

Design of Betrayal

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She closed the lingering application, powered down her computer, and stood up to tidy her desk of the oversized sheets and vibrant pens that had amassed over the course of the day. Swiftly, she rinsed her coffee cup and departed, clutching her bag while bidding farewell, her hands still soaking wet. The final ten minutes preceding her departure invariably provided solace from everything: the headaches, the sensation of burning eyes, and the stench of perspiration. With an exhalation, she descended the last four steps of the edifice, perhaps with the intent of shedding a portion of the burdens of exhaustion as she took her leave.

Samantha's day, however, was far from over; within the scant hours she reserved for herself, she managed to cast aside the tribulations of her profession. Yet, her fervent yearning to draw, design and create new concepts that harmonize human creativity with architecture never ceased. Samantha had developed a keen interest in artificial intelligence, a technological realm that had seamlessly woven itself into diverse domains, particularly within the European sphere. After each workday, she undertook investigative forays and scoured resources for software applications capable of combining artistic wellspring with the precision and utility of mathematical and scientific disciplines. These two seemingly

divergent realms ignited within Samantha a great passion, perhaps serving as the impetus that guided her aspirations of becoming an architect.

For the past three days, a particular AI software application called TarantArt.Ai had managed to capture her attention – a venture that was still in the nascent experimental stages, with potential to produce different forms of art obtained from visual stimuli, scientific data, and sources from other origins. This program was targeted towards artists harbouring aspirations of integrating AI-guided design paradigms into their creative milieu. She had found this project on social media and decided to start following the company's official page. Her purpose was to train and familiarise herself in the use of this software in order to strengthen her creative process and cultivate a nuanced discernment of the equilibrium between human inspiration and the augmentative potential offered by technological advancements, without chipping away the authenticity of the final output. Will there come a time in technological advancement where human inspiration could be rendered superfluous? ... But how could the intricacies of human creativity and the ardour for art be emulated, fabricated? On that particular day, tiredness bore heavily upon her, prompting her to retire to bed earlier than usual.

Less than twenty four hours had passed when she received a message that commanded her attention. Entering the precincts of the office kitchen, Samantha made herself a cup of coffee whilst reading a text by Stephen Chircop, a former companion from her Sixth Form days, who had since ascended the ranks as an engineer and scientist.

Good morning Samantha, hope everything is well, we haven't spoken in a while. I'm reaching out as I've noticed that you're following the TarantArt page. I have no idea how it popped up... I am currently working on many projects that use this particular system and our office has good correspondence with the company that sends work directly to us. I imagine you'd

be interested in using this software for work-related purposes... You're an architect, right? If you'd like to meet up and have a chat, let me know. I look forward to hearing from you.

And so they did. They met up for coffee, engaging in a mutual exchange that spanned the hiatus of years during which they had been estranged; their university studies, the long sleepless nights and the personal setbacks that had consigned them to traverse their thirties in introspective quiet and solitude. The discourse meandered into the realm of their professional endeavours with Stephen explaining to her his involvement in projects that use the software TarantArt. Ai. She listened attentively to his accounts



Minerva Martínez, Mohamed El Amrani, Nadine Zammit and Edgar Pons at the award ceremony of "A Sea of Words" 2023 (IEMed Collection).

and informed him about her own proclivity for integrating this very software within her architectural work. He offered to teach her how to operate the program, with great eagerness to witness the fruition of her endeavour to conjoin the domains of design, and mathematics and programming.

A tender camaraderie blossomed between Samantha and Stephen in the months that ensued. They started meeting up once a week to work on a new idea, often conceived by her that very morning amidst the tedium of morning traffic or the coffee-sipping moments nestled between the tasks of one tender or another. Initially inclined towards virtual encounters, over the course of time, they garnered sufficient ease to venture forth into each other's abodes, thereby keeping each other company for a couple of hours. Undoubtedly, at Stephen's house, Josie – his amiable canine companion – partook of their collaborative activities. Stephen was accruing many insights from the duration he spent in Samantha's company. In her he saw an ingenious and creative spirit that never ceased to look for inspiration, even in the most mundane subjects. Through her eyes, even a matchbox developed vitality and sentiment. She knew how to adapt, solve problems imaginatively, and exhibited unwavering persistence in mastering the intricacies of the software. Remarkably, it did not take her long to grasp its mechanics.

"That's normal when you're an architect," she would remark whilst laughing, a sentiment that he never questioned.

In Stephen she discerned several endearing attributes. He was quiet and meticulous and was always ready to listen closely to the novel

conceptions sprouting forth from her mind as she sketched out new designs on waste paper and inquired about how these could be programmed using AI. His conduct exhibited a degree of ungainliness at times, likely stemming from his awkwardness around people, yet he always managed to make her laugh. He intuitively grasped what she had in mind every time despite his non-proficiency in her realm of expertise. He would proceed to demonstrate his actions on his laptop, graciously extending an invitation for her to explore the software first-hand. Samantha would watch as an original architectural project metamorphosed from nothing – guided by a few descriptive sentences, keystrokes and interactive commands within the programme he had introduced her to – from plans to three-dimensional models of abstract ideas sketched out in pencil only few minutes before.

All the sleep lost during her university days drawing up plans, building scale models and praying that no program crashes before her presentations – all suddenly felt in vain. Notwithstanding this, she would observe the fruit emerging from one night of creative outpouring of abstract ideas and find herself captivated. Invariably, the remarkable ability and efficiency of technology never failed to elicit her admiration. She always retained the scribbled sheets of paper, although regrettably losing a few. Her chaotic life coupled with the little time she allocated towards tidying her apartment led to the inevitable occasional disarray and inadvertent misplacement of these drawings.

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“Sam will you come over to my place tonight?”

“Sounds good. I’m bringing Josie some treats.”

“Fantastic. Is there something new you’d like to work on?”

“Yes. I’ll explain later.”

“Ok. Does eight sound good?”

“Yes, see you.”

They met up as they did every Friday, this time at his place. Samantha harboured a desire to engender a parametric design from a set of analytical data. She had learnt how to run the software very well and needed very little assistance from Stephen. He sat beside her, once again marvelling at her creative process. Finding himself with a dearth of pressing engagements, he offered her a cup of tea. As he leaned in to hand her the cup he glanced at the colourful ink that adorned the skin of her hand... then at her eyes, which had met his in a moment of hushed intimacy. Palpable stillness prevailed. She examined the scuffed glasses perched atop his cheeks, framing a pair of eyes that radiated an ardent smile, one eye slightly droopier than the other.

The messy hair resting on his forehead together with the redolent smell of his chosen cologne reminded her of other unique qualities about him that she held dear: his colourful comics-printed T-shirts, his butchered wallet and the ridiculous abundance of pen drives and screwdrivers that found refuge within his bag and pockets alike. He leaned in closer and kissed her, his hands clammy and his breath heavy. That night she felt the burgeoning of love, love that had budded between two individuals with a bond forged through the crucible of

intellectual depth, and the synergy created during the time they shared together exploring the abilities of artificial intelligence in the domain of art. The night unfurled with an undercurrent of tension. They felt between them a type of uneasiness that stemmed from the fervour of teenage ardour. One way or another she managed to finish the day’s undertaking. She unveiled it to him with a teasing smile. Once again he requested that she explain her creative process in its entirety.

“Haven’t I already told you?” she inquired, a note of laughter accompanying her words.

It did not matter to her. The prospect of revisiting the narrative in its entirety felt bereft of inconvenience.

They officially started courting each other and undoubtedly spent more and more time together. Abstract and imaginative conversations as well as logical and pragmatic ones became an everyday occurrence. Once a week they held the custom of dedicating a juncture to the cultivation of a nascent design idea and proceed to apply it on TarantArt. From time to time she would get tired and retreat into the embrace of slumber, to be met with an updated project in the morning, one which Stephen would have continued working on at night. Samantha really felt that she had found a significant other that not only respected her and supported her visions but whose distinctive perspectives endowed her with a new definition for creative thought. In Stephen she recognized the seeds of a steadfast future, a future filled with love and understanding, a future of intellectual profundity.

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Six months later. Samantha's apartment suffused with the smell of her signature pasta dish. While Stephen's culinary expertise remained modest, he tried his best to assist. He was tasked with chopping the garlic and onions. From his peripheral vision he saw his mobile screen flicker to life as the vibration resonated across the kitchen countertop. A jolt of startled realization coursed through him as he recognized the incoming text message. His unwashed hands barred him from retrieving the device. As Samantha drew closer, he elbowed his phone and propelled it to the floor.

"What's up Steph?"

"Nothing, don't bother. It's probably a spam message."

Meanwhile he had rinsed his hands hastily, picked up his phone and pocketed it.

Samantha found herself disconcerted with his behaviour. Though she trusted Stephen, she had never seen him react that way. The night provided her with little solace, and whilst he was asleep she took his phone and scurried to the bathroom. Her latent curiosity and nascent suspicion waged an internal struggle, culminating in a decision that she could not claim as a point of pride. Her pursuit: his mobile PIN. What were the digits? She traversed the landscape of significant dates tethered to him. His birthday? That did not work. His birth year perhaps? Another unfruitful pursuit. The release date of "The Dark Knight"? 2008. A seemingly incongruous choice. She recalled four numbers from the upper part of the keypad. She prayed to God he wouldn't wake up and catch her. Ah

yes! Josie's birthday, marked on the twenty-third of that month. 2312. A resounding success and a surprising oversight from an engineer of his calibre.

Samantha checked his messages, the contents of which struck her dumbfounded. A sum of €13,700 had just been transferred to his account. The company? VirtualTech – the very administrator of TarantArt.Ai. One message after another revealed the same type of transactions. Perplexity coursed through her brain. What individual could possibly amass such wealth on a weekly basis? In a state of disbelief, Samantha lowered herself to the floor with ears ringing and the reverberation of her heartbeat echoing within her throat. She located the VirtualTech application on his phone, navigating its interface with trembling hands. What she found was months of correspondence between the company and him – detailed explanations, photos of her drawings as well as audio recordings – an in-depth documentation... of all her laborious efforts, the very mechanics that underpinned her designs. From what she could fathom, Stephen was sharing information which assisted the company in updating its system to be able to accurately emulate artists' creative process, eventually rendering them obsolete within their own domain.

Despite the seething rage that surged within her, she snuck out and fled to the kitchen. She felt prescient intuition which insinuated that a deeper investigation might unveil further revelations. She checked his laptop bag and heartbreakingly found several sketches of her own, drawings that he had stolen from her. She hadn't lost them after all. At the bottom of the bag: a black pen drive. Could it be? She confirmed her suspicions that night upon her companion's

laptop. The man who she thought harboured genuine affection for her betrayed and deceived her and in the process monetised her work, contributing to the erosion of the creative voices that reside within the realms of art and architecture, the loss of their creativity, that which gives them a voice, their

distinctive individuality and authenticity in their work – qualities that Samantha held in the highest regard. Absolute betrayal. Six months of lies. Six months of devious words and hollow promises.

He would bear heavy consequences for his actions. She would not stand for this.