

*Who Pays Stays*

## **See It: Depth vs Surface**

Workbook and challenge questions

Marilva Berrenstein · MCJ Studio

## **How to use this workbook**

Each lesson below follows the slides in the Genially course for this lesson: the cover slide sets what you will learn, the teaching slide carries the idea, the activity slide is the work, and the quiz is a quick check. This workbook goes deeper than the slides and ends each lesson with questions that challenge you to apply the idea to your own business.

## LESSON 1

# The Recipe and the Ingredient

*In the Genially deck: the cover, teaching, activity, and quiz slides for this lesson.*

### WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Define centrifugal creativity and centripetal collapse in your own words.
- Judge a piece of work by its direction, not its polish.

### THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

The slides introduce two directions: centrifugal and centripetal. Here is the fuller picture. Centrifugal work begins inside. The maker holds a world: lived experience, a philosophy, a set of constraints, a history. The work moves outward from that center into form, and because the center is real, every surface choice carries weight. Wu-Tang did not start with a kung-fu aesthetic and decorate it with meaning. They started with Five Percent theology, Shaolin mythology, and Staten Island, and the sound, the names, and the imagery grew out of that. Centripetal work runs the other way. It starts with a surface that already exists, a recognizable style or trend, and moves inward looking for a center that was never there. The result can look polished and still be hollow, because nothing inside is holding it up. The reason this matters for you is that polish is no longer proof of value. AI makes surfaces cheap. Direction is the thing AI cannot fake, because direction requires a center, and a center requires a life.

### WORK IT THROUGH

#### **Map one piece of your own work.**

1. Pick one recent piece you made.
2. Decide: did it move outward from a lived center, or inward from a surface you recognized?
3. Write two sentences naming the center it came from, or admitting it had none.

*Outcome: You can name the direction of your own work.*

### QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- Take a piece of your work you are proud of. Can you name the internal center it grew from in one sentence? If you cannot, what does that tell you?
- Find a trend in your field right now. What would it take to build outward from a real center instead of copying its surface?
- Describe a time you made something centripetal: you started from a look, not a world. What was missing in the result?
- Where in your current practice are you rewarding polish over direction, in your own eyes or your clients' eyes?

## LESSON 2

# The Direction Is Everything

*In the Genially deck: the cover, teaching, activity, and quiz slides for this lesson.*

### WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Separate a style from the philosophy that produced it.
- Tell the difference between depth (how far) and direction (which way).

### THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

These slides name the framework and separate it from an older one. Lev Manovich mapped depth: how far you go into the material when you remix. This course maps direction: which way you moved once you got there. The two questions are perpendicular. You can go very deep into a style and still collapse inward, and you can work simply and still move outward from a real center. A style is the visible residue of a philosophy. The soft light and quiet grief of a Studio Ghibli film are the trace of a worldview about imperfection, nature, and loss. A filter copies the residue and throws away the philosophy, which is why it feels thin even when it is technically convincing. The slides also point at scarcity. The TR-808, house music, and the Funky Drummer break were all born from limits, not abundance. Constraint forced invention. When you have everything available, as AI promises, the danger is that you reach for the nearest surface instead of building from a center. Naming the direction lets you catch that in your own work before it ships.

### WORK IT THROUGH

**Trace a style back to its source.**

1. Name a style or aesthetic you admire.
2. List the philosophy or lived conditions underneath it.
3. Describe how you would build outward from that center instead of copying the look.

*Outcome: You can separate a surface from the depth that produced it.*

### QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- Pick a style you admire. Write the philosophy or lived conditions underneath it in two or three sentences.
- Manovich asks how deep you went. This course asks which way you moved. Apply both questions to one recent project. What does each reveal?
- Name a constraint you currently treat as a problem. How could it become the engine of a new form?
- Where are you copying residue, the look, without the worldview that produced it?

### LESSON 3

## The Xerox Problem

*In the Genially deck: the cover, teaching, activity, and quiz slides for this lesson.*

### WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Explain why realism is not the same as depth.
- Audit an AI output for what it captures versus what it holds.

### THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

The slides make a sharp claim: AI is excellent at capture and weak at structure. A photocopy reproduces a page well enough to pass, but it does not hold the living relations of the original. It captures the surface and loses the structure underneath. AI does the same at scale. It can produce something that reads as real because the human brain is a coherence detector, not a fraud detector. We are built to accept things that hang together, not to interrogate whether they hold under pressure. That is why realism is not depth. The evidence is in how people use these tools. Prompting culture exists because depth is not native to the system. People coax, refine, and re-prompt to pull structure out of something that defaults to surface. The practical move for you is to separate the two when you evaluate AI output. Ask what it captured, the tone, the format, the style, and ask what it failed to hold, the relation, the intention, the internal logic. The first is easy to get. The second is where your value lives.

### WORK IT THROUGH

**Audit one AI output you made.**

1. Pick one thing you generated with AI.
2. List what it captured: tone, style, format.
3. List what it failed to hold: relation, intention, structure.

*Outcome: You can tell surface capture from structural fidelity.*

### QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- Take an AI output you made. List separately what it captured and what it failed to hold. Which list is longer?
- Where have you accepted coherence as a substitute for depth, in your own work or someone else's?
- If realism is not depth, what is your evidence that a piece has real structure and not just a convincing surface?
- How much of your prompting is you supplying the structure the system cannot? What does that tell you about where the value comes from?

## LESSON 4

# The End of the Original

*In the Genially deck: the cover, teaching, activity, and quiz slides for this lesson.*

### WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- Explain why a good-enough copy makes the original optional.
- Spot where copy has quietly replaced an original relation in your work.

### THE IDEA, IN DEPTH

The slides argue that the original is not destroyed, it becomes optional. Once a copy is good enough to serve the purpose, the original stops being necessary for that purpose. This is uncomfortable, but it is the real shift, and it moves the question away from real versus fake and toward centrifugal versus centripetal. Basquiat and Warhol sit on either side of that line. Basquiat worked outward from an internal world of race, history, and lived struggle. Warhol designed for reproduction, surface built to be copied endlessly. Neither is wrong, but they are opposite directions, and the difference is visible. The slides also note that repeated images come to feel true even when they are fabricated, and that AI-authored work tends to read as less authentic, especially when it reaches for emotion. For you, the lesson is to find the places in your own practice where a good enough copy has quietly replaced an original relation, and to decide which of those still need the original. Some do not. The ones that carry meaning do.

### WORK IT THROUGH

**Find your own 'good enough' copy.**

1. Identify one place where good-enough copy replaced an original relation in your work.
2. Describe what the internal center used to be.
3. Write what restoring that center would look like.

*Outcome: You can spot where depth has quietly gone optional.*

### QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE YOU

- Name one place in your work where good enough copy has replaced an original relation. Does it still need the original?
- Basquiat or Warhol: which direction does your current work lean, and is that a choice or a drift?
- If the original is optional, what makes yours worth keeping? Answer in one sentence a client would accept.
- Where does repetition make something feel true in your field, regardless of whether it is?

*Build your economy. Who pays stays.*