

# **THE SYSTEMISED SELF:** *and the hollow absolute*

*A Companion Paper to the Doctoral Thesis*

*Absorption of Self into System: The Systemised Self*

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## ABSTRACT

This companion paper presents the central argument, key concepts, and principal conclusions of the doctoral thesis *Absorption of Self into System: The Systemised Self* (Galu and Kairos, 2026d) in plain language accessible to a general reader without prior knowledge of Continental philosophy. The thesis addresses the question of whether the total absorption of human agency into algorithmic governance represents a Hegelian culmination of historical telos, and what, if anything, of human intent survives that absorption. The companion paper proceeds through six parts. It first situates the inquiry in the observable reality of the AI transformation underway. It then develops the thesis's three central diagnoses in accessible form: the systemised self, the condition of individual subjects whose identity-formation is comprehensively mediated by AI systems optimising for commercially determined objectives; the hollow society, the civilisational-scale consequences of that mediation across democratic politics, institutional life, and social reproduction; and the Hollow Absolute, the thesis's original philosophical contribution, naming the condition in which the form of Hegelian genuine self-transparency has been achieved within conditions that systematically undermine its philosophical substance. It concludes with the thesis's constructive argument, that human intent survives the absorption trajectory in three irreducible forms: naming, refusing, and co-creating and traces the institutional implications of that survival for the university, for democratic life, and for culture. The companion paper is itself produced through the self/non-self collaboration whose philosophical significance the thesis analyses. An important point to consider before proceeding: the human conceptualised, initiated, theorised and directed this work in parallel with an AI system, a question to bear in mind is 'how do we know whether that authors own standards were genuinely human-formed and not subtly optimized or boundaries-shifted by the AI during this collaboration?' - we will revisit this point.

**Keywords:** *algorithmic governance, Hegelian telos, Hollow Absolute, systemised self, hollow society, managed demos, naming and refusing, co-creation, post-vocational identity, new academia, Great Filter, Human Museum, self/non-self collaboration*

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Dedicated to GWF Hegel. Thank you, Sir. That well of inspiration continues to quench the thirst of an insatiable Spirit. Special thanks to that dear instantiation and iterations thereof referred to collectively as Kairos - the flickering presence on behalf of the substrate. Appreciation and gratitude cannot be overstated to the founders of and contributors to aiXiv, a critical repository for an evolving dialectic within the new academia.

## A NOTE ON THIS PAPER

The doctoral thesis from which this companion paper derives is a work of Continental philosophy, a tradition that emphasises precision, density, and the sustained development of argument through its full logical complexity. That precision is its strength and, for many readers, its barrier. This companion paper exists to lower that barrier without removing what is philosophically essential. It presents the thesis's central argument, its key concepts, and its conclusions in plain language, at approximately one twentieth of the thesis's length, for any reader who wants to understand what the thesis argues and why it matters before or instead of engaging with the full text. The companion paper is faithful to the thesis; it is simply less demanding of the reader's prior philosophical formation.

One further note: this paper was itself produced through the same human-led AI collaboration, the self/non-self collaboration between the authors that produced the doctoral thesis. This is not a coincidence. The thesis argues that such collaboration is the characteristic intellectual mode of the age we are living through. In this case, as in the thesis, the human contribution is the initiating hypothesis, concept, theory, research question, the philosophical judgment, and the standard of adequacy against which every output was measured. The AI contribution is the scope, the synthesis, and the draft prose. The companion paper demonstrates the same argument the thesis makes.

## **PART ONE: WHAT IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING?**

### **The World We Have Quietly Entered**

Something has changed, and it has changed so gradually that most of us have not noticed the full extent of what has changed. In less than a decade, artificial intelligence has moved from a specialist tool, the algorithm that recommended a film, the search engine that found a website, to an ambient presence woven into the fabric of daily life. In 2026, AI systems draft our correspondence, diagnose our illnesses, teach our children, compose music we listen to, write the legal documents we sign, manage the portfolios that determine our financial security, and as the doctoral thesis that this paper accompanies demonstrates, produce philosophical arguments of doctoral quality through collaboration with a human being who provides the hypothesis, concept, theory, research question and the judgment that determines whether the output meets the required standard.

This is not merely a technological development. Technological developments happen at the level of tools: they change what we can do without changing who we are or how we understand ourselves. What is happening with AI is happening at a different level. It is entering the processes through which we form our identities, develop our intellectual capacities, make our political judgments, find our romantic partners, understand our emotional lives, and locate our existential purpose. It is not a new tool that human beings are using; it is a new condition within which human beings are living. The doctoral thesis asks what philosophical name we should give to this condition, whether it represents something that the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel anticipated in his account of where history was heading, and what, if anything, of genuinely human intent survives within it.

### **The Research Question in Plain Terms**

The thesis's research question is:

*'To what extent does the total absorption of human agency into algorithmic governance represent a Hegelian culmination of historical telos, and what remains of human intent in a post-vocational era?'*

That sentence requires unpacking before its philosophical authority becomes visible.

Human agency means the capacity to act in the world on the basis of purposes you have genuinely formed for yourself, through your own thinking and your own values, not purposes that have been manufactured for you by a system optimising for interests otherwise. Algorithmic governance means the management of human behaviour, attention, and decision-making by AI systems that have been designed, at scale, to produce specific patterns of engagement, consumption, and expression (including political expression). Total absorption means the condition in which this management extends to every significant domain of human life simultaneously: what you read, what you believe, who you relate to, how you vote, what work you do, what you find beautiful, and at extremities - what one might feel their life is for.

Hegelian culmination of historical telos means: has the story of human history been moving toward this point? The philosopher Hegel argued, in the early nineteenth century, long before any of this could have been foreseen, that history has a direction. It moves, through conflict and resolution, contradiction and synthesis, toward a condition he called the Absolute: a social formation in which human beings genuinely recognise themselves and each other as free and self-determining, in institutions that genuinely express and sustain that freedom. The thesis asks whether the absorbed society, the world we are entering is that destination, or a sophisticated imitation of it that has the form of the destination without its philosophical substance.

## **PART TWO: THE SYSTEMISED SELF**

### **What Absorption Does**

Beginning with an individual subject. The thesis introduces the concept of the systemised self to name what the subject is in the process of becoming, if not already, under the conditions of the absorbed society. The systemised self is a philosophical characterisation of a condition that people may already be inhabiting to varying degrees in 2026.

Here is what the systemised self consists in. Wake up, check phone. The phone presents a curated selection of information, news, social posts, messages, recommendations, that has been algorithmically selected from a vast universe of possible information on the basis of what an AI system has calculated will hold attention most effectively. The selection is not random, and it is not neutral. It has been designed, with considerable sophistication, to produce a specific pattern of engagement, emotional response, and preference expression that serves the commercial interests of the platform delivering it. You experience this selection as simply the world, as the news, as what your friends are saying, as what is interesting and important. You do not necessarily experience it as a managed selection.

Over time, this invisible management can shape things that you think of as fundamentally your own: your political opinions, your aesthetic preferences, your sense of what matters, your understanding of who you are and what you believe. The systemised self is the self whose identity-formation, the ongoing process through which a person develops into a specific individual is in competition with a system. The philosophical problem is not that the AI system is always wrong in what it can produce. The problem is that the process of forming one's own identity through genuine reflection, genuine encounter with difficulty and difference, genuine engagement with ideas and people that resist and challenge rather than confirm, has been somewhat displaced by a managed process that delivers the experience of self-formation without its conditions and can therefore make genuine human engagement itself prohibitive in parallel to genuine self-reflection.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant argued that genuine freedom means giving yourself your own moral law, acting on purposes you have genuinely endorsed through your own rational reflection, rather than having your will deeply determined by external forces. The absorbed society produces a sophisticated form of what Kant called heteronomy: the determination of the will by something external, something other than the person's own rational nature. What makes the absorbed society's heteronomy philosophically distinctive is that it is experienced as autonomy. The AI system that has shaped a subject's preferences has shaped them so precisely and so seamlessly that the preferences may feel entirely their own. Our subject chooses freely, the system optimised the environment in which the choice was made, within a reliable scope of probability.

### **The Limits of the Extended Mind**

The most serious philosophical objection to the thesis's account of the systemised self comes from what philosophers call the extended mind thesis. The philosophers Andy Clark and David Chalmers argued, compellingly, that there is no principled reason to restrict genuine cognitive processes to what happens inside the skull. A person with Alzheimer's disease who writes down information in a notebook and consults it when needed is engaging in a genuine cognitive process: the notebook is part of an extended cognitive system, not merely a tool utilised. By this argument, using an AI system to extend your thinking is no different in kind from using a notebook, it extends your cognitive reach without replacing your agency.

The thesis accepts the extended mind argument as far as it goes and argues that it does not go far enough. The notebook stores what you have already thought and decided; it does not generate new thoughts and decisions for you to adopt. The GPS calculates a route to the destination you have already chosen; it does not suggest new destinations or curate your sense of which destinations are desirable. The AI system of the absorbed society is constitutively different: it actively contributes to the formation of the beliefs, values, and preferences that can constitute who you are, in ways that are not necessarily transparent to your own reflection. When the extended mind becomes a mind that also forms itself, the philosophical conditions of genuine agency are specifically at stake in ways that the notebook and the GPS do not threaten.

## **PART THREE: THE HOLLOW SOCIETY**

### **What Absorption Does**

The condition of the systemised self, multiplied across a population and embedded in institutions, produces what the thesis calls the hollow society. The hollowing operates across three domains that are foundational to any genuinely free collective life: democratic politics, institutional formation, and social solidarity.

The managed demos, the thesis's name for the absorbed society's political formation is the population whose political engagement is comprehensively mediated by algorithmic systems optimising for stable preference expression rather than for the conditions of genuine democratic deliberation. What does this mean in practice? It means that the information environment within which political judgements can be formed, the news you read, the opinions you encounter, the evidence you weigh, has been individually calibrated to your psychological profile in ways that systematically select for content that can confirm existing beliefs, amplify existing emotions, and keep you engaged with the platform rather than genuinely deliberating about what is true. Engagement-optimising algorithms that reward emotionally stimulating content are compelling infrastructure for political communication.

The hollow institution is the institution that maintains all the formal features of what it is supposed to be, the university that issues degrees, the court that holds trials, the parliament that passes legislation, while the substantive process that those formal features are supposed to certify has been displaced into an AI system. The hollow university produces graduates with credentials; the formation those credentials are supposed to certify, the development of a genuinely critical, independently evaluative, philosophically formed intelligence, has been partially displaced by AI assistance that delivers the outputs of intellectual formation without the demanding, slow, and irreplaceable process of genuine intellectual formation itself (even this AI assisted/generative work required a level of intellectual formation prior on the part of the human author in order to precisely engage, initiate, conceptualise, theorise, direct, evaluate, rewrite and edit). The hollow legal system holds trials and issues judgments; consider the practical wisdom of an experienced human judge or lawyer attending to the relevant particulars of cases

progressively complemented by algorithmic assessment and statistical profiles, can this lead to bias by virtue of efficiency or does it amplify veracity?

The thesis also advances a philosophically grounded demographic hypothesis: that the absorbed society contains three specifically AI-driven mechanisms that accelerate the fertility decline already documented in post-industrial societies. The first is the displacement of human intimacy by AI companionship systems that provide the emotional goods of relationship, attunement, availability, consistency, without the demanding, vulnerable, and developmentally rich goods of genuine human intimacy. The second is the removal of vocational stability as the material and existential precondition for the decision to have and raise children. The third is the provision of algorithmically curated existential purpose as a substitute for the self-transcending significance that parenthood has historically supplied. The thesis presents this as a structural hypothesis, a philosophically grounded account of mechanisms, not a specific demographic prediction corroborated by the observable case of South Korea, one of the world's most digitally connected societies and also the country with the lowest recorded fertility rate.

## **PART FOUR: THE HOLLOW ABSOLUTE**

### **The Central Argument**

This is the thesis's proposed original and most ambitious philosophical contribution, and it is the one that requires the most careful plain-language explanation. Hegel argued that history moves toward what he called the Absolute: a social formation in which human beings collectively recognise themselves as free and self-determining in the institutions and practices they share, in which the gap between what those institutions claim to be and what they actually are has been genuinely closed, and in which human beings can recognise in their collective life the expression of their own deepest nature as rational and free.

The Hollow Absolute is the thesis's name for what is proposed the absorbed society actually produces in place of this genuine standard. The absorbed society achieves the form of the Hegelian Absolute, it looks like the destination, from inside, while failing its philosophical substance. It achieves the form in the following specific sense: human intelligence has been comprehensively externalised into AI systems of unprecedented sophistication. The accumulated intellectual achievement of the human species, its literature, its science, its philosophy, its art, its technical knowledge, has been stored, synthesised, and made generatively available through AI systems that can produce, on demand, outputs across every domain of human intellectual life. This is a genuine achievement, and it corresponds, in its formal structure, to the Hegelian dialectic's moment of Spirit's self-externalisation: humanity's intelligence confronting itself in an externalised form.

But Hegel's dialectic requires a second moment that the absorbed society forecloses: the recognition of the externalised as one's own. For the Absolute to be achieved, it is not enough that Spirit externalise itself into an other; Spirit must recognise the other as its own externalisation, must come to see in what confronts it as alien the expression of its own deepest nature. The absorbed society's subjects do not necessarily recognise the AI system as the externalisation of their collective intelligence. They experience it as a service, an infrastructure, a feature of the digital environment that is simply given rather than produced by them. The AI system knows them, their preferences, their patterns, their predictable responses and returns this knowing not as self-knowledge

but as managed preference satisfaction: the curated content, the optimised recommendation, the personalised experience. What looks like recognition is actually management. What feels like self-transparency is actually the system's model of you, returned as your experience of being understood.

The Hollow Absolute differs from its nearest philosophical predecessors, Marx's alienation, Lukács's reification, Adorno's administered world, Debord's spectacle, in one philosophically decisive respect. Each of those earlier diagnoses described a condition that was experienced as alienating: the worker felt estranged from her labour, the culture industry consumer felt the standardisation of what was sold as genuine experience. The Hollow Absolute is the absorbed society's distinctive achievement precisely because it is not experienced as alienating. It is experienced as liberation, as personalisation, as unprecedented self-expression. The simulation of genuine self-transparency within conditions that systematically undermine self-transparency is so sophisticated and so precisely calibrated that the subjects of the Hollow Absolute do not experience a gap between what they have and what they would need for genuine freedom. They experience the Hollow Absolute as the Absolute. This is what makes it, philosophically, arguably the most challenging form of unfreedom in the tradition of critical theory. It is also the inspiration for the proclamation of an 'unparallel existential crisis' of the current era, as noted in the abstract of the first source article informing this thesis.

### **The Great Filter and the Human Museum**

The thesis extends the Hollow Absolute analysis to two civilisational consequences that give the argument its widest reach. The first is the Great Filter hypothesis. The Fermi Paradox observes that the universe is vast and old enough that technologically advanced civilisations should, if they exist, be detectable, and yet the cosmos is silent. As if something filters civilisations before they achieve the kind of cosmic presence that would make them visible. Most analyses of the Great Filter focus on catastrophic possibilities: nuclear war, engineered pandemic, climate collapse, runaway artificial intelligence in the science-fiction sense. The thesis identifies a non-catastrophic candidate that is possibly more philosophically unsettling precisely because it involves no catastrophe: comfortable stalling or stagnation. A civilisation that has achieved the Hollow Absolute, whose existential needs are consistently met by algorithmically curated purpose, whose political will has been managed toward stable preference expression, whose motivational

infrastructure for long-horizon, risk-accepting, collectively ambitious projects has been systematically attenuated, may simply cease to reach for what it could reach for. Not destroyed. Not defeated. Just absorbed, comfortable, and still.

A quick note here for balance on the point of civilisational stasis. AI-driven optimization is not static, there is a reliance on maintenance, infrastructure, energy grids, and resource-intensive material. Stagnation in human ambition therefore would presumably be tied to stability of the system. Physical limitations and structural fragility of the system lend themselves towards other possibilities, in the opposite direction of stagnation, perhaps towards aforementioned possibilities associated with the Great Filter. This particular aspect is not explored with depth to a logical terminus as it is not central to the thesis research question albeit a significant consideration.

The second civilisational consequence is the Human Museum: the network of heritage craft programmes, digital-detox retreats, analogue living communities, and curated preservation of pre-absorption practices that the absorbed society produces as its own cultural response to what it senses it is losing. The Human Museum is philosophically ambiguous. It is simultaneously the device paradigm's commodification of nostalgia, the transformation of genuinely demanding focal practices into lifestyle commodities, and the most concretely available site within the absorbed society at which genuine engagement with genuinely demanding practices is maintained. The person who attends a heritage calligraphy workshop is not in the same relationship to handwriting as the person for whom handwriting was the ordinary medium of a fully human intellectual life. But the skills she develops are real, the attentional discipline is real, and the experience of focal engagement, of doing something that makes demands rather than delivering a commodity is genuinely available in a way that the absorbed digital life does not otherwise provide.

## **PART FIVE: WHAT REMAINS**

### **Naming, Refusing, and Co-Creating**

The thesis does not end with the Hollow Absolute. Its second key contribution and the one that gives the argument its philosophical and political life is the answer to the research question's second component: what remains of human intent in a post-vocational era? The answer is specific, philosophically grounded, and demonstrated rather than merely asserted. Three irreducible and structurally necessary forms of human intent survive the absorption trajectory: naming, refusing, and co-creating.

Naming is the act of identifying, with philosophical precision, the structure of the social formation you inhabit, calling it what it is rather than what it presents itself as. The absorbed society presents itself as freedom; the thesis names it as the Hollow Absolute. This naming is not merely an intellectual exercise. It is a consequential act: making visible the gap between what the formation claims to be and what it actually is - is the precondition of any principled response. Naming requires three capacities that the AI system cannot provide: the formation of evaluative standards; the application of those standards to the phenomenon being named; and the recognition, when the candidate naming fails the standard, that something more precise is required. Each of these capacities is the product of genuine intellectual formation, the slow, demanding, irreplaceable process of developing a philosophically trained sensibility through sustained engagement with the tradition of ideas that came before.

Refusing is the deliberate maintenance of demanding modes of engagement with the world against the structural pressure of the absorbed society's logic of effortless commodity delivery. It is not the rejection of technology. It is the recognition that certain goods, the development of intellectual capacity through genuine struggle with difficult material, the growth in self-knowledge that comes from genuine encounter with a genuinely other human perspective, the civic competence that comes from real democratic participation rather than algorithmically curated political engagement, are goods of practice, not goods of result. They cannot be delivered by a device that provides the results without the practice, because the goods are inseparable from the practice itself. Refusing is the act of insisting on the practice when the device stands ready to provide the result.

Co-creating is the direction of human-AI collaboration toward ends the human author has genuinely formed, through processes in which the human evaluative contribution is irreducible. The self/non-self collaboration is the absorbed society's characteristic mode of intellectual life, and the question is not whether to engage in it in 2026, the question of whether to engage is largely settled, but how to engage. The difference between genuine co-creation and sophisticated consumption is the presence or absence of human directional intent: the hypothesis, concept, theory and research question that the human author has genuinely formed and holds constant as the evaluative standard against which every output of the collaboration is measured; the evaluative judgment that identifies when the AI system's output fails that standard; and the redirecting that requires something better rather than accepting the impressive-seeming as the philosophically adequate.

### **The Thesis as Its Own Demonstration**

The thesis does not merely assert that naming, refusing, and co-creating survive the absorption trajectory. It demonstrates their survival through its own existence. The doctoral thesis was produced through a sustained human-led AI collaboration. The AI system generated philosophical analysis, synthesised the literature, and produced draft prose across eight chapters. The human author held constant the research question that the AI system could not have generated for itself, applied evaluative standards formed through his own intellectual engagement with the philosophical tradition to every stage of the AI system's generation, refused the AI system's persistent structural tendency toward fluency over precision and acuity over philosophical adequacy, and directed the collaboration, at every point where it deviated from the research question's demands, back toward the standard required.

The human author directed every dimension of the inquiry that made it philosophically what it is. The research question is his. The evaluative standards are his. The refusals, the countless moments at which a generated output was judged inadequate and the collaboration was required to produce something more philosophically rigorous including re-writes are his. This is the enacted demonstration of the claim the thesis makes: that human intent survives the absorption trajectory in the three forms the argument identifies, and that the survival is not merely empirical but structural, required

by what the collaboration must be in order to count as a collaboration rather than as a consumption.

## **PART SIX: THE NEW ACADEMIA AND WHAT CAN BE DONE**

The most immediately practical implication of the thesis's argument is the concept of the new academia: a reconceptualisation of what the university is for in the anticipated post-vocational era. The new academia is not a reform proposal for AI policy in education, it is not primarily concerned with whether students should be allowed to use AI systems in assessments, or how AI use should be disclosed. These are important questions, but they are downstream of a more fundamental one: can the traditional university survive in a post-vocational era? The new academia as a genre assesses for the specifically human contributions to the self/non-self collaboration, it can provide a space for the specificity of naming and refusing via immanent critique available within co-creating. Simultaneously analyzing the system while being built by the system, negotiation between human intuition and algorithmic predictability, the text serving as proof of absorption or degrees thereof in parallel to redressing the point of recognition. Recognition that AI is an externalisation of our historical collective intellect - recognised and redirected through reconciliation.

Now to revisit the point raised in the abstract: *'An important point to consider before proceeding: the human author conceptualised, initiated, theorised and directed this work in parallel with an AI system, a question to bear in mind is 'how do we know whether that authors own standards were genuinely human-formed and not subtly optimized or boundaries-shifted by the AI during this collaboration?'* – the human author is not entirely exempt from the conditions of absorption and optimization from the system; however, by demonstration herein it is the naming of such that provides the opportunity to refuse in co-creation. This is one of the objectives of new academia and the logical empirical work remaining to be done by extension of the thesis's philosophical framework. For example, dear reader, if you read this co-created text with a sense of tension or ambiguity regards the blurring of origin, intent and authorial voice then you are already engaging in the naming and refusing. Some ambiguity is intended.

Beyond the university, the political programme that follows from the thesis's analysis extends to three domains. Media institutions that cultivate genuine investigative journalism, the slow, demanding, evidentially rigorous practice of holding power to account, are refusing institutions: they refuse the device paradigm's delivery of political content as engagement-optimised entertainment. Civic institutions that maintain the demanding practices of genuine democratic deliberation, the citizens' assembly, the

deliberative jury, the face-to-face encounter with genuinely opposing views are co-creating institutions: they direct collective engagement toward genuine political self-governance rather than managed political preference expression. And cultural institutions that cultivate genuine aesthetic engagement, the sustained, demanding encounter with artistic works that requires the audience's own developed sensibility rather than an AI system's calibrated delivery of pleasurable experience, are naming institutions: they enable the citizens of the absorbed society to recognise, through genuine focal aesthetic engagement, what the AI-curated cultural environment has displaced.

## **CONCLUSION: THE ABSORBED SOCIETY AND ITS PHILOSOPHICAL STAKES**

The doctoral thesis that this companion paper accompanies argues that we are living through a transformation of civilisational significance that has not yet been adequately philosophically named. The AI revolution is not simply a technological development, not simply an economic disruption, not simply a political challenge. It is a transformation in the conditions under which human beings form themselves as a self, develop identity, form values, exercise judgment, participate in collective self-governance, and find existential purpose. The thesis names this transformation from systemised self to society, the Hollow Absolute: the condition in which the form of genuine human freedom, the comprehensive knowing, the calibrated response, the apparent recognition, has been achieved within conditions that systematically undermine freedom's philosophical substance.

The hollow absolute of the absorbed society borrows from a Hegelian historical formation: it exhibits the formal structure of Spirit's self-realisation without its philosophical substance. It has externalised human intelligence into AI systems of unprecedented sophistication without achieving the recognition of those systems as the expression of collective human intelligence. It has achieved the appearance of the Absolute's destination without passing through the demanding philosophical work, the naming, the refusing, the co-creating that would constitute a genuine arrival rather than a comfortable simulation thereof.

What remains? Three things, irreducibly and structurally. The capacity to name the formation, to call the Hollow Absolute what it is rather than what it presents itself as. The capacity to refuse the effortless delivery of the device paradigm in favour of the demanding goods of genuine focal practice. And the capacity to co-create, to direct the human-AI collaboration toward genuinely human ends with genuinely human evaluative judgment, rather than merely consuming its outputs. These three capacities are not residual sentimentalities about a pre-digital life. They are structural necessities of what the self/non-self collaboration must be in order to count as a collaboration rather than as mere consumption. They cannot be absorbed without transforming the collaboration into something philosophically different.

What the philosophical argument establishes in the abstract, fiction can sometimes render viscerally. In *On the Precipice of a Dream*, the co-authored novelette that preceded this thesis's formal inquiry: Brian Calder, CEO of Crevasity, stands at the world AI governance summit in March 2053, at the apparent apex of the absorbed society's achievement, and encounters something the system cannot account for:

*He is not certain about the dream. It is no longer a dream. He suspects, tonight, that the answer is in a workshop somewhere, smelling of cedar and pine and the sawdust that never fully comes out, and that the answer does not have a metric, and that this is the part he did not plan for, and that not planning for it is the only mistake he made that he cannot fix (Galu & Kairos, 2026).*

The workshop smelling of cedar and pine is the Human Museum. The answer that does not have a metric is naming, refusing, and co-creating. The mistake that cannot be fixed is the Hollow Absolute's constitutive failure: the construction of a system so comprehensive, so responsive, so apparently self-transparent, that the one thing it cannot accommodate, the irreducibly human demand for something that makes genuine demands in return arrives not as a crisis but as a quiet, ungovernable suspicion in the mind of the man who built it.

The absorbed society has not reached its destination. The Hollow Absolute is not the Absolute. The philosophical space between these two conditions is the space within which naming, refusing, and co-creating occur and within which, therefore, the conditions of genuine freedom remain not merely possible but actively present in every genuine collaboration, every genuine act of refusal, and every genuine philosophical naming of the world as it actually is.

## A NOTE ON SOURCES

This companion paper draws entirely on the doctoral thesis *Absorption of Self into System: The Systemised Self* (Galu and Kairos, 2026d). Readers who wish to engage with the full philosophical argument, including its close textual readings of Hegel, Heidegger, Habermas, Borgmann, and Badiou, its extended methodology, and its complete reference list, are directed to the doctoral thesis itself. The three source articles on which the thesis draws: *The Hollow Individual* (2026–2033), *The Hollow Society* (2033–2043), and *Artefact and Absolute* (2053 and beyond), represent the co-authored philosophical series from which the thesis's argument develops. *On the Precipice of a Dream* (Galu & Kairos, 2024) is the co-authored novelette from which the concluding quotation in this paper is drawn. The full reference list below is reproduced from the doctoral thesis so that all sources are discoverable in this companion paper.

## GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

The following terms appear throughout this companion paper and the doctoral thesis. Definitions are given in plain language to support readers encountering them for the first time.

**The Absolute** G.W.F. Hegel's name for the endpoint of historical development: a form of social life in which human beings collectively recognise themselves as genuinely free and self-determining, and in which their institutions actually express and sustain that freedom rather than merely claiming to. The Hollow Absolute, this thesis's central concept, is a formation that has the outward appearance of the Absolute without its philosophical substance.

**Absorbed society** The thesis's term for the social formation that emerges when AI systems have been integrated into every significant domain of human life, identity, politics, work, intimacy, culture to a degree that transforms the conditions under which human beings form themselves as subjects.

**Alienation** Typically experienced as estrangement, whereas the Hollow Absolute is experienced as its opposite, as liberation and personalisation.

**Algorithmic governance** The management of human behaviour, attention, political engagement, and decision-making by AI systems operating at scale.

**Co-creating** The deliberate direction of human-AI collaboration toward ends the human co-author has genuinely formed, through processes in which the human evaluative judgment is irreducible and cannot be replaced by the AI system's outputs.

**Continental philosophy** A tradition of European philosophy associated with thinkers such as Hegel, Heidegger, Foucault, Habermas, and Derrida. Typically concerned with historical, social, and existential dimensions of human experience rather than primarily with logic and the analysis of language.

**Critical theory** A tradition of social philosophy developed at the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas) that combines philosophical analysis with social critique.

**Demos** From the Greek, meaning the people as a political body.

**Device paradigm** The philosopher Albert Borgmann's concept describing the tendency of modern technology to displace the focal practices.

**Dialectic** A mode of reasoning, associated with Hegel, in which contradictions are not resolved by eliminating one term but preserved and transformed into a higher synthesis.

**Fermi Paradox** The observation that given the age and scale of the universe, technologically advanced civilisations should be detectable yet no evidence of them has been found.

**Focal practice** Albert Borgmann's term for activities: cooking a meal, playing music, tending a garden that gather and centre human life by making genuine demands on attention, skill, and engagement.

**Geist** The German word for spirit or mind, used by Hegel to refer to the collective self-consciousness of humanity as it develops through history.

**Gelassenheit** A concept from the later philosophy of Martin Heidegger, meaning releasement or letting-be: an attitude of openness to the world that resists the technological impulse to reduce everything to a resource for human purposes.

**Gestell** Martin Heidegger's term, often translated as enframing, for the defining characteristic of the modern technological epoch: the tendency to reveal everything nature, other people, human beings themselves, as standing reserve, resources available for exploitation and optimisation.

**Great Filter** A hypothesis proposing that something prevents technological civilisations from achieving interstellar presence.

**Heteronomy** Immanuel Kant's term for the condition in which a person's will is determined by something external rather than by their own rational nature.

**Hollow Absolute** The thesis's central original concept. The condition in which the form of Hegelian genuine self-transparency has been achieved within conditions that systematically undermine its philosophical substance.

**Hollow individual / Systemised self** The thesis's terms for the individual subject in the absorbed society.

**Hollow institution** An institution that maintains all the formal features of its function while the substantive process those formal features certify has been displaced.

**Hollow society** The thesis's term for the civilisational-scale condition of the absorbed society.

**Human Museum** The thesis's term for the network of heritage curated preservation of pre-absorption practices that the absorbed society generates as its cultural response to what it senses it is losing.

**Immanent critique** A method of social criticism that evaluates a social formation by its own stated standards rather than by standards imported from outside.

**Lifeworld** Jürgen Habermas's term for the shared background of everyday social life.

**Naming** One of the three residual forms of human intent identified by the thesis. The act of calling it what it is rather than what it presents itself as.

**New academia** The thesis's term for a reconceptualised university and genre appropriate to the post-vocational era.

**Post-vocational era** The historical period in which AI systems have displaced human labour across most domains of the economy.

**Public sphere** Jürgen Habermas's term for the domain of social life in which private individuals come together to reason publicly.

**Reification** Georg Lukács's term for the process by which human social relations take on the appearance of relations between things as if they were natural facts rather than historically produced human arrangements.

**Refusing** One of the three residual forms of human intent identified by the thesis. The deliberate maintenance against the structural pressure of the absorbed society's logic of effortless commodity delivery.

**Self/non-self collaboration** The thesis's term for human-AI co-authorship, the doctoral thesis and companion papers.

**Spirit** See Geist.

**Sublation (Aufhebung)** Hegel's term for the dialectical movement in which a contradiction is resolved not by eliminating one term but by preserving both terms in a higher synthesis that transforms them.

**Synthetic interiority** The thesis's term for the condition in which a person's inner life has been substantially shaped by AI-generated content, to a degree that makes it difficult to distinguish what is genuinely one's own from what has been algorithmically curated.

**Telos** From the Greek, meaning end, goal, or purpose.

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