giving particular focus to the intersection of AI with creativity and precarity in cultural labour, this chapter foregrounds the voices of those working in the sector. Thereby, I aim to address this theoretical gap in unpacking how workers make sense of AI's creative and labour implications in their real-world contexts.

Through such analysis, four key themes have been identified that capture both the shared concerns and conflicting perspectives of participants. The first is the perception of AI as a tool, not a creator. This highlights how AI is mostly used to support rather than replace creative work. The second key theme is AI as an increasing pressure on job insecurity. Indeed, there is a shared understanding that the precarious nature of the industry, where financial pressure and employment instability are explicitly felt by workers, is worsened by the uncertainty that AI presents. The third key theme is the potential for fewer entry-level opportunities in the animation industry. This theme reflects the fears that low-skilled roles are and will disappear, expressed in the first-hand accounts of junior participants and empathy expressed from senior respondents. The final theme identified is a distinct emotional ambivalence toward AI. Indeed, mixed feelings are demonstrated throughout respondent accounts, which blend excitement, scepticism, fear and hope surrounding the rise of AI.

Throughout the chapter, each section combines participant responses with relevant academic theory to explore how AI is not simply adopted but actively negotiated and interpreted by cultural workers. Furthermore, adopting a social shaping approach informed by Baym (2015) and Wajcman (2015), these findings aim to transcend technologically deterministic interpretations to understand how workers and their labour practices co-evolve with the development and adoption of AI.

4.1 AI as a Tool, Not a Creator

A clear theme emerging from the interviews was the positioning of AI as a creative support tool, rather than a replacement for human authorship. Reflecting O'Connor's (2023), participants widely acknowledged the usefulness of generative AI tools for tasks such as ideation, early creative visualisation, and mocking up concepts before recreating. Despite working in a technology-driven industry (Izani et al., 2024), most participants voiced discomfort and scepticism toward the idea that AI could, or should, take on creative responsibilities. Articulating this distinction, James determined a clear limitation to his comfort level surrounding AI in creative tasks.

'If you choose to use it as a tool to bolster your creativity, that's fine. But yeah, using it to replace creativity, I think I do have a problem with that.' (James)

His comment encapsulates broader sentiments among interviewees that creativity is inherently human. Rather than a simple process of generation, it is recognised as embedded in feeling, intentionality and aesthetic judgement. This mirrors the concerns raised in the literature surrounding the ability of AI to replicate the emotional dimension of cultural labour (Atkinson and Barker, 2023; Erickson, 2024). This ability combines with moral judgement in practitioners, many of whom foreground the essential creativity of human output as opposed to generative works, mirroring the arguments of Gao (2023). Emma articulates this well here:

'It doesn't have the human element, and to me, in my creative opinion, I love real human stories... We are our supercomputer that is far more advanced and brilliant' (Emma)

Similarly, both Lee and Joel described AI-generated animation as more of a first step in the creative process, which demands a lengthy and interactive approach to maintain creative control and produce professionally presentable works. In this way, AI is recognised for its value as a generative tool while also asserting its creative limitations. Challenging technologically deterministic narratives in foregrounding the agency of workers to interpret and negotiate AI's adoption, this boundary setting reflects Wajcman's (2015) social shaping perspective. Indeed, rather than passively integrating AI into their creative practices, participants actively interpret AI's role. Mirroring Izani et al.'s (2024) findings that animators utilise AI for time-intensive and menial tasks, participants often noted demoting the use of AI to small or experimental phases of production; 'the crappy little jobs' (Emma). In this way, new technologies are highlighted not as inherently disruptive or transformative, but as negotiated through labour practices (Baym, 2015). As demonstrated in all interviewee accounts, animators are not merely reactive to AI but are actively determining its function within creative workflows. Furthermore, Thiago reinforced this boundary in noting the essential collaboration between AI and the animator. He notes how the combination of skills can be effective, however, the balance of primary authorship should be considered.

'I think it's more like collaborating...It's mixing with what we're doing instead of just being something you sit there and you just prompt...then you're not really doing the work anymore' (Thiago)

This framing supports Lee's concept of 'meta-creativity' (2024, p.14), as animators integrate AI without relinquishing authorship and creative autonomy. Thus, furthering the illustration that cultural workers actively shape the terms of technological advancement. Expressing a broader approach of pragmatism echoed across the majority of respondents, Emma's commentary further expands this theme. Acknowledging production efficiency, she positions AI as a useful tool for final enhancements, yet still demonstrates the need for animators to quality check output.

'AI is super useful in broadcast to help us have that Hollywood output...without the same money. But it still needs that human eye to check that it has done what we want it to do.' (Emma)

While confirming Singh's (2023) proposition that AI can enhance realism and quality, her view frames AI more as a cost-effective assistant as opposed to a replacement for the emotional depth or originality associated with creative animation. This nuance further echoes Baym's (2015) emphasis on domesticated technologies, in demonstrating how the impact of technologies is partly shaped by context rather than capability alone. Likewise, Tom illustrated ambivalence toward AI's creative potential. Initially intrigued, especially for the uncanny or horror content that generative AI can produce, they expressed a growing disillusionment in stating: 'It's just a bit of a novelty. It's a bit of a gimmick, you know, but with none of the passion behind it'. Tom's depiction highlights a tension between the technical capabilities and perceived artistic imitations of AI commonly expressed by participants. Here, Bender's critique of AI as a 'threat to the meaningfulness of human-created work' (2024, p.2) is arguably resisted, through acknowledging that while generative AI can be technically competent, its output is viewed as emotionally hollow and therefore human creativity remains safe from its disruption. Indeed, the majority of participants voiced a rejection of AI-produced content for lacking a crucial layer of authenticity and originality.

In unpacking participants' perceptions of AI within creative practices, this theme reveals how workers are actively shaping the boundaries of AI integration. At once embracing the benefits of AI as a 'very human-led tool' (Joel), while resisting its encroachment on creative authorship. Importantly, the participants question the interaction of such technologies from a moral and ethical perspective. From a social shaping perspective, and evidenced in the quotation below, such interpretation points to the active negotiation of technologies.

'I think when you're using it to basically replace your own creativity, then it becomes a bit questionable. Are you a creative or are you just, you know, typing in prompts? Are you just a prompter?' (James)

What becomes clear is that the perceived function of AI within creative workflows is the production of ongoing negotiation, grounded in industry norms and artistic values.

4.2 AI Makes an Unstable Industry Even Less Secure

AI's integration into the animation industry is unfolding against a backdrop of longstanding precarity, particularly for junior and freelance workers (Deuze, 2016; Gill and Pratt, 2008; Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009). Indeed, participants frequently described unstable employment patterns, low pay, and intense competition. Reflecting on job security, Emma noted 'just to even go on LinkedIn, everybody is open for work. Nobody has got any work'. Furthermore, addressing the particularly precarious nature of the animation industry in recent years, Lee explained 'we've really seen that sort of feast and famine, it's been a turbulent five years'. Similarly, Joel acknowledged 'it's a very difficult time at the moment'. Within this context, AI was often framed as an intensifier of fragile labour conditions, as opposed to an isolated disruptive force. Crucially, while none of the participants had experienced AI replacing their specific role, AI did contribute to a wider climate of insecurity and promote fear for future disruption. Tom, a

freelance junior 2D animator, exemplified these anxieties while reflecting on their employment struggles.

“I was unemployed for like basically a year... and the amount of times that I would go onto a job listing... there would be fake studios that would show up that were clearly AI.” (Tom)

They explained that many of the job adverts appearing in the industry are, somewhat ironically, AI-generated, and problematically advertised to harvest artists' portfolios to train datasets. Whilst this indicates urgent ethical concerns surrounding copyright, authorship and content homogenisation, reflecting Yixuan et al.'s (2024) critique of AI's creative data training, it also underlines the desperation that defines contemporary job-hunting. Indeed, Tom noted that even with legitimate opportunities, these often required network referrals or a proactive approach to in-studio visibility; “it's so hard to get work right now. I had to go up to someone in the studio I'm working at right now to be like...I exist, I exist!” (Tom). This scarcity of work, in conjunction with what Tom describes as a 'supply and demand' imbalance, situates AI as just one of many pressures within the animation industry.

Reflecting on the interconnected nature of the animation industry to other cultural industries, Phil contextualises these pressures on a broader industrial scale.

'A lot of the 3D workers in film are so emotionally and mentally battered through years and years of poorly paid work, very short-term contracts, work dries up, you're out of a job, you know, quite hard, long hours, long weeks. That is a very hard area of the industry to work in, and it's not very well supported.' (Phil)

Against this backdrop, he articulates the fear of mass job reduction at the hands of AI integration, which is echoed in many participant responses.

'It's hard to say whether [the industry] will just adapt and be like "actually we use AI now" and then they'll cut their workforce by three-quarters..." (Phil)

These fears reflect Ali et al.'s (2024) prediction that AI integration causes significant stress and anxiety, and support the findings of Narayan et al.'s (2022) research that stated the fear of future displacement as AI technologies improve was common among cultural workers. Perhaps more hopefully, however, they contest Tiwari's (2023) hypothesis that significant job displacement among cultural sectors is taking place currently. Nevertheless, this anticipatory anxiety, where the threat of automation loomed over future work prospects, was a common narrative throughout the interviews. Indeed, James questioned 'in terms of workload pressure, will clients expect more for less, or more in less time?' while Joel speculated 'quite a significant level of replacement in five years'. James' temporal framing exemplifies Wajcman's 'time pressure paradox' (2015, p.14), in which AI should be recognised as a part of a larger ecosystem of advancements which have re-negotiated labour expectations and norms. In acknowledging this ecosystem himself by questioning 'has anything ever been safe? Probably not', Baym's (2015) argument that technologies are domesticated over time is reflected, as technologies are initially destabilising but ultimately negotiated and normalised in labour practices. However, what distinguishes AI from previous shifts is the perceived rate of impact, as participants like Thiago stated that inventions such as the printer will have led to job loss, but 'it's just how fast it's changing. That's really scary'. This perception stresses that the rate of AI adoption, which has been noted as unprecedented (McAlister et al., 2024), is acutely felt by cultural workers.

Ultimately, participants did not depict AI as an isolated force of precarity within the industry. Instead, participants were reflective in their acknowledgement of a wider

insecure ecosystem, while clear that AI is a force that sharpens existing poor conditions. Adopting a social shaping framework, it becomes clear that AI's impact is not only shaped by what it can technically achieve, but by how it is adopted within a labour market already marked by exploitation, overwork and scarcity.

4.3 The Disappearance of Beginner Roles

One of the most pressing concerns voiced by participants of varying seniority was the potential erosion of junior roles due to AI's automation of foundational animation tasks. As suggested in the literature by O'Connor (2023) and Singh (2023), many of the entry-level roles, such as in-betweeners and clean-up artists, were presented as under threat. Contrastingly, the senior participants saw their job stability as safe from AI displacement, largely due to the client relationship management involved in their roles. Nevertheless, great empathy for younger animators was expressed. Acknowledging the importance of junior positions, many senior participants determined these positions as critical not only for studio operations but for developing skills, confidence and networks. Echoed in the sentiment of Thiago's questions 'How is it gonna affect them? How are they gonna join the industry?' and following statement 'there's gonna be a massive gap and that's really problematic', participants worried about the impact of displacing these roles. Emma was particularly direct in her account.

'Normally, you bring juniors...who are starting in their career and they start on those menial tasks. They're in a working studio and they're able to see how a studio functions. They're able to look at the seniors around them and get good hands on knowledge...And they're just not going to have as much opportunity to do that if we're saving money and doing those tasks with AI. That is where AI is going to let us down.' (Emma)

Her explanation voices a fear for the jeopardy this places the industry in when considering long-term workforce development, as crucial stepping-stone careers are potentially eliminated. Furthermore, these insights reflect a deep concern surrounding industry structural erosion and mirror a widespread academic concern for the future of entry-level creative opportunities (Ali et al., 2024; Tiwari, 2023; Lee, 2022).

Demonstrating these concerns through lived experience, Tom, whose current freelance role involves layout preparation, expressed unease about the vulnerability of such technical positions; "My current role could be taken over by AI. For something like layout...I'm certain that it could do what I do' (Tom). Indeed, they acknowledged the manual and repetitive nature of their work, yet noted the value of such experiences for the opportunity to learn. From a managerial perspective, Joel seconds this inevitable skills gap through noting that if the 'learning grounds are automated now, you lose the incentive to train or hire'.

This reduction in opportunity to learn, confounded by the raised pressure to upskill theorised by Erickson (2024) and Bhargava et al. (2021), combines to illuminate problematic consequences for who gets to enter and remain in the animation industry. Indeed, far from supporting notions of labour democratisation suggested by researchers, including Park (2024), the entry barriers are perceived as heightened through AI's disruption. Adopting a social shaping lens, Baym (2015) reminds us that technologies do not operate in a vacuum; their effects are shaped by existing power relations. From this perspective, the automation of entry-level roles does not simply reflect technological advancement but reproduces existing hierarchies within creative labour. Thereby, the integration of AI raises critical questions surrounding the sustainability, inclusivity and long-term cultural diversity of the animation workforce.

4.4 Emotional Ambivalence Towards AI

Beyond structural concerns, many participants expressed complex and often contradictory emotional responses to AI. While both its capacity for creativity and efficiency were acknowledged, such benefits were frequently accompanied by depictions of fear, anxiety and unease. This ambivalence arises from the complex interplay between creative identity, ethical awareness and job insecurity. Tom's account offers a clear illustration of this complexity. Reflecting on their early experimentation with AI tools, they remark 'at first I was like, whoa, this is really sick...we're creating a gloopy mess that actually looks like what's being typed out' (Tom). However, shifting in tone and reevaluating their current experiences, they lose their enthusiasm; 'It used to be fascinating, now it's kind of gone to the point where it's actually...so problematic' (Tom). His transition from fascination to disdain for AI captures the mounting professional and ethical concerns which take precedence over potential creative capacity. Echoing this sentiment, Thiago notes 'it is scary because you know it's based on a lot of people's work' while also determining 'I think we need to embrace it'. His stance reveals the duality of AI negotiated by cultural workers who wish to remain competitive in an increasingly precarious labour market, while also wanting to be progressive in adapting to new technologies. These accounts reflect Narayan et al.'s research findings that practitioners experience 'complex ambivalences' when perceiving AI (2022, p.117), and foreground the emotional labour involved.

Notably, several participants did not view AI as a tool to be enthusiastically adopted, but rather a necessity to navigate a precarious landscape. Framing this view bluntly, Lee stated 'You need to embrace it because otherwise, how are you going to survive it? Because it's coming. Whether you like it or not'. This reluctant adaptation underscores the emotional cost to remaining employable in a highly competitive environment (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009). In this way, AI is perceived by participants as something to endure, thus re-emphasising Wajcman's 'time pressure paradox' (2015, p.14) in which tools designed to ease work experience in turn intensify demands. Invoking dark humour, Phil exemplified this resignation; 'It just has to last for, like 20 more years,

then... It's someone else's problem'. This theme also reveals the affective burden carried by cultural workers as they strive to maintain their creative autonomy, artistic expression and ethical values. In this way, this research addresses the gap in research identified by Narayan et al., who call for a deeper engagement with the 'ethical and practical challenges posed by AI' (2022, p.113). Here, these challenges can be identified through analysing Banks' 'charms and allure of cultural work' (2007, p.60). In doing so, it becomes clear that workers sustain creative careers in hopes of self-expression and self-realisation; however, this complex negotiation of tools which threaten job stability, originality and authorship arguably further mystifies the reality of contemporary cultural labour.

5. Conclusion

This dissertation has examined how cultural workers in the UK animation industry perceive and navigate the growing role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their creative and labour practices. By centering the lived experiences of practitioners through seven semi-structured interviews, the research offers rich insight into a rapidly evolving area of cultural labour research. Adopting a social shaping framework, as informed by Baym (2015) and Wajcman (2015), the study emphasises that technological capabilities do not solely determine AI's impact. Indeed, it is essential to recognise its continual negotiation through working practices and labour dynamics. Thereby, illuminating the agency of cultural workers in shaping and being shaped by the evolving role of AI in animation. In this way, the study rejects a technological deterministic understanding of practitioners as passive recipients. Responding to the dissertation's research questions by demonstrating how cultural workers experience and interpret AI in relation to both creativity and precarity, four key themes emerged from thematic analysis to reveal a nuanced and conflicted set of experiences from respondents. Indeed, while participants recognised the beneficial use of AI to streamline certain tasks and assist in the creative ideation stages, they consistently drew boundaries around authorship, authenticity and emotional value. In this way, they resist the notion that AI could meaningfully replace human creativity. Addressing the animation industry's precarious nature, participants recognised AI as part of a wider ecosystem of instability. Rather than presenting its disruption as entirely novel, participants framed AI as an extension of long-standing structural insecurities. For example, reducing job stability and displacing junior roles. The varied emotional responses to AI integration are particularly striking, as many participants simultaneously express both fascination and anxiety. In this way, the 'complex ambivalences' common toward technological advancement in the cultural industries are evident in the negotiation of AI (Narayan et al., 2022 p.117). As argued throughout, the findings re-instill the importance of grounding the discussion of AI not only in what it can do, but in how it is used, perceived, negotiated and potentially resisted.

Despite the depth and richness of the findings, several limitations must be acknowledged. Namely, the small sample size and snowball sampling somewhat limits the generalisability of the study as it cannot claim to represent the views of all practitioners within the animation industry. As Higginbottom (2004) notes, whilst this should be acknowledged, it is through this sacrifice that I could gain an in-depth understanding within the time and resource limitations of a dissertation project. For future research, however, I believe this study could benefit from an increased sample size to gain advanced insights across a wider, more representative pool of participants. Additionally, while the diversity of participants was continually sought for throughout the two-fold sampling technique, future research could address the perspectives of marginalised groups more deliberately. Thereby, allowing for the thorough analysis of the gendered aspects of cultural labour in the context of AI adoption. Finally, due to the continually advancing nature of AI which adds a temporal limitation to this study, the research could also be strengthened through a longitudinal or comparative research design to evaluate participants' perspectives over time. This is recognised and seconded by adjacent research such as Narayan et al. (2022). Ultimately, this research contributes to growing calls within the literature to foreground the perspectives of creative practitioners themselves (Bender, 2024; Narayan et al., 2022). It highlights the importance of studying AI not only as a technological development but as a lived and negotiated phenomenon shaped by, and shaping, the cultural workers who engage with it. As one participant succinctly captured, 'you need to embrace it...it's coming' (Lee), a statement that reflects not resignation but the pragmatic agency of workers navigating uncertain futures in a precarious labour environment.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Participants

	Name	Role/Title	Company	Primary Sector	Gender	Location (UK)	Interview Length
1	Thiago	Creative Director	Cookie Studio	Advertising, TV	Male	London	59 mins
2	Lee	Creative Director	Mainframe	Advertising, TV, Online	Male	London	58 mins
3	Joel	Head of Production	Mainframe	Advertising, TV, Online	Male	London	52 mins
4	Phil	Senior Producer	Mainframe	Advertising, TV, Online	Male	London	1hr 2m
5	Emma	Executive Producer	Lux Aeterna	TV	Female	Bristol	52 mins
6	James	Art Director/ Animator/ Creative	Freelance	Film, TV, Advertising	Male	Leeds	49 mins
7	Tom	2D Animator	Freelance	Games, TV	Non-Binary	Bristol	1hr 24m

Appendix B: Interview Participant Information Sheet

How do cultural workers within the animation industry perceive and apply the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies during creative production?

Hello, and thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. You are being invited to take part in a research project for my final year dissertation. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please contact me if you would like any information to be clarified or if you have any questions.

What is the purpose of the project?

The aim of this research is to explore cultural workers' perspectives, uses and practices of AI technologies within the creative industries - with a specific focus on the animation and motion design industry. This project will run until mid-May 2025, after which all data will be deleted. To conduct this research, I will collect/record/transcribe/code interviews with professionals to understand their experiences of AI within animation looking at the intersection of technologies on labour practices and creative expression. The findings will contribute to current scholarship on media and communication, among other fields.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been contacted because I want to interview cultural workers within the animation industry on their perspectives of AI technologies, specifically within creative production. I will be interviewing a range of people with such experiences.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You can still withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

What do I have to do?

You will take part in an interview lasting 45-60 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions which should prompt you to explain and reflect on key topics related to the research focus in your own words. Topics will centre around working conditions, practices, motivations and experiences in relation to AI within the animation industry. You will be asked if you are willing to have your interview audio recorded. When the interview is held, please make sure you are in a comfortable environment with good wifi connection and are free from distraction.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is possible that some topics may be sensitive to discuss. You have every right to refuse to answer a question should you choose not to. You may also ask for any of your data to be removed from the project.

What if I have any other questions?

Please feel free to contact my university email address here: en21fgg@leeds.ac.uk

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Consent to take part in the following Communication and Media BA final year dissertation project:

'How do cultural workers within the animation industry perceive and apply the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies during creative production?'

Please place initials next to the statement if you agree.	X
<i>Informed Consent</i> I confirm that I have read and understood the ' <i>Interview Participant Information Sheet</i> ' explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
<i>Voluntary Participation</i> I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. Should I not wish to answer any particular question/s, I am free to decline. If I withdraw from the study, the data already provided will be deleted.	
<i>Anonymity, Confidentiality and Protection</i> I understand that the researcher will have access to my responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research (unless agreed to). I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential.	
<i>Data Storage/Use</i> I understand that the data collected from me may be stored and used in relevant future research in an anonymised form. I understand that the data I provide may be archived at Communication and Media. I also understand that, should I not wish for this, I can withdraw my data. I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by individuals from the University of Leeds or from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in this research.	
<i>Contact Details</i> I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change. Researcher contact details: en21fgg@leeds.ac.uk +447512706226	

Name of Participant	
Participant Signature	
Date	
Name of Researcher	Florence Gaskell
Signature	
Date	

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Pre Interview:

- ☐ Provided with *Participant Interview Information Sheet*?
 - ☐ Provided and signed *Participant Consent Form*?
 - ☐ Set up recording
-

Stage 1: Introduction to Project

- ☐ Introduce yourself
- ☐ Overview of dissertation and aims of investigation - exploring cultural workers' perspectives of AI within the animation industry, their uses/thoughts/feelings, specific focus on creativity and working conditions (don't explain too much - leading)

Aim of stage

→ Make participant comfortable and give context of the dissertation

Stage 2: Icebreakers/Background

- ☐ Can you tell me a bit about your current role in the animation industry?
- ☐ How did you first get involved in animation?
- ☐ What does a typical working day/week look like for you?

Aim of stage

→ Establish rapport and gain context of their role

Stage 3: AI and Creative Workflows

- ☐ Have you ever had any experience working with Artificial Intelligence tools in your work?
 - ☐ If *yes*: Which tools have you used and in what context? Why?
 - ☐ If *no*: Is there a reason why not? Do other people at your work use them? How do you feel about this?
 - ☐ If *unsure*: Give list of example AI products in animation (PAGES ARE BELOW)
- ☐ What kind of tasks do you think AI is most/least useful in animation production?
- ☐ Do you think AI products add to or take away from your workload? How do you feel about this?
 - ☐ If they mention *saved-time/productivity*: Are you able to reallocate this saved time to other aspects of your role? E.g. more creative aspects of your role?

Aim of stage

→ Explore use of AI in animation production process and feelings surrounding integration

Stage 4: AI and Creativity

- ☐ Would you say creative expression is an important motivator in your work? Why?
- ☐ How, if at all, has AI changed how you approach creative decision-making or design?
- ☐ Do you feel AI enhances or restricts your ability to be creative in your role?
- ☐ Some researchers suggest AI leads to the homogenisation of animation content - is this something you've noticed or are concerned about?
- ☐ How do you view your role in relation to AI with creativity e.g. collaborator, competition, compromise of art?

Aim of stage

- Explore the perceived impact of AI on creativity/creative expression/creative autonomy

Stage 5: AI and Precarity/Labour Conditions

- ☐ How would you describe job security within the animation industry?
- ☐ Have you felt pressure to learn or adapt to new AI tools? What kind of pressure (stay competitive/self-motivated, personal interest/enforced by employer)?
- ☐ How do you think the growth of AI will impact the roles at your workplace?
- ☐ Do you think AI is replacing any roles in your workplace or the wider industry?
 - ☐ If *yes* - which roles and in what spaces?
 - ☐ If *no* - why not?
- ☐ Do you think AI could replace your role? Why/Why not?
- ☐ Do you think AI could change/transform your role?
 - ☐ If *yes* - in what way?
 - ☐ If *no* - why not?
- ☐ In your experience, has AI reduced your workload or changed the nature of it?
- ☐ Some researchers suggest AI can democratise the animation industry by making it more accessible e.g. lower barriers to entry, less creative skills, more technical skills. Do you see this as an opportunity or a threat to skilled workers?

Aim of stage

- Understand the labour environment of animation production considering job security, overwork, exploitation, upskilling. Then looking at how AI interacts with this.

Stage 6: Closing

- ☐ Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't covered?
- ☐ Would you be happy to be contacted if I need to clarify anything?

Post Interview:

- ☐ Remind of researcher's contact details + welcome to see a copy of the final dissertation
- ☐ Thank participant for time

Example List of AI technologies used in Animation/Creative Production

• Stable Diffusion (SD) produces realistically detailed, coherent, and natural-looking images suitable for high-quality backgrounds, characters, and special effects. • The Volcano Engine (VE) enables simulation of human interaction details, provides intelligent motion adjustment suggestions, and improves the naturalness and realism of character movements through high-precision capture and deep-learning technologies. • Runway (RW) provides a wide range of AI models and tools for animation generation, editing and post-processing, making it a comprehensive animation production platform. • Adversarial Networks (GANs) • Natural Language Processing (NLP) e.g. OpenAI ChatGPT • Reinforcement Learning • Virtual Reality (VR) • Augmented Reality (AR) • OpenAI's MuseNet - creation of original soundtracks • Runway ML - tweak visual effects • EbSynth - tweak visual effects • Adobe's Sensei - automatically edit scenes based on predefined parameters	• OpenAI Sora • With Poly • Rokoko Video • Eleven Labs • DiffusAE • Topaz Labs - Upscale images and footage • Gen-2 - Text to video generation • Recraft - Generate vector art, illustrations and 3D images • ChatGPT - Conversational dialogue where you can ask questions, generate scripts, create copy, find resources, and so much more. • Colourlab - Color correction • Wonder Studio -Automatically animate, light and compose CG characters into a live-action footage • MidJourney - Text to image generation • Dall-E - Text to image generation • Vocal Remover - Generate music stems • NVIDIA Canvas - Paint tool • Azure AI • BARD AI • Chatsonic
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• Renderman - used in rendering, utilizes machine learning algorithms to predict the appearance of a pixel • Midjourney - image based model • DALL-E - image based model • Adobe Firefly • Stable Diffusion • CopyCat • OpenAI ChatGPT • Stable Diffusion • Jukebox • Dance Diffusion • DeepDream • PhotoSonic • Big Sleep • Google Imagen • Bing AI • DuckAssist • Perplexity AI	• Storyboard.ai • Deep Composer • AudioCraft • I2SB • Facet AI • OpenART • Neural.Love • Craiyon • Parti • Muse • GLIGEN • PLaY • Phenaki • Potoroom AI • Alpaca AI
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Appendix E: Ethical Review Form

SCHOOL OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION
FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND CULTURES



COMM3910 Communication Dissertation / COMM5600M Dissertation and Research Methods Ethical Review Form

1. Basic project details

Your name	Florence Gaskell
Student ID	201413669
Name of supervisor	Holly Steel
Provisional title/ topic area	<i>How do cultural workers within the animation industry perceive and apply the use of AI technologies during creative production?</i> Interviewing cultural workers to uncover their perceptions of the uses, benefits and limitations of AI technologies in animation and motion design production - reflecting on cultural labour practices and technological advancement.

Ethical review is required for all research carried out in the University involving people (human participants), including research undertaken by students within a taught student module. Further details of the University of Leeds ethical review requirements are given in the Research Ethics Policy available at: <https://secretariat.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/109/2023/12/Research-ethics-policy.pdf>.

For ethical approval on this module, you should discuss research ethics with your supervisor and ask them to review and approve this form. You must submit your form with your supervisor's signature to the submissions area in Minerva by the published deadline (see module handbook), or before you begin fieldwork (whichever is soonest). **Please note that you must not commence fieldwork until this form has been approved and signed by your supervisor and the module leader if necessary.** You must complete this form even if your research does not involve people.

Please note that you must NOT complete research with participants who are under 18, unable to give 'informed consent', or are 'vulnerable' (e.g., prisoners, asylum seekers, the homeless). This module does not have ethical approval for research with these groups. Also, you must NOT store any participant data on your personal devices. All data related to research participants must be stored on your University One Drive storage facility.

Further Research Ethics Guidance for Dissertations is available in Minerva. Please refer to this Guidance when completing this form.



2. Summarise the aims, objectives, and method of the research (max 300 words).

Provide a summary of the research, outlining the aims and objectives and / or research questions and the proposed methodology. Please explain how you will conduct the research (e.g., how will research participants be identified and recruited and what will they be asked to do, or for online research, how will people's data be selected, used, and analysed?)

The aims of this research are to better understand creative's perceptions and uses of AI technologies during creative production. This will involve a series of semi-structured interviews with creatives within the animation industry where, through questioning, the uses, and perceived benefits and limitations of AI products will be explored. In addition, I will aim to uncover the impact on these uses on cultural worker's labour practices and conditions. This method has been selected due to its flexible and dynamic nature, allowing the researcher to review their list of questions in order to explore phenomena/areas of interest following each interview held. The open framing of questions will also allow for spontaneous discussion, hopefully leading to new areas of interest. Therefore, the objective is to obtain rich and detailed answers from participants without the constraints of quantitative structured interviews.

I will conduct this research through a series of online calls via Zoom/Microsoft Teams. These meetings will be recorded to ease the process of transcribing following the interview, subject to participant's permission. This recorded data will be held in my University OneDrive account in accordance with the University of Leeds data storage policy and destroyed once confirmation of passing of the module has been received. Participants will be asked a series of questions related to the research area, given time for extended answers and subsequent probing.

Participants will be identified using purposive sampling in the form of snowball sampling. This technique will allow the researcher to identify original participants which meet a set criteria (working in the animation industry, involved in the production phase of creative work) via reaching out to participants known to the researcher prior to research as well as utilising LinkedIn. These participants will then be asked to recommend or bring in other participants who have the required experience or characteristics. This sampling technique has been selected due to the potential difficulty in accessing relevant participants due to required experience/expertise.

3. Confirm if you plan to conduct fieldwork with (data on) people

Yes

No

Will your dissertation involve conducting research on people (this includes online research methods and researching data on people / secondary data analysis)? Tick as appropriate.	✓	
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If you ticked **No** to Question 3, you do not need to take further action in respect of ethical approval. Please proceed to the declarations in **Part C**.

If you ticked **Yes** to Question 3, you need to complete **Part A**.



Part A: Ethical Considerations Raised by Your Research

4. What is the source of the data used in your research? (Indicate with an 'X' all that apply)

New data collected for this research	✓
Data previously collected	
Data already in the public domain (including Internet-based research)	
Other, please state:	

5. How will the data be collected? (Indicate with an 'X' all that apply)

Through one-to-one research interviews	✓
Through focus groups	
Self-completion (e.g. questionnaires, surveys, diaries)	
Through observation	
Data previously collected	
Data already in the public domain	
Other, please state:	

6. Personal safety: risk assessment

Will your fieldwork be outside the University campus?

	Yes	No
		✓

If you answer Yes to Q. 6 you will need to complete a separate risk assessment form and send this to your supervisor to review. Supervisors will need to approve the risk assessment before signing this form.

7. Will the project involve any of the following (Tick as appropriate)
(Please check the Dissertation Research Ethics Guidance Notes when completing this section)

	Yes	No
Discussion of sensitive topics, or topics that could be considered sensitive		✓
Prolonged or frequent participant involvement		✓
Researching people without their knowledge and consent		✓



Cause potential harm to participants or others (including researcher(s))		✓
Potential conflicts of interest		✓
Researcher(s) in a position of authority over participants	✓	
Cooperation of an intermediary to gain access to research participants or material	✓	
Internet-based research or other visual / vocal methods where participants may be identified who may not expect their communication to be accessed by third parties:		✓
Translators or interpreters (other than self)		✓
Fieldwork taking place outside the UK [See point 3 Personal Safety above]		✓
Other (please state):		✓

NB: you must NOT complete research with participants who are under 18, unable to give 'informed consent', or are 'vulnerable' (e.g., prisoners, asylum seekers, the homeless).

8. Research data management

Will the research involve any of the following activities at any stage (including identification of potential research participants)? (Please check the Dissertation Ethics Guidance Notes when completing this section)	Yes	No
a. Examination of personal records by those who would not normally have access		✓
b. Sharing data with other		✓
c. Use of personal contact details other than email and telephone numbers (e.g. postcodes, faxes, home / work address)	✓	
d. Publication of direct quotations from respondents	✓	
e. Publication of data that might allow individuals to be identified	✓	
f. Use of audio / visual recording devices	✓	
Explain in this textbox what will happen to the data you collect once you have completed the module: Guidance on management of your research data and on data protection is available in the Dissertation Ethics Guidance Notes.ss		



Data will be stored in my University of Leeds OneDrive account for the duration of the research project. This data will then be deleted following officially published confirmation from the University that I have passed the module.

NB: You must NOT store data on your personal devices: all data related to research participants must be stored on your University One Drive storage facility

If you answered **Yes** to any of the items in Questions 7 and 8, please ensure you complete Part B of this form which requires you to explain how you will conduct your research ethically. As noted above, if you answered Yes to Question 6, you must complete the separate risk assessment form and send this to your supervisor to review before signing this form.

If you answered **No** to all the items in Questions 7 and 8, you do NOT need to complete Part B of this form. Please now complete Part C.

Part B: Addressing the Ethical Considerations Raised

9. For the ethical considerations indicated in Questions 7 and 8 in Part A of this form, provide further details and explain how these issues will be addressed. Please refer as appropriate to the Dissertation Research Ethics Guidance Notes, and the University's [Research Ethics Policy](#), the module reading list, and other resources on ethics and good practice in research available in Minerva.

Response to ethical considerations identified in Question 7:

Researcher in a position of Authority over Participants:

I realise that I may be in a position of authority or influence over some participants who work for my family (see below). This relationship must not be allowed to pressurise the participants to take part in, or remain in, an investigation. I will disclose this relationship to any employees before any research/interview takes place.

Cooperation of an intermediary to gain access to research participants or material:

Due to the use of snowball sampling, certain participants including family will be key informants for the research. This is due to their position within the animation and motion design industry and ability to recommend future participants, thereby



acting as an intermediary between myself and other participants. I will carefully consider this power relationship in your research and inform my supervisor.

Response to data-management considerations identified in Question 8:

Use of personal contact details other than email and telephone numbers (e.g. postcodes, faxes, home / work address):

Due to the relevance of the participant's seniority and job role to the research this information will also be stored also. Participants' information will be stored in a password protected file in my University OneDrive account (secure Cloud storage).

Publication of direct quotations from respondents:

I will publish direct quotes from interviews in my dissertation from the interview data. I will store audio and video recordings and transcripts of the data in a password protected file in my University OneDrive account (secure Cloud storage). I will also anonymise names associated with the stored data, and keep participants' contact details and their data in separate files.

Publication of data that might allow individuals to be identified:

As participants will provide lengthy, and possibly personal accounts of professional creative work undertaken, it is possible that participants may be able to be identified. Participants will be made aware of this prior to interviews and data storage, with research only progressing once permission has been given.

Use of audio / visual recording devices:

I will ensure that the data collected is transferred as soon as possible after the research encounter to a password protected file in my University OneDrive account (secure Cloud storage). I will not retain audio and visual files on the devices used. I will also ensure that the data is deleted from my University OneDrive account following officially published confirmation from the University that I have passed the module. In the event that I am required to resit the Dissertation, I will keep the data since I may need to refer to it again for my resit submission.

Part C: Dissertation Research Ethical Approval: Declaration

Student declaration (for all students)	Tick as appropriate
I confirm that the research ethics form is accurate to the best of my knowledge.	✓
I have consulted the University of Leeds Research Ethics Policy available at https://secretariat.leeds.ac.uk/research-ethics/university-protocols-and-policies/ and the dissertation research ethics guidance notes.	✓
I understand that ethical approval will only apply to the project I have outlined in this application and that I will need to re-apply, should my plans change substantially.	✓
If my research will be conducted outside the University campus, I am aware that I need to complete the separate risk assessment form and send this to my supervisor to review.	✓
For students conducting research with (data on) people	
I am aware of the University of Leeds protocols for ethical research, particularly in respect to protocols on informed consent, verbal consent, reimbursement for participants and low risk observation. If any are applicable to me, signing this form confirms that I will carry out my work in accordance with them.	✓

Student's signature: Florence Gaskell

Date: 20/01/2025

For Supervisors	Tick as appropriate
No further action required	
I confirm that the dissertation project is in line with the Guidelines for COMM5600M Dissertation and Research Ethics / COMM3910 Communication Dissertation.	x
I have discussed the ethical issues arising from the research with the student and their risk assessment (if necessary) and I agree that all	x



issues have been accurately and fully addressed at the time of signing this form.	x
Further actions required	
Refer to module leader for further review.	

Supervisor's signature: *Holly Beel*

Date: 11-04-25





Part D: Dissertation / Research Project Ethical Approval: Module Leader authorisation

To be completed by the module leader (only necessary if requested by the student's supervisor)

Yes	No

No further action required

The project falls within the parameters of the module's block ethics approval.

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Additional comments

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Module leader's signature:

Date: