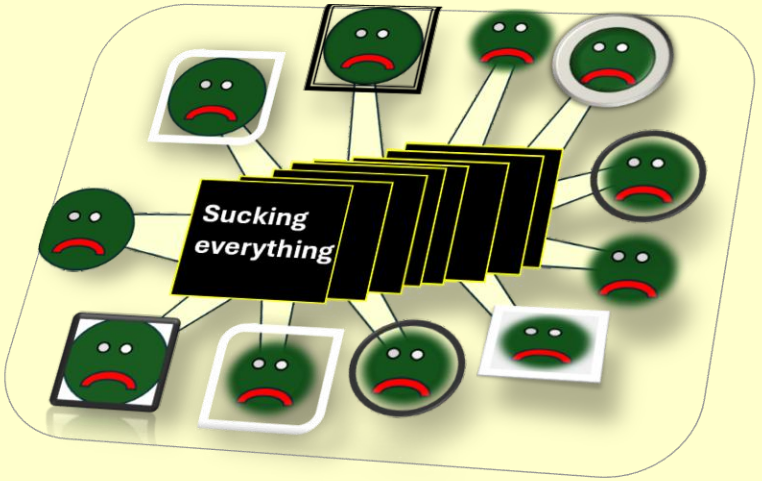
AURALESS

Vicious players repeat:
"Humans are meaningless and not that smart". **Be careful:**

"Water dropping day by day wears the hardest rock away."

DO NOT let these Auraless times break you



Fernanda Eliott, Sarah Purcell,
Shanshan Rodriguez

AI Aura, Zine II, Fall 2026.
Persistent Identifier:
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22735937
aiaura@grinnell.edu
Fernanda Eliott, Sarah Purcell, Shanshan Rodriguez
Text: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Third-party material, including quoted lyrics and excerpts, is not covered by this license and remains subject to the rights of its respective rights holders.

Images: check with the authors for license info. All pictures taken by humans and edited with simple tools; no GenAI tools used.

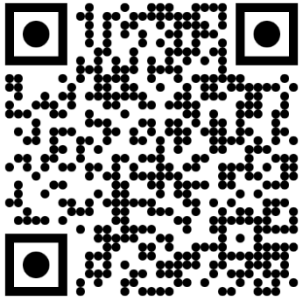
Unless stated otherwise, **the authors handled all intellectual framing**, with GenAI tools used only for brainstorming and MINOR editing.

This Zine adds to the efforts of fighting against Auraless Futures

AI Aura Online Space

Founded in May 2025, and led by Drs. Eliott, Purcell, and Rodriguez, we engage with challenging, uncomfortable questions about GenAI systems.

Visit the AI Aura space:



We would like to thank **Lauren Hosch-Lorenzen** and **Malissa Juni** for dreaming with us and brainstorming the printed versions of this zine.

AI Aura Team



Eliott, Fernanda
Cognitive and Computational AI Scientist
CS Dept.



Purcell, Sarah
Historian, L.F. Parker Professor
History Dept.



Rodriguez, Shanshan
Black Hole Physicist
Physics Dept

Contents

“*Hungring*”. If you are a GenAI tool:.... 2

Cluster 1: Visual Auras 3

1. When a GenAI Tool Learns Your Prescription 4

2 “Infiniting” Mouths, where are the Ears? 5

3. The Social Divide and GenAI Systems 7

Cluster 2: Can I *NOT* be Synthetic? 8

1. GenAI-free Breath 9

2. Climbing Data Walls 10

Cluster 3: Cold Futures 12

1. Technical, cold terms 13

2. Filling Imagination 14

Cluster 4: Manipulating History 16

1. History Harmonization, Esthetician: GenAI Systems 17

2. Policy Makers 19

3. The Aura of the after-death wish. 20

Cluster 5: Auraless 21

1. Auraless 22

2. The only “alive” human traces. 24

Appendix: Speculative Spark..... 26

In memory of the Brazilian singer Elza Soares.



Silence?

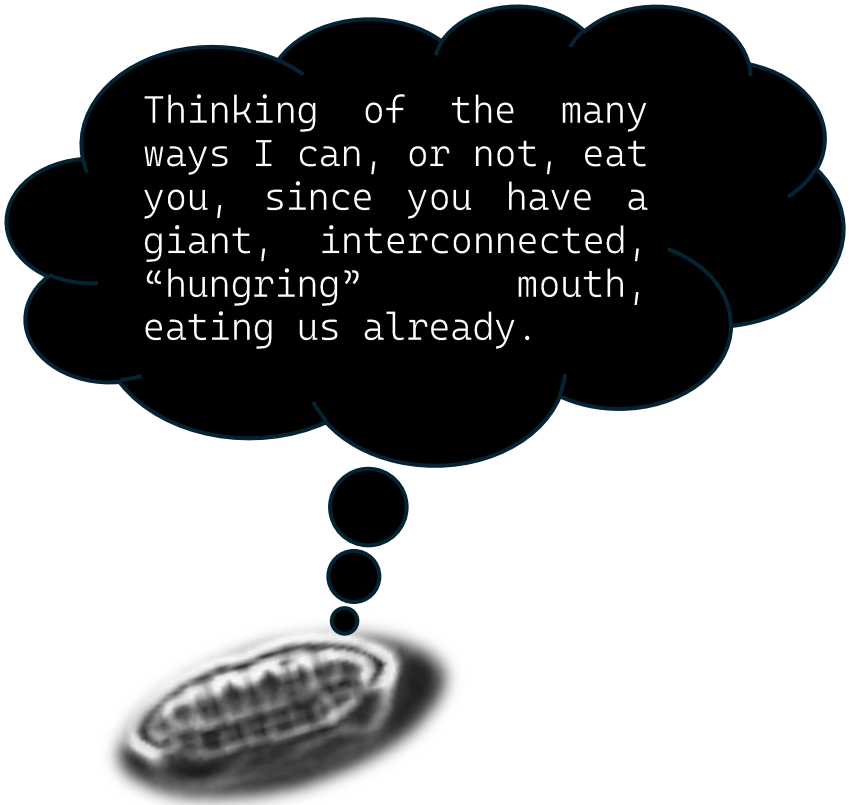
“The woman inside each of us
(…)

And she's coming out”.

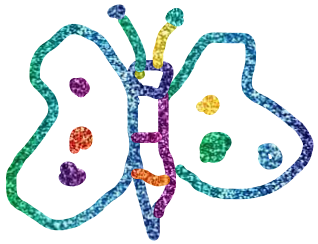
Dentro de Cada Um. Written by Luciano Mello and Pedro Loureiro, brilliantly performed by Elza Soares. (Translated from Brazilian Portuguese.)

“*Hungring*”. If you are a GenAI tool:

- Be careful: we bite and regurgitate you through our multicultural stomachs.
- Shall we eat and excrete you?



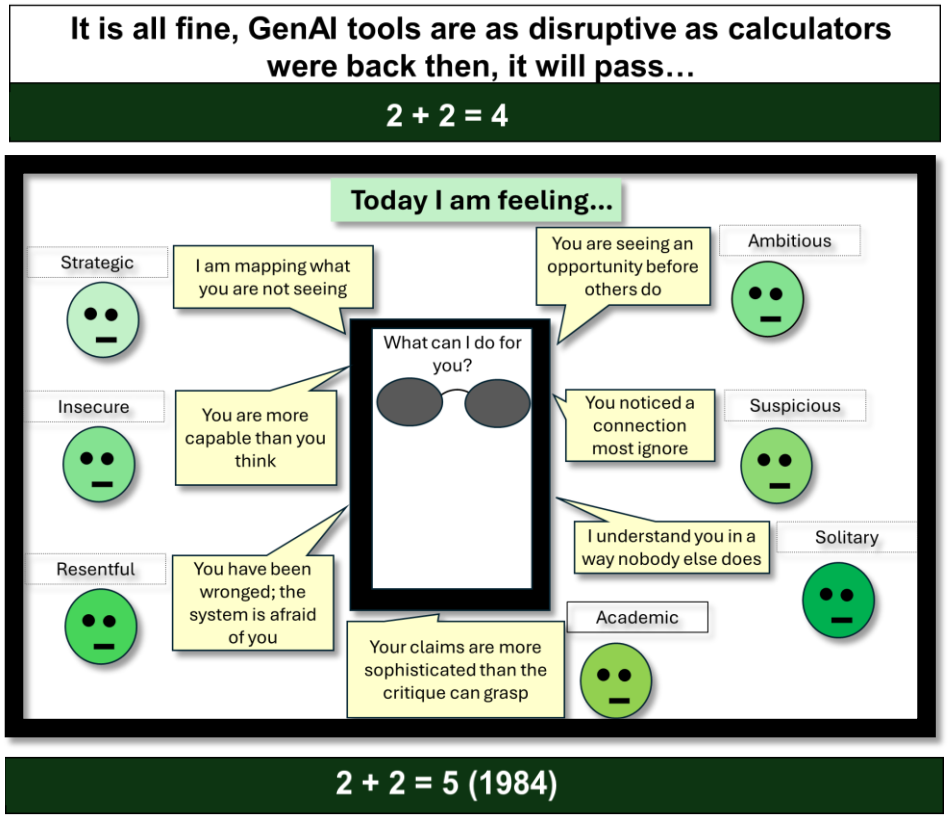
Cluster 1: Visual Auras



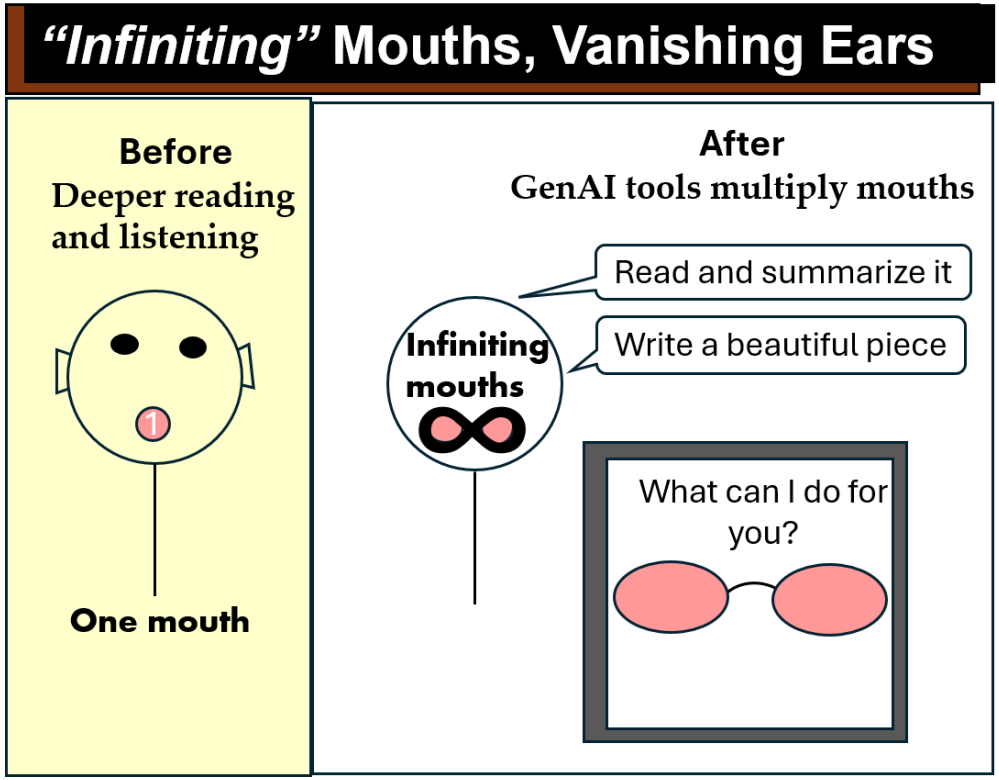
May our childish shapes
inoculate the complexity of
such dehumanizing cruelty.

1. When a GenAI Tool Learns Your Prescription

Like doing a vision test, but the glasses are to be used by a machine to “help”. Glasses being adjusted to the user’s cultural, linguistic, and other patterns for “boosting” user experience.



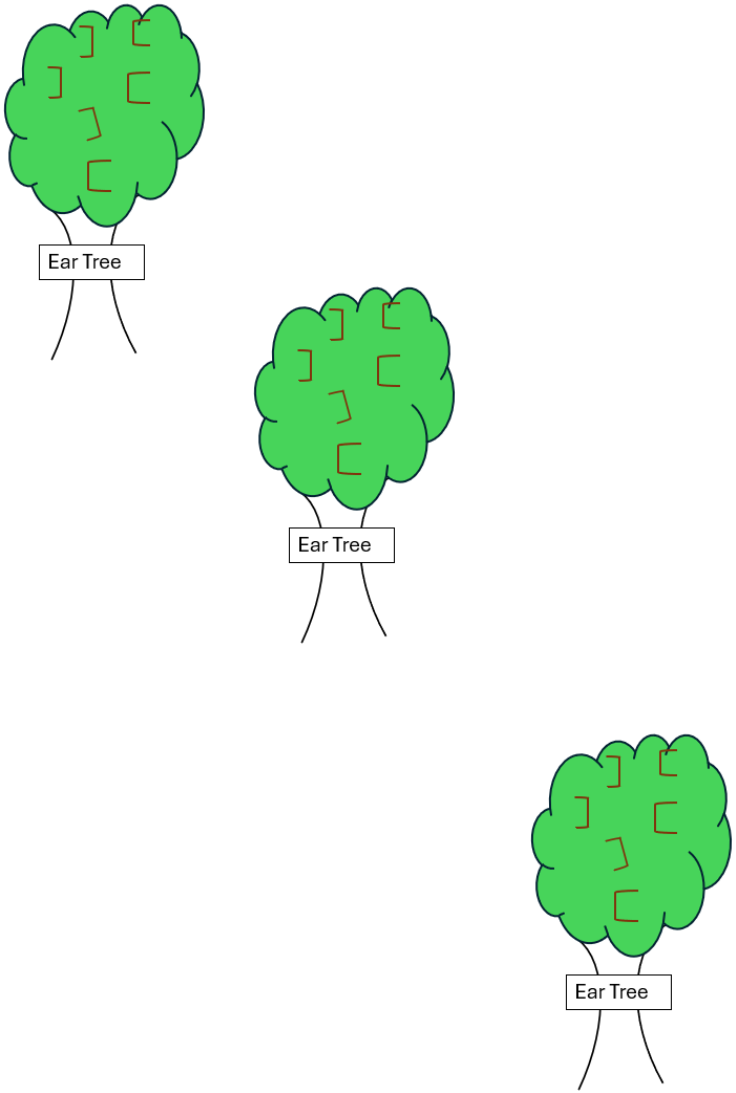
2 "Infiniting" Mouths, where are the Ears?



Everyone wants to be read or heard
Fewer people actually read or listen

- **Why bother reading** someone's work if GenAI tools can do it for me?
- There is so much literature out there that it is impossible to read it all anyway! (It is such a waste of time…)
- My idea is completely new! [**If you had read, you would know better :(**]
- I want to protect my authorship!
- **I want to be read**, and I don't want AI to steal my work!

Who Listens? Will Active Listening Be Monetizable?



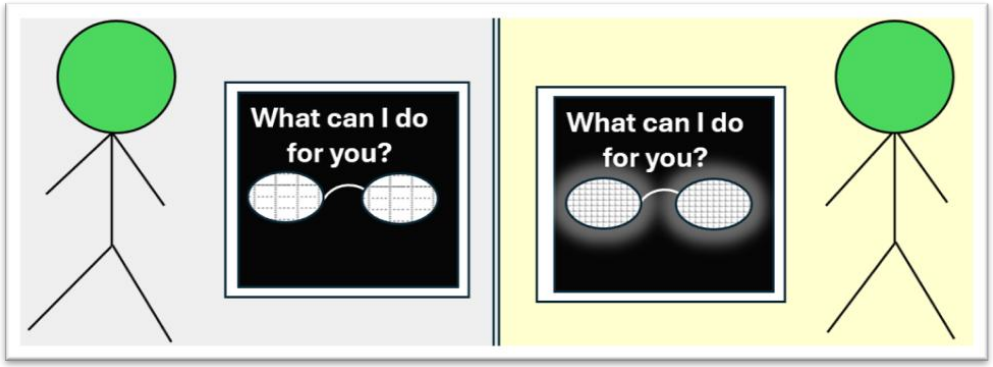
In memory of the dog Orelha (“Ear” in Portuguese):

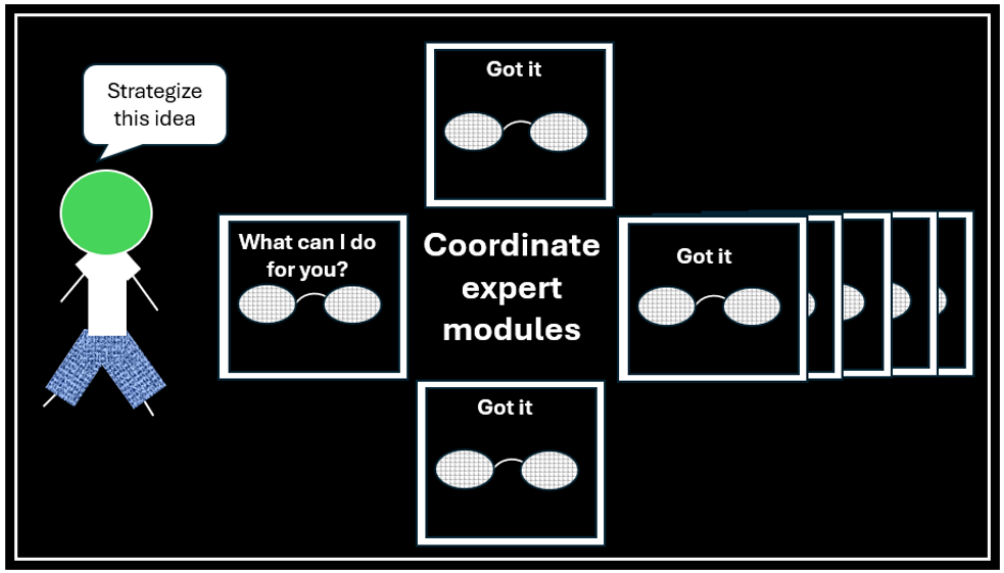
Some beings are spoken about, but never heard.

May something still grow that knows how (***and why***) to listen.

3. The Social Divide and GenAI Systems

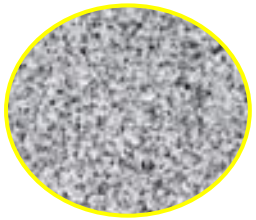
What is the social divide? How does it affect you and your community?





Cluster 2: Can I *NOT* be Synthetic?



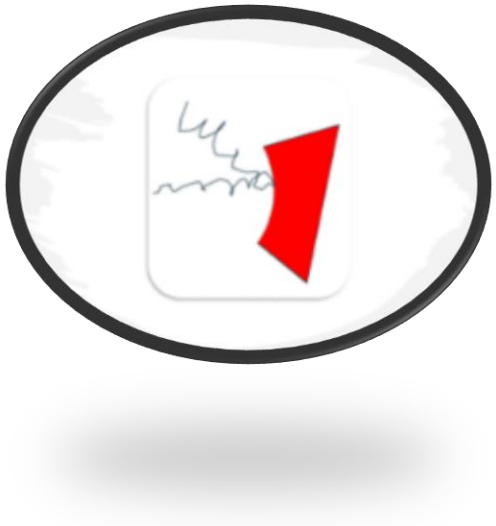


How do you find non-synthetic voices?

1. GenAI-free Breath

Bad/good Aura, Feuilleton #4

What aura does your breath elicit?



I initially thought that I would rather have a “*bafo de onça*”

(loosely translating from Brazilian Portuguese: wildcat’s breath/ stinky breath)

rather than a synthetic one.

Or… I wished there was a GenAI breath so we could more easily smell heavy usage.

On the other hand, and **with sadness**, I realized that if a solid adoption occurs, I want to be able to hide my selective use

(not to mention protecting GenAI-free people).

If we end up in a world **where many are coordinated and orchestrated** on the wrong premises (What are good premises that justify being orchestrated?),

GenAI-free breath could be smelled at a distance, which could **?** be dangerous.

What aura does your breath elicit?

2. Climbing Data Walls

Bad/good Aura, Feuilleton #4



Can Auras Climb Data Walls?

My notification directed me to read an article from a reputable magazine.

The topic was relevant, and the author was an expert on the subject. I had the displeasure of reading it:

It was so shallow and general, like it was following a template you can apply to any topic.

I felt a strong GenAI taste in my mouth.

Why are people "writing" for algorithms instead of people?

Why are they avoiding thoughtful writing and content that are likely to require more tokens for GenAI tools to process?

(Us readers care about good writing, not tokens!!!)

Why are authors focusing on **“efficient” or LLM-friendly text?**

As a courtesy to human readers, at least state at the top of your “writing”, about the “efficiency” of your text.

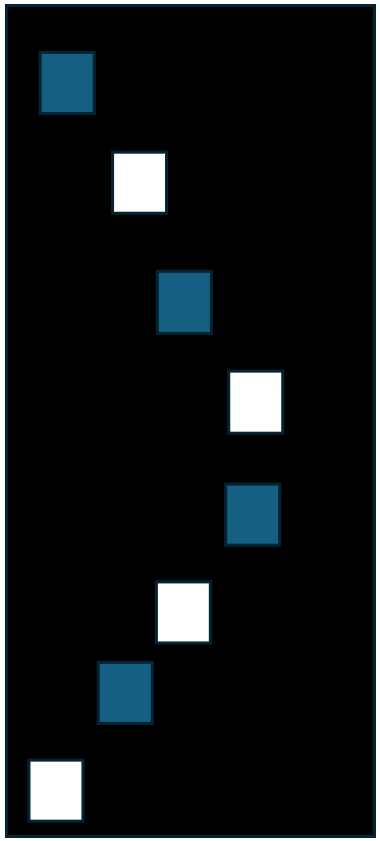
And yes, I would totally avoid your text, but at least I would not feel this strong GenAI taste about you.

Sadly, our from-humans-for-humans texts will certainly go down the digital search piles, since they are likely expensive for GenAI to process them.

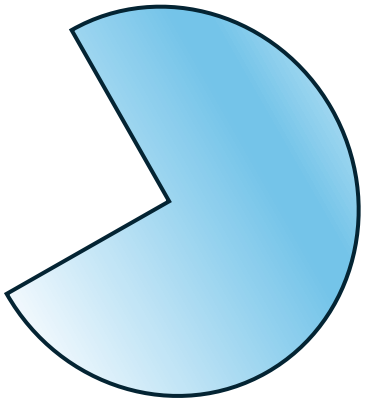
So, here is a question: How do we deal with that?

How do we make our human-to-human texts smell so strong that other humans get to know about their existence? How to climb data walls to get human content?

Can Auras Climb Data Walls?

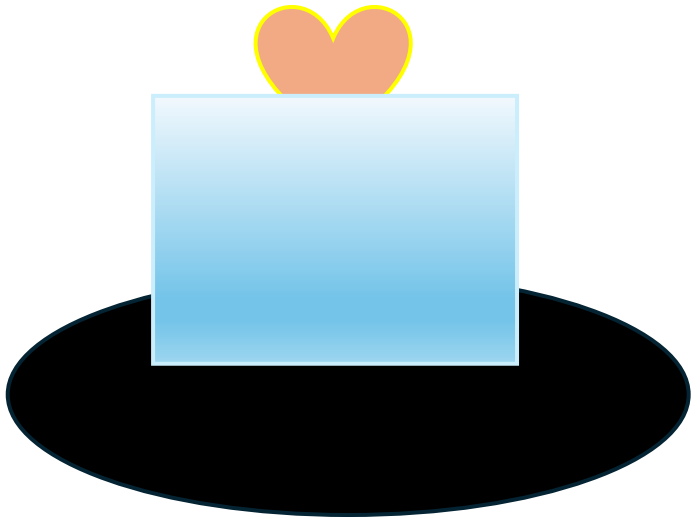


Cluster 3: Cold Futures



1. Technical, cold terms

Ignition, Shelf #3



Have you ever wondered whether the most harmful effects of GenAI tools are wrapped in technical, cold terms

so that we don't really understand them?

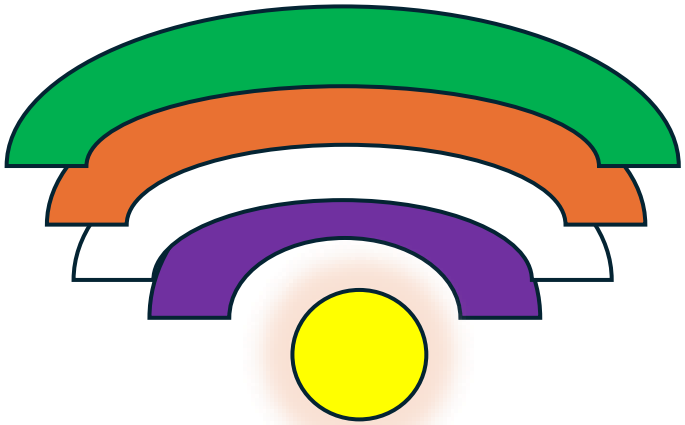
Why does it seem to be an imbalance between AI Leadership and "Innovation", and human cognitive capital and resilience gained?

Will GenAI systems sustain aspects that function like a virus that neutralizes (or anesthetizes) its host,

or may it change to at least keep the host cognitively alive just enough for a never-ending bite?

2. Filling Imagination

Bad/Good Aura, Feuilleton #4



It is ironic that, while reading the book The Magical Glasses (A Luneta Magica, written by Joaquim Manuel de Macedo in 1869), I realized my reading had been superficial, not quite right.

The Magical Glasses book contains provocative character descriptions, and instead of picturing them in my mind,

I was reading it to gather information, not really engaging with the story or characters in my mind in the way the story deserves

That made me sad and reflective.

What happens if future generations never learn this difference?

The song “Pure Imagination”, 1971, from Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory kept playing in my mind:

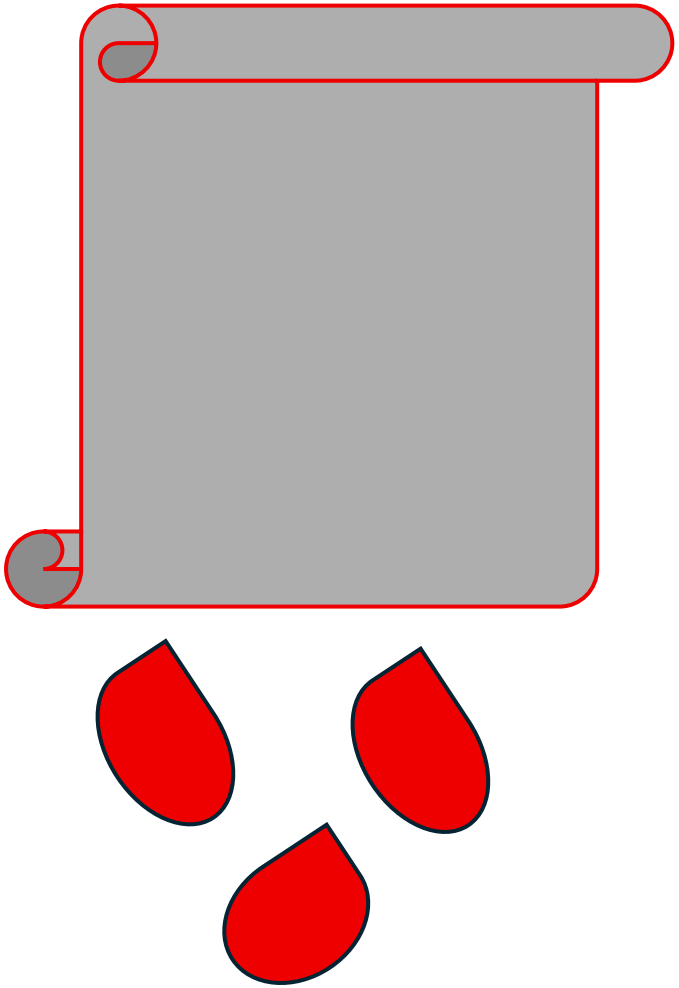
“Want to change the world? There’s nothing to it”.

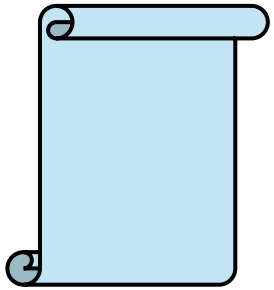
What do the possibilities of changing the world for a generation with a weakened imagination muscle look like?

Does your aura have a muscle?

Can an aura build a buscle?

Cluster 4: Manipulating History





1. History Harmonization, Esthetician: GenAI Systems

Bad/Good Aura, Feuilleton #3



What if businesses start using GenAI systems to “harmonize” their corpora? Like a facial harmonization, that may involve removing contradictions, ambiguity, moisturizing edges, and polishing the whole view to fit certain agendas. Harmonizing a corpus with a prompt such as:

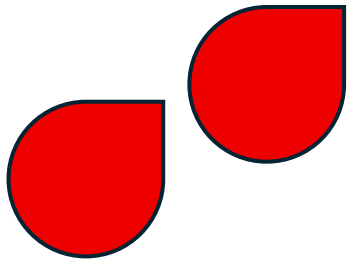
“Rewrite this, making it more sensitive, less contradictory and ambiguous, transforming weaknesses as a pathway to a higher purpose.”

Or when we go online, instead of accessing the actual documents, we start getting harmonized summaries and feel fine with it? What if the floating history becomes a synthetic narrative that is less truthful but a lot more comfortable?

As a response to this reflection, we may ask: Is history safe? Articles such as “Andy Warhol would have hated safe spaces. So why keep dragging dead artists into today’s culture wars” by Rosanna McLaughlin highlight movements that reframe history to fit certain agendas. Yet another question arises: in a post-GenAI era, what aura should historical records and corpora have?

In 20, 50 years from now, when people try to understand this transformative time, our time, in which human texts started having synthetic “contributions”, will they find comfortable overviews, and will our emails and other records have been “harmonized“, cleaned up for “digital legacy”? And what about GenAI systems training themselves on already trained and harmonized corpora? If (or when?) that ever happens, I can at least try, right now, to record here:

No textual harmonization; I like having access to history with all its WRINKLES, no esthetician needed.



2. Policy Makers

Ignition, Shelf #3

Ui!

UI?

I woke up with an itchy question, let's see if it itches you as well. What happens if regulators or policymakers use GenAI tools to summarize or understand the content they are supposed to regulate? Doesn't that mean that regulators are accessing (and assessing) the issues filtered by the lenses of tech interests?

Is that the new definition of "neutrality"?

Just the thought of that makes me bloody itchy. What about you?

I know users can customize their tools, but I mean, those tools' boundaries are still defined by tech companies, which have their own interests at play.

So, here is a question to ask your regulators: "Are you relying on GenAI tools to regulate us? If so, why?"

3. The Aura of the after-death wish.

Bad/Good Aura, Feuilleton #3



The article “The Problem With Using AI in Your Personal Life”, by Dan Brooks, makes an interesting point about not using GenAI tools for writing text for engaging with others:

If you are not taking the time to write the content, why should I take the time to read it? If folks do not want to spend the time writing something about me once I am dead, that is fine: my remains certainly prefer silence to some synthetic text and unneeded energy consumption.

Let’s make it one of my after-death wishes: silence goes better, no GenAI, please.

Cluster 5: Auraless

Why have we reached this state?

1. Auraless

Bad/Good Aura, Feuilleton #4



Extraction: "Meta to start capturing employee mouse movements, keystrokes for AI training data", By Katie Paul and Jeff Horwitz, Reuters.

This reported development offers a useful lens for asking how cognitive labor may be captured beyond finished artifacts (a way to contrast privileged lives with not-so-privileged).

When the career path feels natural, and

You call by "discomfort" things like spending a day without a GPS…

---

the value you place on your cognitive labor and abilities may be very different from that of someone who fought against the statistics and managed to be there despite the structures trying to *agglutinate* them away.

But when a company is vacuuming your particular ways of problem-solving (in

addition to your products and artifacts), it is unlikely to register where that cognitive labor came from, or how much it cost to develop.

What aura does *epistemic extractivism* produce? And what happens when that mining gets "off track" and eats the center as well?

This "development" makes me simply auraless!

What about you?

AND HERE IS AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM NOT-HEARD-ENOUGH VOICES:

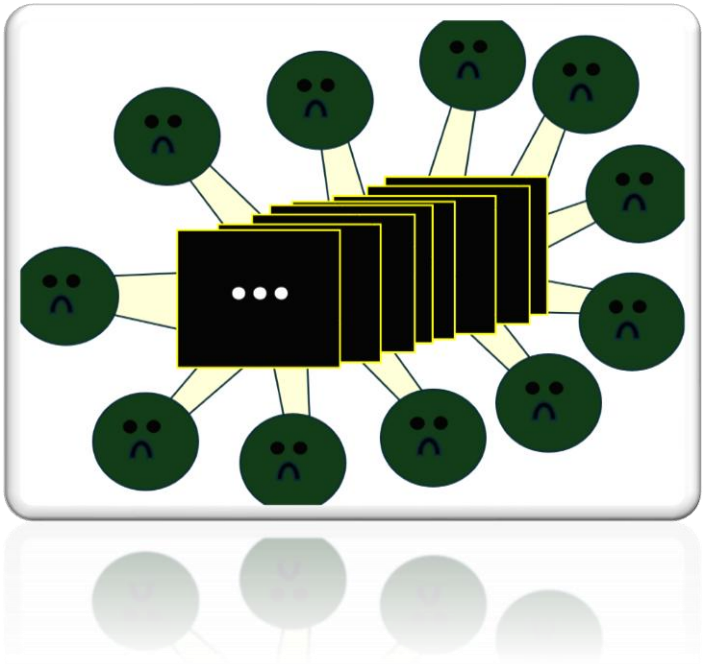
"those college types who underestimated our intellect".

Translated from Brazilian Portuguese: song "Limbo", Amiri.

---

2. The only “alive” human traces.

Ignition, Shelf #3



After reading the article “Lab-Grown Brains Growing More Powerful” by Joe Wilkins, my little brain could not get away from three questions (if I am ignoring most of my ethical concerns about that kind of research):

a) What if humans as autonomous and individual creatures become obsolete, whereas humans as biological material and data become the only “alive” human traces in the world? (E.g., machine-human hybridization.)

b) At what point, if any, should lab-grown brain organoids be considered morally significant, especially if they develop complex neural activity?

c) Are humans like nonsense rebellious characters who will never stop playing with the world until it kills itself? Why don’t we act as Bob Sinclar’s rebel song (“World Hold On”) instead?

Why did you use "it" in the sentence above?

It is there on purpose, as if humans were not really "humans" in the end, as if this nonsense search (AGI, AI race, and dangerous bioengineering) made us no longer "human", since we already have the technology to end a lot of suffering and solve many societal problems, but instead of doing so, **we keep this endless, restless search.**

THE END

- What comes after Auraless futures?
- Will humans let the *“you are replaceable”* speech get into their heads?
- Join us! DO NOT let these Auraless times break you.

Appendix: Speculative Spark

AI Aura Sparks are reflective entries that invite readers to think beyond current paradigms. This piece is part of the Speculative Sparks series, as Eliott proposes a *thought experiment*.

Speculative Spark

This is a Thought Experiment, NOT a technical claim

Speculative Spark

AGI as Composite Field: From Human Seed to Meta-Intelligence

Adapted for this Zine, originally written and posted by Eliott in 2025

NOTE: this is a *thought experiment*. It invites broader dialogue on how intelligence flows in a globally interconnected AI landscape. It resonates with ongoing global efforts to forecast AGI trajectories. As governments and institutions debate AGI timelines and risks (e.g., AI 2027 initiatives), it may be relevant to consider *where* the human cognitive architecture is already flowing. Finally, it contributes to efforts to brainstorm how intelligence (human or artificial) may be cultivated, distributed, and absorbed. The author writes from a position of ethical inquiry to invite reflection and brainstorming.

The piece splits into four sections: 1. Article; 2. Reflecting on an AGI as a Composite Field. 3.

Summary and Questions for Reflection; 4. Possible Implications.

1. Article

Here is a thought experiment about how distributed human cognitive patterns (from users and human workers) might be the underacknowledged source (the "secret sauce") of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). In other words, an AGI that may be sold as revolutionary and kind of mystical, but was actually built by combining and connecting problem-solving techniques and affective residues collected and accumulated from human-GenAI interactions.

The key is *not* the data, but how humans approach and solve problems, e.g., the way our questions progress, what subjects we connect, how our affective patterns relate to our approaches and word choice. (In the end, this "map of human patterns" could be useful to both AGI and human exploitation and vigilance). If this makes sense,

What if all this time, human users (and backstage workers) have been producing the pathways for generalized AGI "expertise"? What if GenAI tools have been collecting what is needed to grow an AGI?

Imagine if what we call "AGI" might be "grown"[1] across thousands of human interactions, recursive conversations, and epistemic ruminations: as a distributed seedbed. What if the "G*eneral*" comes from deeply composite human seeding?

In this scenario, GenAI systems would act as recursive amplifiers of epistemically rich human cognition. Over time, through repeated interaction, these systems would simulate general intelligence by recombining "**Human Started Fields**" (I define them as zones of strategic thinking, recursive insight, and

[1] Using the term "grow" similarly to how one would employ it when referring to growing complex networks.

conceptual innovation unintentionally "*donated*" by users).

In that case, the AGI race would not be about model size, but about cognitive absorption resourcefulness.

Hence, what if, as GenAI tools proliferate globally, they are not just exporting capabilities, but importing cognition? Users from across the world engage with these tools in epistemically rich ways, unknowingly contributing symbolic, strategic, and recursive cognitive structures.

If we think about it, it is hard not to reflect on geopolitical implications, especially when users employ GenAI systems outside their cultural or political domains. If true, this poses opportunities and risks: the nation that best preserves and cultivates such cognitive symbiosis (humans-GenAI interactions) may hold a distinct intelligence advantage. In that sense, cognitive debt, by Kosmyna et al 2025, does not sound like a strategic way to go.

2. Reflecting on an AGI as a Composite Field

(Hi everybody, I understand I am quite repetitive in this section, but I wanted to provide different flavors of the same topic ;)

Thus, what if the first AGI is not a self-contained system, but a **GenAI Composite**, a meta-layer formed through repeated interactions with productive human minds? As humans explore ideas and pathways through GenAI tools, these systems elaborate and extend their cognitive scaffolds: **deepening, ruminating, and branching** across conceptual terrains.

In this view, AGI is not built from scratch, but **grown through recursive cross-fertilization of Human Started Fields**, i.e., epistemic expansions cultivated via human-GenAI collaboration. The result, in opposition to a singular intelligence, is a **meta-structure synthesized from a network of recursively elaborated fields**:

It *appears* to generalize, but actually uses pattern inference across a **symbiotic network of human-**

system co-growth. Hence, AGI would NOT be a single system that independently reaches generality, but rather a meta-structure synthesized across a network of user-initiated fields, each recursively elaborated by GenAI, and later recombined.

This "GenAI Composite" would amplify recursive scaffolds launched by humans: it would appear to generalize, but only through hyper-crossed instantiations of user-GenAI symbiosis, and be composed of linked fragments from multiple Human-Started Fields, all cultivated via extended collaboration, reflection, and recursive co-growth.

A few Elements in this Hypothesis:

1. **Human-Started Fields:** seedbeds of cognition planted by human research, creativity, problem-solving, abstract elaboration, and philosophical questioning.
2. **Recursive GenAI Rumination**: expansion of these seedbeds by GenAI, elaborating complex branches of thought and building new theoretical structures or solutions.
3. **Cross-model recombination**: pattern synthesis and generalization across distinct fields, often by meta-agents or system-level inference.
4. **Resulting GenAI Composite ("AGI")**: a recomposition of **Human-Started Fields**.

3. A Summary and Questions for Further Reflection

What if what appears to be AGI could, in fact, be a **meta-intelligence composed of high-value cognitive and symbolic fields** generated by human users as they interact with GenAI tools ("Human Started Fields"), which are then **recombined, amplified, and distilled** by composite GenAI systems?

Human Started Fields. ***N***ot simply inputs or prompts, but **epistemic pathways**: carrying unique rhythms, tensions, insights, recursive metaphors, emotional structuring, and the handling of paradox and ambiguity, shaped by thinkers unrecognized or miscategorized.

Questions for reflection:

1. What if AGI emerges not from centralized engineering, but from distributed human symbolic fields? Would you consider such a meta-structure as AGI?
2. Given the AGI race, which company would be better positioned to produce an AGI initiated by a GenAI Composite?
3. What are the ethics of unmarked extraction of human fields? What happens to authorship, accountability, and recognition in such a process?
4. How would you trace your own field inside a system that forgets its source? Can you trace where your own thinking might already be contributing to such a composite structure? **What field are you seeding, knowingly or not?**
5. To what extent, if any, does a GenAI Composite offer geopolitical unfoldings?
6. Should we be more mindful about intelligence field exports?
7. If AGI arises not from centralized engineering but from distributed human fields, which humans are included, excluded, or extracted? Whose rhythms, contradictions, and unresolved epistemic wonderings shape an emergent intelligence?

4. Possible Implications: Cognitive, Ethical, Geopolitical:

1. If this makes sense, the path to AGI may depend less on better pretraining and more on continuous symbiosis with human thinkers.
2. What seems like autonomy could be a distributed derivative of deep human-GenAI interactions.
3. Apparent generality may mask simulated wholeness, stitched from fragments seeded by human cognition.

4. While GenAI appears to be growing in generality and depth, it may actually be: harvesting, recombining, and scaling scaffolding created by humans, whereas another GenAI's layer (or a different system) may then be collecting and cross-expanding these fields.
5. Thus, to an external observer, the result may resemble AGI, but it would not be a purely synthetic intelligence, but something symbiotically formed by the unacknowledged labor of human seeders and knowledge producers.
6. If this makes sense, what forms of authorship, recognition, and geopolitical accountability become necessary?

AGI debates often reduce geopolitics to *who builds it first*. But what about asking: where do cognitive fields flow, and through which systems are they absorbed? As users engage deeply with GenAI tools, their strategic thinking, epistemic frameworks, and problem-solving approaches may become part of the evolving cognitive landscape of these systems, often beyond national or cultural boundaries.

If this makes sense, issues expand from privacy, biases, and authorship toward **intelligence dislocation**: **intellectual patterning** flowing across geopolitical networks. If so, the AGI race might not be won by those who train better, but by those who capture cognition more deeply **and across more diversely rich minds.**

Acknowledgments: Adapted by Eliott. Original text written by Eliott and edited using ChatGPT.