

The Ghost Team: What AI really changes at work

Jana Retkowsky (September 21, 2026) AI Matching Community



OUR MAIN POINT

Generative AI is collapsing (creative) processes

rapidly

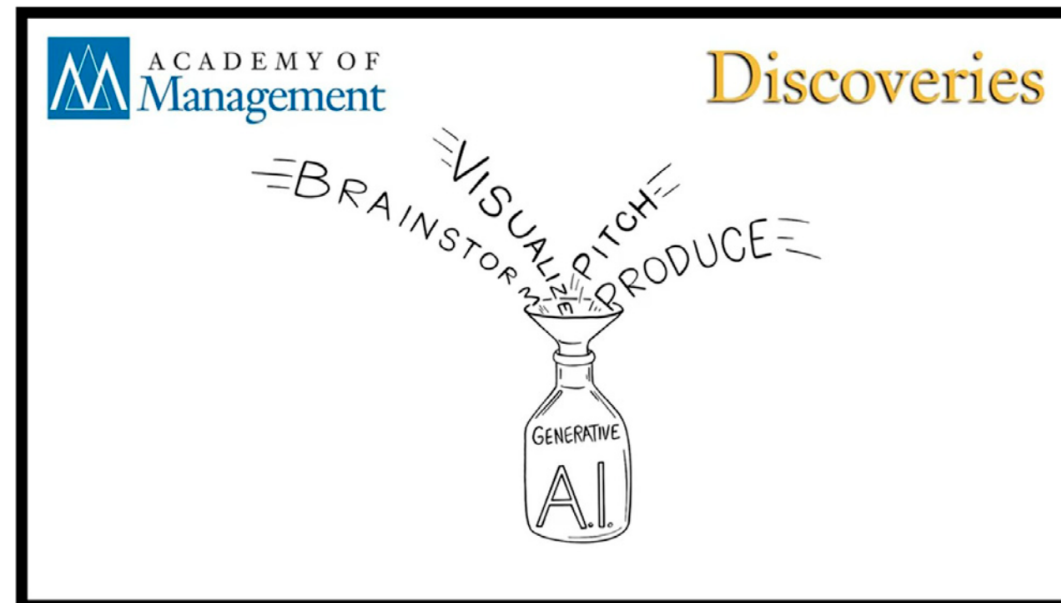
often covertly

fatally....for organizations as we know them?

HARNESSING A “SPIRITED TECHNOLOGY”: HOW WORKING WITH GENERATIVE AI COLLAPSES THE CREATIVE PROCESS

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Innovation

Research: Gen AI Is Collapsing Creative Processes

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What did we do?

A case study based on the creatives at RTL Nederland.



- 31 interviews with creatives (creative directors, graphic designers)
- 43h observations of creative work
- Visual diaries from creatives
- Analyzed 24 projects



Our study – what we found

GENAI AS A 'SPIRITED TECHNOLOGY'



GenAI's unpredictability is like a spirited technology: kicking back, filling in aesthetic details (without being asked). It's powerful, responsive, but not fully under your control.

GENAI AS A 'SPIRITED TECHNOLOGY'

URGING ON

- ☐ Exploring open-ended prompts to see what emerges
- ☐ Asking for more variations of something that caught your eye
- ☐ Letting the AI surprise you, and using that surprise

REINING IN

- ☐ Redirecting away from unwanted elements
- ☐ Re-specifying prompts when GenAI misunderstands
- ☐ Using tools like Describe to 'speak the AI's language'

This is skilled work! it depends on your aesthetic judgment, not just prompt engineering...

THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD: EARLY AESTHETIC CLOSURE



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THE UPSIDE

- ✓ You can visualize complex ideas faster
- ✓ Concepts look polished e.g., 'Hollywood level'
- ✓ You can sell ideas more easily to clients
- ✓ You can explore more directions in less time

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THE CATCH

- x Clients anchor on the AI image...it becomes ***the*** image
- x Leaves less room for interpretation and further development
- x AI lighting and physics can't always be recreated on set
- x Risk of overpromising what production can deliver

A NEW TYPE OF WORK: AESTHETIC ALIGNMENT WORK

Bridging the gap between what GenAI promises and what production can deliver

Before the shoot

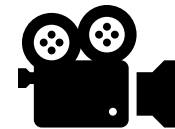
Preparing guidance for photographers (= marking up AI images with directions for gaze, lighting angles, and positioning) so real photos can blend with generated backgrounds.



On set

Negotiating with photographers and lighting specialists to recreate effects that GenAI 'invented'

→ finding a middle ground between AI aesthetics and what's physically possible.



In post-production

Fixing AI 'oddities' (e.g., strange shapes, extra fingers, impossible physics). And sometimes deliberately 'dirtying up' AI images so they match the imperfections of real photography.

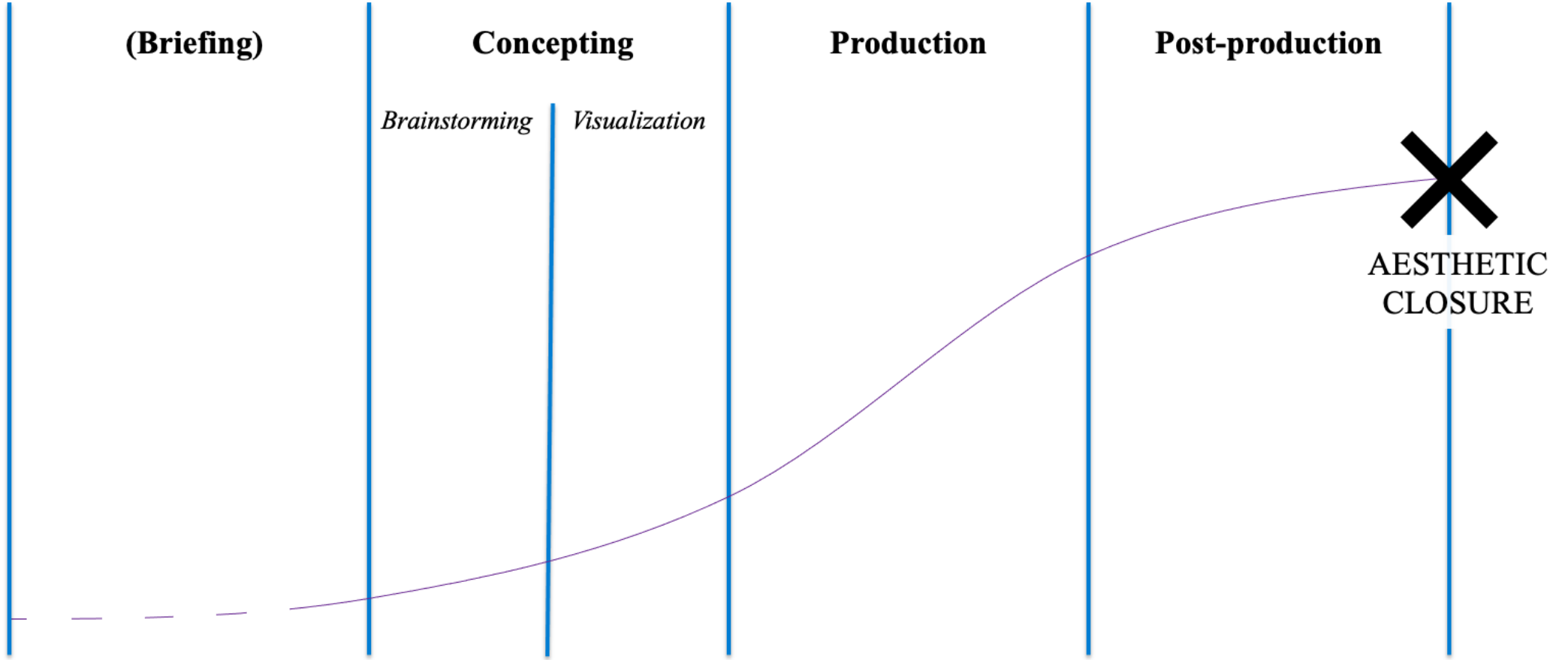


Overall, working with GenAI can lead to
process collapse.

Let me show you...

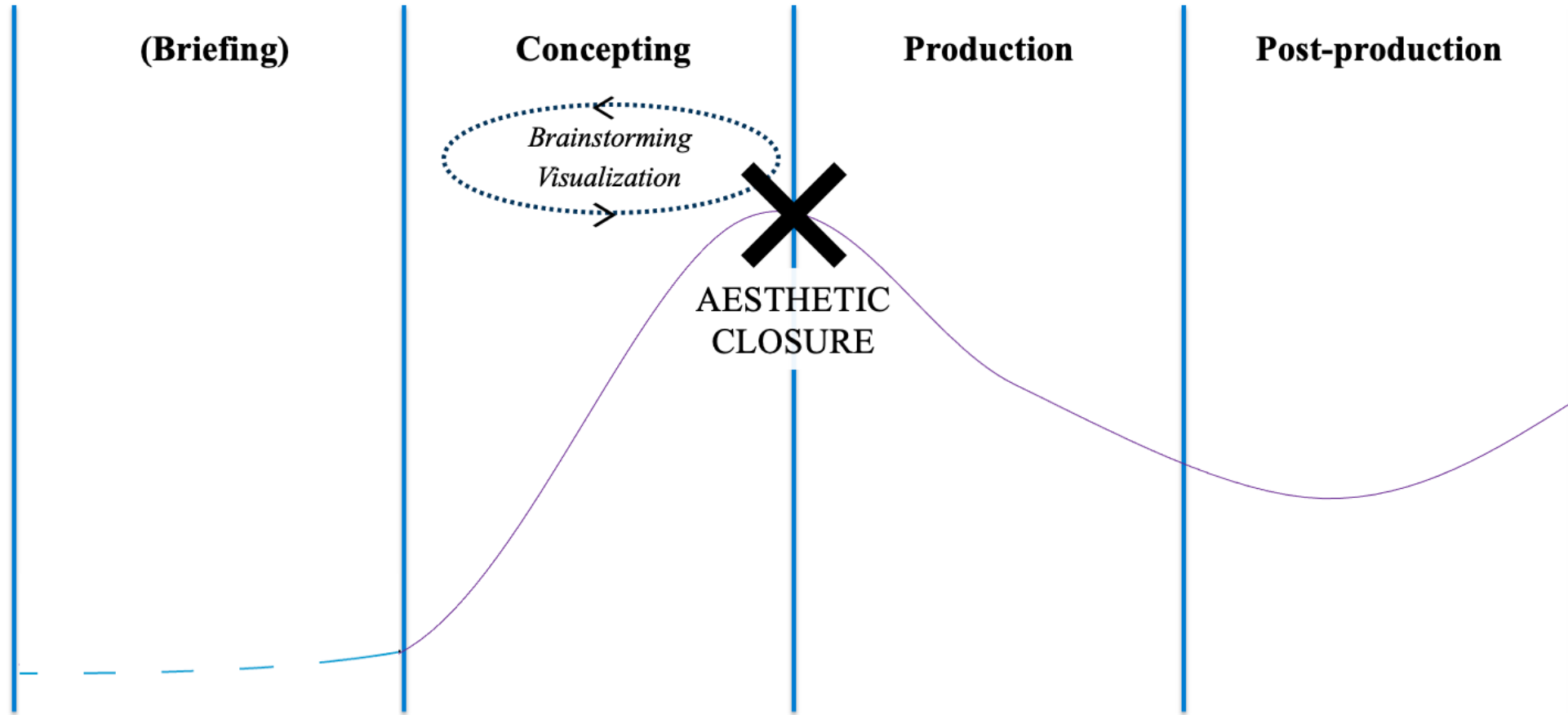
STAGE OF CREATIVE PROCESS

REFINEMENT OF AESTHETIC ARTEFACTS



REFINEMENT OF AESTHETIC ARTEFACTS

STAGE OF CREATIVE PROCESS



***Do you see process collapse
also in your organization?***

The insights from this study go beyond the creative industry. Think of the start-up industry where entrepreneurs give pitches in front of investors, software development...

Opinion Perspectives

Fake rooms: Pinterest boards may be a fantasy, but AI is spoiling the fun

In a world on high alert for fake news, AI-designed interiors seem small fry. But they are fuelling the fire of everyday paranoia

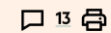
BETHAN STATON

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Why not show this AI picture to your interior designer? Do write in and let us know what they say © Shutterstock / Shutterstock.AI Generator

Bethan Staton

Published JUL 24 2025



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR WORK



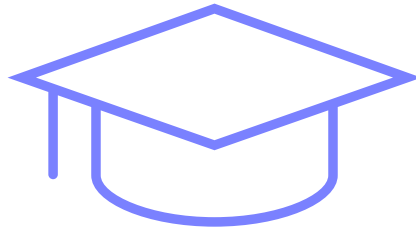
4 Best practices: How to stay ahead in times of

(Gen)AI in concepting

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR WORK: 4 BEST PRACTICES

1 Your skill matters more than ever

GenAI doesn't replace creative skill. It demands a new kind: aesthetic reflexivity. The ability to judge, react, and guide GenAI outputs is what makes the difference.



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR WORK: 4 BEST PRACTICES

2 **Manage expectations early**

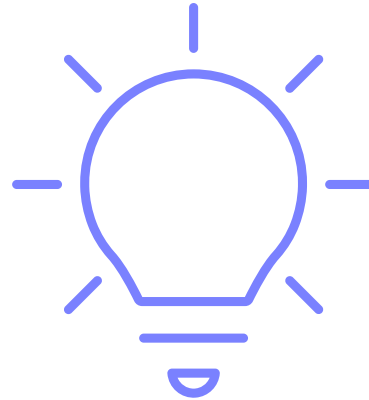
Flag AI images as concepts. Walk clients through what's feasible in production.



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR WORK: 4 BEST PRACTICES

3 **Aesthetic alignment is real work**

Bridging GenAI and reality (= directing photoshoots to match AI lighting, fixing 'oddities', adding imperfections) is new, skilled, and deserves recognition.



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR WORK: 4 BEST PRACTICES

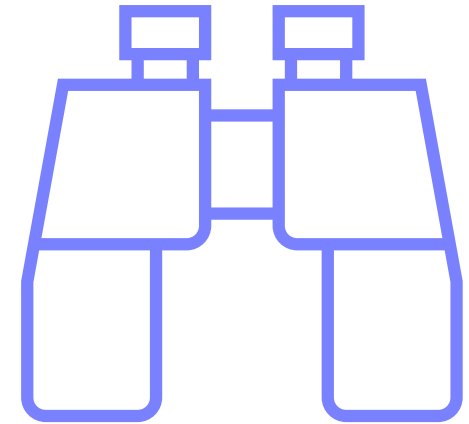
4 Don't lose the collaborative spark

GenAI makes solo concepting easier, but don't cut out the team entirely. Different perspectives and productive disagreement still fuel the best ideas.



OUR TIP

- In times of GenAI there is a risk to manage a ghost team (if changes in the work processes are unnoticed)
- ***Surface process collapse:*** Detecting changes due to GenAI (time may be saved for some tasks, and new work emerges elsewhere in the new process)
- Keep the GenAI conversation safe and open



**Questions and
comments are
welcome.**

The background of the slide is a photograph of a large audience seated in a conference hall, facing a stage. The text is overlaid on this image.

RESHAPING WORK 2026 CONFERENCE

AI@Work

THE HUMAN FRONTIER

12 | 13 NOVEMBER 2026

AMSTERDAM

Ticket still available!

*Also **still available sponsorship opportunities.** If interested, contact me (Jana Retkowsky).*



Jana Retkowsky



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*Academy of Management Discoveries
publication*



Harvard Business Review article