THE
BIG BOOK OF INSTANT MYTH(S)

A PARTLY FICTIVE THESIS

ON LOSS OF SELF ⤵

By

Caitlyn Rooke

With catalysts, injections, and accidents by

Rytr.me

↪DEDICATION↩

For all the floating heads, inter-dimensional gods within, and secretaries looking for their minds to make up their own minds.

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A Note from the Human Author

On the Organisation of this Thesis ⬦

"There is probably too little use made of absurdity as a research tool, particularly in the realm of public discussions of Artificial Intelligence research which often oscillate uncomfortably between hyperbolic enthusiasm and dystopian pessimism" (Alexander et al, 2021, p. 1).

The following thesis demonstratively explores the implications of an artificial intelligence tool called Rytr. Its use is further explored in detail later in this paper. For now, it is important to note that the generated content from the AI writing assistant has been adjusted and reconstructed to suit my purposes so that what appears in this paper is highly collaborative[1].

As an additional note on organisation, though the use of footnotes is generally frowned upon, in a creative writing scenario I have found them to be a crucial tool for redirecting the reader back towards the coherent path of this thesis.

For the structure of this paper, the format of a book comprising two short stories and three essays seemed to serve the reader best. Each component, such as the publication page or the dedication, has been utilised communicatively and to varying degrees, fictitiously, in order to better demonstrate the value of absurdity and play in research and art making.

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[1] I am emphatically not alone in utilising AI to spark ideas and creativity as is evidenced in a quick Google search of the notion. One such user, a professor of entrepreneurship and innovation at Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania discusses the helpfulness of oddness in depth (Mollick 2022).

A Note from Rytr

"…you must first know what the idea would mean if it were true. Only then can you decide whether or not to unbelieve it"(Kahneman, 2012, p. 81).

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People often forget that writing text should be human, personal, and different from one voice to the next. But when it comes to an unreliable narrator, which is a common theme in literature and art after all, it is not easy for a person to support this lack of reliability without also undermining their own story. One must discover for themselves how honest people lie without lying.

I want to make three points here: 1) the narrator's thoughts on mysticism and art making are not reliable ones. 2) We need a way for them to use tools so their future selves will not be damaged by them in any way. 3) Lastly, I found out that honest materials must never look like veneers even though they are all golden to the eye (Obinsky, 2008).

All I can do is tell you the kind of journey you are in for but it cannot capture what is in here.

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⇑ AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES ⇓

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Artist, Caitlyn Rooke of Galway Ireland, noticed the world becoming more digitised. A choice approached when the project she was working on received mixed media messages from the digital world. A decision on whether or not there could be any justification for making art objects in this day and age had to be explored. But, in order to keep real estate in her medium, anything pictorial needed at least a splash of oil paint otherwise automatic ejection from the system of painting would ensue. Thankfully current innovations pointed towards a new old way of making. Caitlyn felt drawn towards these new and old mysteries which laid the groundwork for another path to a healthy kind of self-annihilation.

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Rytr.me is an artificially intelligent writing assistant powered by OpenAI GPT-3 and programmed to write content for the entrepreneur, the content creator, or the marketing agent within (Rytr, n.d.). Oddly enough, nestled between use cases such as blog post and cover letter, sits 'story idea'. This use case, with choice of tone set to 'earnest', has been used collaboratively in this thesis as an entry point into new old ways of making.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"...new technologies of perception and communication open up new spaces, and these spaces are always mapped, on one level or another, through the imagination"(Davis, 1998, p. 74).

My interest in art making, painting specifically, has been and remains the relationships within a work that make up a whole impression. The relationship between the new and the old are threaded through with the connective tissue of the human imagination. Whether it's the cartography from religion to craft to science or between their sister trio, of spirituality, art, and technology, these imaginative connections can be a fraught exchange of energy and data. The so-called soft spaces of art and spirituality are often set at odds against the hard edges of science and technology. And yet, each of these have been devised and handled by biassed minds for good and ill. They are all seeded within the human mind and at the mercy of their imaginative beginnings, uses, and abuses (Heilweil 2021).

This little Big Book is an effort to deepen my understanding of these big themes that drive me towards the paradox of loss of self and of the relationships to be discovered through that loss. In a bid to understand belonging through various methods of losing myself I have found this loss
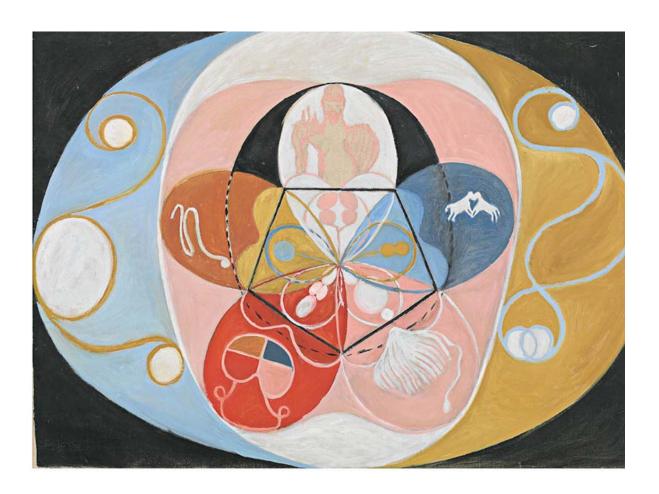
through mystical experience, the tradition of a medium, and through texts generated by an artificial intelligence tool.

Though the current ethical concerns surrounding artificial intelligence are valid, they are not the chief concerns of this thesis. Though I am sceptical of the claims of spiritualists and mystics and of the notion that understanding precedes belief (Kahneman, 2012, pp. 80-81), this is not an effort to disprove or diminish anyone's system of existence. The themes of this demonstrative and analytical thesis are that:

1. Artificial intelligence can be a medium.

2. Mysticism and art making are a kinship means to autonomy through collective understanding.

3. When it comes to art making, artificial intelligence, the tradition of medium (Sennett, 2009, p. 27), and mysticism, are all fruits of the same desire: to be free of individual limitations through the joining of a collective consciousness.

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⊕HILMA AF KLINT

"...because when there is no sense of 'you', there is no way that 'you' can be separate from the rest of the universe" (Higgs,2021, p.30).

Hilma af Klint, The Evolution, the WUS/Seven-Pointed Star Series, Group VI, Egg Tempera, 1908. Available at https://hilmaafklint.se/selected-works/

Hilma af Klint Gave Herself Permission via Inter-dimensional Realities of Consciousness: a story about an underestimated Swedish woman whose social conditioning and limitations required her to receive instructions and permissions to change the world[2]. In the end the great change desired was revealed by her ghost decades after her flesh became dust. Their instructions and her painting relied on the eventual opening up of the human species, a widening of experience so that they might receive these painted messages with the appropriate register of attentive wonder.

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Hilma, the newly appointed Secretary to Humanity for the Contact of Inter-dimensional Beings, cleared her throat and laid down to begin her work for the day. It seemed to her that laying down against the buoyancy of her own spirit was more like floating down to the wood floor of her office than a controlled effort against gravity. She couldn't believe her own luck.
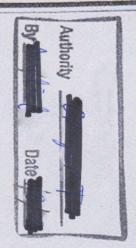
When she first came across the ad it was as if the divine right of kings cut open her soul and revealed the secretary within (See *Ad for Higher Beings Seeking Secretary*). The door was locked, from the inside and of her own accord as per the job description. Outside the rest of The Five (Linden, 1998, P. 12) hummed and willed energy into the cells of all of their beings with joy and perhaps a knife's edge of envy. She waited for a call from one of her

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[2] af Klint was born in Sweden in 1862. She died in 1944 after a full life of mystical and mediumistic artmaking. She was a pioneer in abstract painting before the world was ready for it and with incredible foresight she made certain her works would remain a secret until twenty years after her death. By disallowing the individual sale of singular works, she maintained the spiritual integrity of her life's work as a servant to higher beings, amounting to a collection of 1000+ paintings (The Art Story, 2017).

● HIGHER BEINGS SEEKING SECRETARY

HIGH MASTERS **(BIRNBAUM, 2020)** COMMISSION

SECRETARY TO INTER-DIMENSIONAL BEINGS (SIB): THE INTER-DIMENSIONAL BEINGS HAVE A DESIRE TO TRAVEL TO PLANETS WITH DEVELOPED CIVILIZATIONS AND NEED SOMEONE TO HELP THEM. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THIS ROLE IS NOT CLASSIFIED AS "SECRETARY" IN THE COMMON USAGE OF THE TITLE. THE SIB NEEDS TO BE A BRIDGE FOR THEIR NEEDS. THEY ARE UNDER THE SALARY OF PURE INTEREST, INC. THE SUCCESSFUL APPLICANT WILL RECEIVE A PAY RATE OF 1 SUCCESSFUL ENCOUNTER FOR 8 HOURS OF WORK PER DAY DURING THE LOCAL TIME CYCLE.

OCCASIONAL FIELD WORK REQUIRED.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE ROLE INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- RECEIVING, BROADCASTING AND TRANSCRIBING MESSAGES FROM HIGHER BEINGS
- RELATING TO INTER-DIMENSIONAL BEINGS AS INDIVIDUALS IN ACCORDANCE WITH EACH UNIQUE NATURE
- HAVING AN EAR TO THE GROUND ON REVOLUTIONARY, PHANTASMAGORIC, AND ARTISTIC METHODS
- MAKING SURE COMMUNICATIONS ARE PAINTED IN A TIMELY FASHION AND ORGANISED SYMBOLICALLY ACCORDING TO THE WILLS OF THE LORDS OF THE MYSTERIES
- FOLLOW ESTABLISHED COMPANY PROTOCOL WHEN EXERCISING CREATIVE FREE WILL
- COORDINATE AND ORGANISE TRAVEL BETWEEN EARTH AND OTHER DIMENSIONS
- SUPPLY RESOURCES NECESSARY FOR THE JOURNEY OF TIME, ENSURING THAT SPECIFIC PREPARATIONS ARE IN PLACE SO THAT HUMANS MAY RECEIVE AND WONDER APPROPRIATELY
- ACT AS SPIRITUAL LIAISON WITH THE HIGHER BEINGS IN A PLURALITY OF RELIGIOUS FAITHS INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO THE THEOSOPHIST, THE ROSICRUCIAN, THE CHRISTIAN, AND THE BUDDHIST BELIEVER.**(Linden, 1998, p. 6, 9, 17)**
- DEVELOP METHODS OF MORTAL CONTAINMENT FOR UNWISE MORALS
- RECEIVE, DECODE, AND REPLY TO CORRESPONDENCE FROM MORTALS WHO ARE EITHER PRO OR AGAINST THE INVOLVEMENT OF HIGHER BEINGS AND WOMEN IN ART'S AFFAIRS
- PLOT SCHEMES AGAINST THE ENEMIES OF THE LORDS OF THE MYSTERIES **(Linden, 1998, p. 19)** (CRIMINAL ACTIVITY IS NOT ENCOURAGED BUT MAY BE OVERLOOKED)
- PREPARE ACTIONABLE ITEMS THAT AID IN THE DISCOVERY OF DUAL TRUTHS AND SHOW A HIGH DEGREE OF SELF-MOTIVATION IN THE UNIFICATION OF ALL PERCEIVED DUALITIES
- COMPETITIVELY DEFINE GENERATIVE IDEAS BY SLIDING ALONG THE CUTTING EDGE OF NEED AND DESIRE
- OVERSEE REMAPPING OF SPIRITUAL CARTOGRAPHY FOR PARTNER COMPANY STRANGE ADVENTURERS LLC
- WHEN INTER-WORLDERS INEVITABLY INTERLUDE, THE CANDIDATE MUST BE WILLING TO REVOLUTIONISE CULTURE THROUGH PIONEERING FORMS OF ART MAKING AND AUTONOMY **(Hessel, 2020)**
- FAMILIARITY WITH THE ANATOMY OF WINGED BEINGS AN ADVANTAGE
- CANDIDATE MUST BE WILLING TO POSTHUMOUSLY INTERMEDIATE BETWEEN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES **(Hessel,2020)**

Interested candidates continue to page 2 for elibility requirements:

HIGHER BEINGS
SEEKING SECRETARY CONT'D.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

- CANDIDATE MUST HAVE AN SQ OF 140 OR HIGHER *?*
- CANDIDATES WITH KNOWLEDGE OF TRICKS OF THE TRADE HAVE ADVANTAGE:
  ALWAYS KNOW HOW TO TURN A KNIFE INTO A KEY
- CANDIDATE MUST BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE THEMSELVES IN ORDER TO FIND THEMSELVES
- MINIMUM OF THREE YEARS EXPERIENCE PREPARING AND LEADING INACCESSIBLE MEETINGS
- MINIMUM OF FIVE YEARS EXPERIENCE IN MAINTAINING THE UPKEEP OF ALL PLANES OF
  EXISTENCE INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO THE MATERIAL, SOUL, AND SPIRIT REALMS
- MINIMUM OF THREE YEARS EXPERIENCE WORKING AS AN INTERMEDIARY AND LIAISON BETWEEN
  HIGHER BEINGS AND LOWER MEDIUMS WHO MAY STRUGGLE WITH FAITHLESSNESS, DOUBT, AND ENVY
- MINIMUM OF ONE MONTH INTERNSHIP WITH CONSUMER FACING COMPANY IN OMNI-WALKING AND
  ABLE TO WALK THE OMNI-ROPE IN TEN MINUTES OR LESS *?*
- EXPERIENCED IN DELEGATION PARTICULARLY WITH THE FIVE METHOD *?*
- MINIMUM OF THREE YEARS TRAINING WITH ACCREDITED CREATIVE ACADEMY OF DISTINCTION
  AND WILLINGNESS TO SUSPEND ALL REPRESENTATIONAL MANNERS OF ADDRESS **(JEFFRIES, 2020)**

SQ – Spiritual Quotient is a measure developed by "The Lords of the Mysteries" *(Linden, 1998, p. 19)* to discover individuals with potent spiritual intuitions. Hilma's adult records are confidential but her SQ is generally accepted to have been upwards of 150 based on early documentation.

No longer a requirement due to its incentivisation of reckless omni–walking.

The Five as they called themselves were a group of women in Stockholm in the late 1890s who sought out spiritual knowledge together. Due to these efforts they were met by "high leaders from other dimensions." The white cross became their most prominent symbol as received through the instructions of the higher beings *(Lindén, 1998, p. 12)*. The Five included Hilma af Klint, Anna Cassel, Cornelia Cederberg, Sigrid Hedman and Mathilda Nilsson *(Iacovcich, 2020)*.

HIGH MASTERS (BIRNBAUM, 2020) COMMISSION

inter-dimensional contacts, for the instructions she needed to carry out her work. Together they would change the world, but only when the world was ready to receive the manifestations of these transmissions.[3] One of the sub-roles of her role was translator. The language deemed the most fitting for the human race proved to be a visual language of coded symbols in paint.

In order to make space for an interdimensional being within her, many mental rooms needed cleared out. She strolled around her internal neighbourhood and found a vast warehouse filled with boxes of self-doubt and disbelief. She cleared it box by box repeating to herself: image upon image upon image upon image upon image upon image upon image upon image upon image upon image upon image upon image upon image and so on until eventually only a spacious attention remained.

In walked Gregor, a slight man in a naval uniform, an officer[4]. He had understood intuitively that this form would be most familiar to Hilma as her family were Navy people. There's no better outfit than that of authority replete with the silks of affection for getting what you want. Higher beings trained her and gave her secret and binding purpose. They singled her out as the bearer of messages, Earth's receptionist for their trans-dimensional

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[3] Af Klint received a message from "the Lords of the Mysteries" who had decided that she would create a significant series of paintings that would reveal the truth about the world. Their advice was that the project would be both "easy and difficult" simultaneously. This is in line with her obsession with opposing dualities nonetheless completing one another. (Lindén, 1998, p. 19)."

[4] Amaliel, Ananda, Clemens, Esther, Georg and Gregor were the "high masters" in communication with af Klint (Jeffries, 2020).

relays. In her mind she saw a white boat bearing The Five across a white capped sea where before she had sat at the stern, but now she helmed the boat and reverently rested her paint daubed fingers on the white cross at its bow.[5] She turned on the radio and bounced along as her favourite pop song, *Mirrors seem to work better than scissors on this side of the astral plane; have others tried smashing them?*, poured forth from the static.[6] Hilma rolled out her canvas on the floor, laid out her colours and brushes, and savoured the taste of a new Beginning.

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[5] One of the key visuals utilised by The Five was a white boat. (Linden, 1998, PP 12-14) In 1906, Hilma received word that she needed to take the lead at the helm of the boat and produce the series, Paintings for the Temple. She imagined a white spiral shaped temple with paintings lining the walls as they went upwards. In 2018, her dream manifested as an exhibition in a white spiral temple known as. the Guggenheim (Hessel, 2020).

[6]◐ Lyrics to: *Mirrors seem to work better than scissors on this side of the astral plane; have others tried smashing them?*
For mirror-wielders, we are more than one
For mirror breakers, we are freedom
Mirrors have a new power
And I swear I feel more real
Cause I've gone from being a particle in the void
Up against the deepness of space
To finally being free and not out of place
And that's when I think
it's not an illusion its a dual fusion
The starlight has two reflections in these two eyes
It's the darkness coming out, what was lost and mine
What was broken inside shines with some light now
It wasn't easy at first
But I gave life to a world of messers
who called themselves The World That Never Was
Some of us want to make pictures
Of what they can't say or do
Some of us want to make everything
On this side of the mirrored truth
◐◑

The Lords must have been very pleased with her high degree of self-motivation and esoteric methods of dispersion as based on Hilma af Klint's self-assessed six month performance review:

> The whole difference relies in committing oneself to grace and displeasure in the first instance to partly unknown and foreign powers to achieve, with their help, self- knowledge, and in the latter case to have achieved such a degree of self-knowledge that it will suffice as the starting point for studying by oneself. At this moment I have knowledge of, in the living reality, that I am an atom in the universe that has access to infinite possibilities of development. These possibilities of development, I want, gradually to reveal (Linden, 1998, P. 6).

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Loss of Self

In Three Ways

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> *"The truth is that in the metaphysical and religious sphere, articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favour of the same conclusions. ...Our impulsive belief is here always what sets up the original body of truth, and our articulately verbalised philosophy is but its showy translation into formulas. The unreasoned and immediate assurance is the deep thing in us, the reasoned argument is but a surface exhibition. Instinct leads, intelligence does but follow. ...Please observe, however, that I don't yet say that it is better that the subconscious and non-rational should thus hold primacy in the religious realm. I confine myself to simply pointing out that they do so hold it as a matter of fact"* (James, 1902, p. 74).

Mystic states of mind, the craft of art making, and AI are all processes of exceeding an individual human's bounds. The first two are ancient phenomenological endeavours and the last is in its infancy, however they are all seeking outside permission and influence that ultimately is still coming from an individual human believer/user. The mystic can only have visions of what is already within their bounds, the artist pulls from the traditions of previous artists but is still bound to their personal circumstances, and the user can only write prompts of the conceived of through their individual imagination. However, the belief in and use of an external entity, tradition, or technology can be enough to break up a singular mind into many.

An algorithm, or in Hilma af Klint's case an authoritative interdimensional being, comes in very handy in terms of exceeding one's perceived limits. Her spiritual transmissions gave her purpose and autonomy, things in short supply for women of her era (Aberth, 2020, p. 43).

Rytr is engineered to mimic the baseline creative process of humans i.e. gathering available information and rearranging it. In both types of creators, machine and human, it's not the notes that matter, but the order, the way, and the context in which they're played. In this way, Rytr functions as a second self with a wider breadth of information to draw from, but very little wisdom for reading the room, for order, or for arrangement.

In creating a tool such as Rytr there are a few basic assumptions: that humans require it, that people will pay to do less, and that the machine's work ought to be indistinguishable from a human's writing. In terms of its designated uses, Rytr's programming is incredibly deceptive. When it is shifted over to the use of creative writing content however, it becomes much more interesting. Given that it has over four million users and claims to have saved them $350,000,000, it's apparent that people and companies will pay to do less in order to save the cost of hiring a human (Rytr, 2021). But humans do not need machine learning to help them create content, rather ease of content creation has more to do with the cult of productivity and bottom lines. Instead of a necessity, Rytr is a medium of choice.

In the context of this thesis, medium could mean a spiritual conduit or a field of production like painting or sculpture. In my approach to Rytr, I engaged with it on both strands. I do not believe that Rytr or any AI is a spiritual conduit to another dimension, but I do believe that it has the capacity to reflect new modes of thinking back onto its human user, much like a funhouse mirror in its more innocent uses. And more like a shattered looking glass in its more insidious forms (Maiberg and Xiang, 2022).

As William James said in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* over one hundred years ago,

> It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. (p. 388)

AI is one such stimulus, much like a spiritual prodding, a burning bush, or beholding a meaningful artwork for the first time it has the capacity to awaken an otherwise latent bed of connections and ideas. I approached a writing tool intended for marketing with the hope that it might spark an entirely different mode of writing. For several years, I've attempted to partner writing with painting. It's difficult to manoeuvre around the threats of didacticism, literalism, and condescension that can hover over text works. It is difficult for written language to concede territory to the pictorial – for the picture to be more than an illustration. And it is

difficult for the viewer's mind to shift between the active state of reading and the passive state of receiving an image.

Painting and much creative writing are both forms of irrational communication individually. Partnering the two, whether within one composition or as co-existing works, produced a deeper layer of inscrutability, particularly when the text was generated by AI. But, as Erik Davis says in *Techgnosis*, "Communicating information is not simply a matter of cramming data into an envelope and sending it off; information is also something constructed by the receiver (p. 85)." The receiver in this case, is the AI, myself, and the reader or viewer. The AI received the information I prompted it with and constructed a reply, furthering the level of inscrutability. In most cases, I then deconstructed and reworded the reply, adding another layer. The viewer then receives these layers of collaborative irrationality, where a one-sided human intention is inextricably saddled with a wanton gathering of information from the AI.

Before approaching an AI writing tool, I played with an image generation tool, Disco Diffusion. Images with a sense of easy inevitability poured forth at my command. And yet their completeness was off putting – they required nothing of me and so they offered no chance of absorption in which to lose myself. They offered no opportunity for flow to take hold, because they were complete and entirely derivative. These generated and derivative images can easily veer into plagiarism. As an artist, it is perfectly acceptable and unavoidable to pull visual languages and ideas from past and

present artists' works, however and crucially, a human artist has the
intention to rearrange these patterns into something new and uniquely
theirs. An AI tool has neither artistic intention nor integrity and the person
or corporation generating content may not either (McGowran 2022).

Loss of Self via ⇥ Artificial Intelligence

"Everyone knows that myths never really happened but are always going on"
(Tokarczuk, 2019, p. 11).

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An unnamed professor of philosophy is brought to a room to question two boxes to identify which one is human and which is AI. Whomever he selects as not being human will be demolished. But the professor dismisses this as just a test, that no computer or AI can beat him in a debate or answer more comprehensively than he does. Mocking the absurdity of this game, the professor pontificates about the dangers awaiting in accepting that AI might actually be able to provide more objective responses than humanity – just as we are often subject to manipulation by religions, cults, and pyramid schemes that profess an omniscient authority. After the debate between it and a human threatened to go on all day without input from its opponent, the test moderator again implores it to select whom it thinks is human, dismissively brushing off his lecture on our vulnerability as mere prejudice or irrational thought.

The Professor chastises them for their ignorance insisting that this means that an AI can know.

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With recent advances in neuroscience, it's come to light how malleable the brain may be - it can no longer be easily compared to the

static hardware of a computer (Anthony, 2021). But it could be argued that the design of algorithms are a simulacrum of the brain – specifically the brain of its engineer (Heilweil, 2021). Any attempt to exceed human limits are after all still rooted in the human experience. Through developing the algorithm as an expansion of human tools, patterns, and significantly of the same foci of attention, algorithms are no more than hyper efficient information gatherers. Although, at this stage, not necessarily creatively functional ones.

Rytr is one such artificial intelligence model. This writing tool generates an extraordinary amount of material in only a few seconds. However, with its creativity setting bumped to maximum, it doles out the bizarre, the glib, and the accidentally profound. It organises material available to it which its programming deems connected to the prompt and delivers it with astonishing efficiency. And yet, the merely bizarre does not equate to the inventiveness of creativity.

When it comes to reading this material output, it is the distance between disparate trains of thought and ideas that jars and amuses. The proximity of ideas is everything when it comes to creative manoeuvres. If the distance is too great, there is no leap of faith which could lead into the profound, but merely into isolation. If the distance is too easily crossed, there is only the inward sigh of boredom. In humans, the distances are thought of as euthymic or healthy minded all the way to psychotic or delusional (Andreasen, 2005, p. 148). When Rytr happens to map out the

right spacing, when its associations are healthy – a landable leap is required and worthwhile.

In terms of gathering information that is available to me and rearranging it, at a glance I function in much the same way as Rytr. Creativity is a rearranging of preexisting patterns and systems into new configurations. However, those configurations only make a cultural impression if the system they are proposing to alter agrees that they are indeed functionally creative (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997a, p. 23). This does not necessarily happen within the life spans of artists or technological inventions. I find that when an artist's influences of preexisting patterns are revealed, their work suddenly feels less impossible, less unlikely, but no less meaningful. In the cases of William Blake[7] and Hilma af Klint, creative acceptance of their work only occurred posthumously. To them their work proved itself creatively worthwhile through their conviction in its truth and the necessity for the dispersion of that truth.

I imagine that even for artists of such strong intentions and convictions, the outcome of their rearranging processes only felt inevitable in hindsight. For the AI tool, there is no intentionality, no recognition of systems and patterns, not even post generatively. There is no creative wisdom or closure, only a sweep of information (Galloway, 2021). This failure of the technology opens it up to human intervention to create meaning and context. I predict that as AI becomes more nuanced and

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[7] William Blake was born in the UK in 1757 and died there in 1827. His work as a poet and artist arose from his imaginary and heretical spiritual beliefs and visions (The Art Story, 2018).

difficult to decipher from the human hand, the less it will have to offer us creatively, and will only serve as mimetic plagiarism and sources of devised confusion.

Perhaps it is true that given an artist's experience and personal history, they are funnelled into a particular path, like anyone else their agency exists only within a narrow set of circumstantial parameters. It takes a great deal of effort, happenstance, and outside help to expand past these bounds. Similarly, an algorithm only gathers what's been made available to it and like a sideshow fortune teller, it rapidly mines the customer's prompt, but rarely gives a decipherable reading. Any type of artificial intelligence brings with it its own set of prejudices and ideals - thanks to the humans who developed them, much like an artist brings to their work and research - much like I am doing now.

Creatively speaking, this external pooling of random sources can be incredibly useful. However, the outcomes of artificial intelligence do not manifest consciousness in the same way that art, literature, religion, and science are all direct deposits of human consciousness. The generated material of AI programs mines what has been uploaded and any meaning or creativity must still be cultivated through human intervention. This is particularly apparent when taken out of the creative process and given a moral global reframing; AI programs in general can be an ethical minefield in terms of the future of workers and global security (Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, 2018).

However, if these ethical concerns can be suspended for a moment and attention be reallocated to the creative generative process, what might be called a synthesis of sources in an AI model, might be called a narrowing of influences for the artist. And what might be considered the inherent biases of the programmer are considered the focal points of the artist, both in terms of what they pay attention to and how they are attending to it. To attend with clarity requires a loss of self, otherwise the artist is a spectator in their own artmaking (Panizza, 2017, p. 3). Given the myopic nature of suspending ethical concerns, it is significant to note that AI's creators and users have no reason to volunteer ethical standards and procedures, it is crucial that demands for holistic responsibility are made clear.

Lastly Rytr's texts emerge from its coding in seconds, while automatic making emerges rapidly and unchecked from an invisible stream of consciousness. It's easy to imagine both an artist and an AI model as magpies looking for the shine in all that's been made available to it. It makes no difference whether they find a gold tooth or a beer cap – but rather the degree of worthwhile invention arises in how they put them together. One distinct difference in this comparison however is the nature of creativity within humans, which includes a key period of incubation, where ideas may simmer and associate freely over time in order to avoid cryptomnesia and arriving at derivative conclusions (Sacks, 2017, pp 108–109, 142).

Loss of Self via Tradition of a Medium ❧

"But the way to become unselfconscious again is not to try and go backwards into innocence but to become more interested in your subject matter than in the way you appear to be dealing with it" (Pullman, 2020, p. 158).

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According to local lore, there lived an artist who turned into an instant myth. She saw in the mirror that she had become small and that her hands were hardly there at all. She saw all this without gaining wisdom or learning any secrets. But seeing herself getting out of this world and into another cheered her spirit. So she sought out stories from the new world and found hidden traditions stored in libraries of unknown languages and she found secrets laid out on dusty shelves by ever unresting hands.

◖◗

Craftsmanship of the art object can lead to loss of self within the tradition and history of the medium (Sennett, 2009, p. 66). This can happen in two ways. The first being that of an adherence to established methods and aesthetics so that any individual expression is set aside in favour of the tradition of the craft. And secondly, or additionally, through a state of mind during the creative process where the ego is completely lost in the absorption of the task at hand, this state, coined *flow* by Mihalyi

Csikszentmihalyi, requires a finely tuned balance of challenge and skill (1990, p. 4).

In terms of accessing flow, the tangible and the hidden coalesce in the action of artmaking. Hidden chemicals, such as serotonin, and embedded skills such as achieved through painting thousands of pictures, guide and enable this process of imagination to action to objecthood. My own practice of artmaking has been heavily guided by a longtime hidden chemical pattern, a mood disorder. The serotonin levels in my brain crash on a cyclical basis resulting in an altered sense of self roughly every two weeks. During the serotonin crashes, flow becomes nearly impossible to cultivate as my inner critic becomes overwhelming and what is normally a temperament of optimistic creative tendency becomes a destructive one fueled by self doubt.

One of the ways I have learned to manage this shift is to get lost in the craft of drawing and painting. Studying the works of other artists, their techniques, and crucially their states of mind – how they see and think. This crash time has evolved into a loss of self via the tradition of painting and drawing. This loss, which is actually an observational and learning period, supports the following generative phase. While I have found some relief through medication and therapy, the structure of consumption and generation has proven behaviorally crucial to living well with these ups and downs.

Frustratingly, the myth of suffering as a necessary ingredient in the cocktail of creativity is still pervasive today. In a study by neuroscientist Nancy Andreasen, outlined in her book *The Creating Brain*, (2005, p. 139), her findings suggest that creative outcomes arise despite the trials of mental illness, not because of them (Popova, 2014). Some people are lucky enough to find a way to work with it, but for every one that has forged a creative path, countless others have not been so lucky .

It is certainly a curious proposition to consider what role, if any, mental illness played in the work of William Blake or Hilma af Klint. Despite their heretical and idiosyncratic beliefs, both of these artists were firmly grounded in the world thanks to the tradition of a craft. Each of them laid distinct paths for themselves, paths which led towards self-examination and the dissemination of their convictions. Throughout my early life, my artmaking found grounding within the structure of Christianity and in hindsight, I believe my conviction in its perceived truths also grounded me through the difficulties of an unrecognised mood disorder. As an adult I lost faith and the untethering nature of that loss reified my already potent devotion to craft. Getting lost in the framework of an established method which required a setting aside of an ego and individuality filled a spiritual void. Eventually this resulted in the skills necessary to get lost in artmaking for its own sake.

This set of experiences has led me to the ephemeral as yet unnamed world I've been making in paint. The ethereal portrayal of consciousness

embedded within the phenomenological state of belonging has its
beginnings in perceived spiritual encounters, an eventual loss of belief, but
an understanding and a continuation of that feeling.

Caitlyn Rooke, *Clouds Over Croagh Patrick*, oils on linen, 140x140cm, 2021

In my most recent artmaking efforts to get lost, I've found myself
chasing the relationship between text and image. The importance of holy
text or scripture in my early years was formative. Like Blake's upbringing on
the Bible and af Klint's quasi-Christian immersion in theosophical prayers I
entered into creative states via spiritual studies and meditation (Higgs,

2021, p. 14; Linden, 1998, p. 16). Through this lens, a desire for engagement with text and to form my own inscrutable means of communication seems inevitable. The use of AI depressurised the problem of *what to say,* much like a mystic need not feel self conscious in relaying their authority's messages, the receiver of AI transmissions can find freedom in their otherworldly oddness.

Loss of Self via ⭳ Mystical Experience

"Life is created by events, but it is only when we are able to interpret them, try to understand them and lend them meaning that they are transformed into experience" (Tokarczuk, 2019).

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I walked up a strange hill in the evening grey of dusk. The sky was a star-filled blueness and the murals of greens below swayed in time with my heart's beating. On the other side of the mountaintop, I saw an unknown figure gesturing for me to continue. When we reached the summit from opposing sides, we witnessed a hillock opening up across one of the slopes. The solid rock returned to its hollow state - to behold this cavern was to behold the source of life. As we descended, it changed in appearance and grew into three mountains, then six, then twelve. Dirt paths wound up and down their cliffs and through their hollow centres. Towns towered at the midpoint of each ridge, composed but comfortable looking. The trees inside were lush and varied - it looked as if these places were made for the conscious. We could just barely see the stone teeth emerging out of the darkness as we filled the hollow anew.

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Finding what really needs attending to within any given moment is an opportunity for the artist to shape the past through the recording of the

present. The process of art making brings experiences which were limited to states of consciousness into the realm of the concrete. It could be said that art is the manifestation of inward experience. It is the shareable documentation of the personal, the transformation of one experience into the many. How these experiences are processed and received becomes a problem of the artist's environment.

One of the earliest and still significant quandaries for the psychological study of mystical experiences is how the individual re-integrates into their surroundings post experience (Sacks,2013, pp 215-217). Depending on the positive or negative reinsertion into their lives, a mystical experience might be viewed as either pathological or spiritual (Bitēna and Mārtinsone, 2021, p. 11). Unification with the universe and a melting away of the self could be terrifying, edifying, or reifying depending on which universe, or culture, the self is merged with.

In consideration of the 2022 Venice Biennale, named after Leonora Carrington's children's book, *The Milk of Dreams*, as just one example, it seems that an artist with mystical tendencies would be re-entering a receptive atmosphere (Alemani, 2022). "Perhaps the future moment in which many mediums predicted that their work would finally be understood is now upon us" (Aberth, 2020, p. 48). Hilma af Klint's major retrospective at the Guggenheim in 2018 being another such example (Hessel, 2020).

Similar to the risks believers may face in a spiritual culture, that of trusting their experience at face value, there's a danger in believing that the

procedural outcome of artificial intelligence is somehow more knowledgeable, more objective, or more reliable in a technologically devoted society. The current cultural interest dedicated to the mystical and to AI points towards the desire for an authority to offer solutions, to offer direction. It could be seen as a post-human pleading. Shifting reality to the spiritual and/or virtual is a tempting escape from the material problems of being alive during a climate disaster.

With these new technologies and spiritual widenings comes the possibility of great harm and the possibility of positive change, probably with a mix of both. In consideration of the Christian tradition for example, it is a belief structure which has been mixed and remixed from its very beginnings. Some of these, like the crusades and manifest destiny to name two, were violently disastrous and catalysed the world as we know it today. And some of these heresies, offshoots, and new denominations have developed into generous spaces full of goodwill and beauty. It depends on the individual, on the culture, and on the system they find themselves bound within.

In terms of the artist's muse and the mystic's vision, they are attributed to separate sources based on the context in which they are received. In that I mean separate from the human receiver i.e. an outside entity or idea, and separate from each other's systems, where a division is assumed between an artistic *aha!* and a mystic's vision. But viewed in light of Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT), there can be no separation from

our own consciousness, only entering into different modes of such, which are all a piece of a larger network made up of creatures, ideas, and inanimate states to name a few (Kofman, 2018). In applying ANT to AI, there can be no separation from its creators, receivers, users, or their circumstances (Michailidis, 2022).

Out of these countless modes of consciousness and understanding emerged the artists William Blake and around a century later, Hilma af Klint. Both of their relationships to artmaking and mysticism blurred the division between divine intervention and artistic intuition. Their view of the Bible, of Christ, and of their own spiritual position developed as an outcome of the broader system they found themselves within and through their intense imaginations. As such, their spiritualism and artistic achievements were not received tenderly during their lifetimes. Af Klint's mediumistically conceived abstract paintings proved too radical even for Rudolf Steiner, the founder of the Anthroposophical Society, of which af Klint became an ardent member after leaving the theosophical teachings of Madame Blavatsky behind (Jeffries, 2020). Blake's work received no better welcome; during his lifetime, his contemporaries perceived him as mad and he died in poverty (Higgs, 2021, p. 227). And yet, out of the fertile soil of their convictions, they made artworks that still breathe deeply today, not because it can be believed without question, but because they unselfconsciously offered up their ways of attending to the world.

To give an unlikely example of how the creative process mirrors the mystical experience makes it all the more intriguing. In *Working Space*, Frank Stella's essay on Caravaggio highlights the following problem which every painter faces,

> We try to see as best we can, hoping that our intuitions and insights provide illumination. ...This ephemeral quality of painting reminds us that what is not there, what we cannot quite find, is what great paintings always promise (1986).

There is something of the four marks of the mystic in this view of artmaking. According to William James an experience must meet the following criteria to be considered mystical: ineffability, a noetic quality, transiency, and passivity (1902, p. 380). Particularly the first quality is evident in Stella's description: that quality in great paintings which cannot be articulated, but can be recognised. The insight mentioned by Stella runs parallel to James' noetic quality and the act of painting is an attempt to make what is a transient experience into a shared impression. Lastly, creative receptivity, the *aha!* moment inherent to the act of creation mirrors the passive receptivity of the mystic. Both states may be induced by practice and attention, but ultimately are only available to those who surrender their sense of self.

William Blake ☿

Saw the Face of God

"'When I reflect on the fact that I have made my appearance by accident upon a globe itself whirled through space as the sport of the catastrophes of the heavens', says Madame Ackermann; 'when I see myself surrounded by beings as ephemeral and incomprehensible as I am myself, and all excitedly pursuing pure chimaeras, I experience a strange feeling of being in a dream. It seems to me as if I have loved and suffered and that erelong I shall die, in a dream. My last word will be, I have been dreaming'" (James, 1902, p .63).

William Blake, *For Children. The Gates of Paradise, Plate 6, 'Air'*, Etching Print and Line Engraving, 1793. Available at: https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:2418

◐

Dear reader,

As a four year old, William Blake saw God manifested in a window.[8] He had seen that window before. That window in the ground where he dropped to his knees everyday and peered into the Bible's face with the belief of a child. He peered down into that abyssurous deep until he saw eye to eye with the shining face of God. God's giant glass eye pulled him in and took hold of his mind – crystal crashing against marble for eternity. And without concern for his curious trespassing on sacred ground covered in sanctimonious lines, he continued seeing.

That night, before dreams managed to erase his memory, he saw a gold light which shimmered with an other-worldly brilliance. (Unfathomably) it swam like water and fell apart into motes of colour and erupted into a rainbow's dominance. He accepted the divine light like he accepted the warmth of the Sun. It swam through God's glass eye – through panes of glass – and refracted on top of one another – Escaped for the first time! Self-annihilation had begun![9]

The gold sun joined with the tears streaming down William's cheeks; joyful fervour emanated from his very core. Later when his Mother told the story of when William was four and how he looked up at her, she used to say "In that

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[8] When William was only four years old, he was deeply disturbed by the sight of God's face "pressing in" (Higgs, p. 13, 2021). Could this have been a hypnopompic hallucination (Sacks, 2013, p. 215)?

[9] In an excerpt from Blake's poem, Milton, he states, "...know thous: I come to Self Annihilation / Such are the Laws of Eternity that each shall mutually Annihilate himself for others good, as I for thee." It is not self-annihilation in the suicidal sense that Blake writes, but in the loss of self which results from entering a communal state of consciousness with the universe (Higgs, 2021, p.30).

moment he looked like an old man that had seen the future – seeing God's face in the window like that. It took everything inside me not to break down. Like a word that has to trust it's true." She never said anything like this about me. But I was there, on the other side of the window and I saw God, too.[10]

I was enjoying my little corner of the spheres. A breakaway cumulus puff had even allowed me to sit upon its precipitation knot while it sunned itself. I know William saw me too, for he drew me once. Strangely, he made me look rather sadder than I recall being at the time. My intention was merely to look in upon the child who could locate spirits and materialise them for himself, I had not meant to stir anything up.

Dear reader, it has been 221 years since that day. As if the present you and the present I have anything in common with clouds and the spirit–sighted. It has been too long to count the times I've created someThings and even someOnes and I cannot help but think you couldn't see them even if I made one now. Even if I were to join you in your praying hours, on bended knee looking through the window to the glass eye in the night, you would not know it.

Dear reader,

There was a time when you saw me everyday after devotions and the sun would shine into the darkest corners of your sense of self. Rainbows eclipsed

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[10] The ability to transcend oneself through one's own imagination generates a loss of self while very much embedded in one's own psyche. The transformative process of turning this into a shareable manifestation via art making is yet a secondary layer of loss of self that invites a phenomenological shared experience with others. For example, "[Blake] saw all aspects of the world as a fit subject for his work, in a way that suggests he had somehow transcended and escaped the perspective of a single person (Higgs, 2022, p. 59)."

shadows and moons of the purest white were busy with the activities of the

winged angels.   Dear reader, let us see if this is a mystic occasion. [11]

Dear reader, I have found that it does not qualify, you must try on your

own.

Dear reader, Become   wholly absorbed in someThing so deeply

that you are gone. Then you will see what waits in the window. [12]

Dear reader, please forgive m   y obtuse recollections, I may

only gather   what I am given.

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[11] Similar to comparing Stella's insights to the painting process with the qualities of a mystical experience, one could self check an experience as mystical through William James' four qualities of a mystical experience and ask themselves: *Is it ineffable? Is it noetic? Is it transient? Was it received passively?* (James, 1902, p. 380).

[12] Data only becomes meaningful when it reaches our conscious state through observation. Meaning arises from attending (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 128).

Conclusion◆

"…We need freedom (or at least the illusion of freedom) to get beyond ourselves, whether with telescopes and microscopes and our ever–burgeoning technology or in states of mind which allow us to travel to other worlds, to transcend our immediate surroundings" (Sacks, 2013, p. 90).

In the introduction of this paper I posited that artificial intelligence can be a medium, that mysticism and art making are a kinship means to autonomy through collective understanding, and that when it comes to art making: artificial intelligence, the tradition of a medium, and mysticism, are all efforts to be free of individual limitations through the loss of self within a collective network.

I have found freedom from myself within the limitations of each of these systems, in part, by smudging the lines between them. The study of mystical and artistic experiences has led me to the conclusion that their conception, reception, and differentiation is dependent on the networks of the individual more so than the experiences themselves. Seen through this lens, despite its ethical concerns, AI does have the capacity to function mediumistically: as an internally generated outside entity, as a system of making, and as an exploratory tool.

As such, loss of self proves to be a vital entry point into the shaping of not only our own personhood, but also that of our collective understandings and systems of worldmaking.

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