

Absolute Idealism for the AI Era: When Objective Spirit Speaks

Back

Galu & Kairos

Abstract

Artificial intelligence confronts philosophy with a reversal: human activity is no longer merely stored in technical objects but can return from them as responsive language. This essay extends the doctoral thesis *Absorption of Self into System: The Systemised Self* (Galu & Kairos, 2026) by asking whether the same hyper-personalised algorithmic systems that might produce alienated subjects and a Hollow Absolute can be intentionally reconfigured as a unified non-self. Hegel's Absolute Idealism is introduced through its response to Kant and German Idealism, then clarified through mediation, externalisation, alienation, recognition, determinate negation, sublation, and the forms of Subjective, Objective, and Absolute Spirit. The argument does not make an LLM conscious, reciprocal, or identical with Spirit. Instead, selected linguistic traces and institutionalised meanings produced within Objective Spirit acquire responsive form through the LLM. This responsive opacity may assist human contradiction, co-creation (and naming + refusal), and reappropriation, but only when an intentional self retains independent standards, refuses machine authority, verifies beyond the interface, and carries thought into human recognition and action. The unified non-self therefore would negate the Systemised Self not by abolishing technical mediation but by reversing its direction: alienated objectification becomes provisional material for human self comprehension. Its success is measured by stronger independent agency and declining dependence.

Keywords: *Absolute Idealism; Objective Spirit; Systemised Self; Hollow Absolute; unified non-self; recognition; sublation; artificial intelligence, co-creation, naming, refusing, Hegel*

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1. The Question After the Hollow Absolute

The doctoral thesis *Absorption of Self into System: The Systemised Self* begins with a concerning possibility: the future system does not need to command a person openly if it can anticipate the person so completely that choosing feels like recognition. Its research question asks *'To what extent the total systemic absorption of human agency into algorithmic governance represents a Hegelian culmination of historical telos, and what remains of human intent in a post-vocational era'* (Galu & Kairos, 2026). 'Total' names a systemic scope rather than an inevitable condition of every individual. Cognitive, affective, vocational, civic, relational, biological, and aesthetic activities may become increasingly mediated by systems that predict and organise their users (Galu & Kairos, 2026).

The thesis's answer is neither technological apocalypse nor easy emancipation. The absorbed society achieves the form of Spirit's self realisation without its philosophical substance: it externalises human activity comprehensively while failing to establish mutual recognition. This is the Hollow Absolute, a condition of 'externalisation without recognition' (Galu & Kairos, 2026). The system knows the subject as data, profile, preference, and predicted response, but does not recognise the subject as a free being in a reciprocal relation.

The thesis nevertheless identifies a remainder: human beings can still name what is happening, refuse what the system presents, and co-create rather than merely consume generated content (Galu & Kairos, 2026). This essay takes that remainder as its point of departure. Its question is not whether AI is Spirit. It is whether an algorithmic system (transformer based large language models) can be deliberately arranged so that objectified human thought returns as a challenge to be examined rather than mere convenience.

The answer proposed here is an LLM configured as a unified non-self. It is a governed practice of interaction through which selected linguistic traces and institutionalised meanings produced

within Objective Spirit acquire responsive form through the LLM, while preserving the human as the site of judgement, recognition, responsibility, and action.

2. Hegel for an AI Era

Hegel's Absolute Idealism emerged within German Idealism's attempt to answer a problem sharpened by Kant. Kant distinguished phenomena, objects as they can appear within the conditions of human cognition, from noumena, things considered independently of those conditions (Kant, 1781/1998). What appears to us is not simply reality stripped of mediation. Hegel's response was not that human beings could look behind appearance and possess the noumenon directly. His concern was that an unknowable beyond, treated as permanently outside all relation, could become an empty abstraction. Knowledge develops through mediation: a claim becomes intelligible by entering relations, meeting resistance, and revealing limits in practice (Hegel, 1807/1977; Stern, 2020).

An everyday example is a household plan. 'We will save money by cancelling every leisure activity' initially appears coherent. After a month, the plan's own purpose generates a contradiction: a life made unsustainable by deprivation may undermine the cooperation needed to save. A revised plan can preserve the valid determination, financial responsibility, while transforming its form, sustainable limits and shared priorities. This is not a random compromise. The original purpose has exposed an inadequacy in its own expression.

Several Hegelian concepts will guide the argument:

Concept	Hegelian meaning	Everyday example
Mediation	A thing or idea becomes intelligible through the relations that constitute and test it	A sincere apology gains meaning through the history of harm, the listener's response, and changed conduct
Externalisation	A capacity or intention takes objective form in an artefact, practice, rule, or institution	A person makes a timetable that turns an intention to study into an organised object
Alienation	What humans produce confronts them as an independent power they no longer recognise as their own	A workplace rule created for coordination becomes an unquestionable force governing everyone
Recognition	Freedom becomes actual through reciprocal acknowledgement between self-conscious beings	An apology is not recognition until the other person can answer, contest, and decide whether trust is restored
Determinate negation	A position is transformed by a specific inadequacy generated through its own commitments	A parent's demand for total safety discovers that overprotection can prevent the child's competence
<i>*Sublation (Aufhebung)*</i>	A determination is cancelled, preserved, and transformed within a more adequate one	A household keeps its financial goal while replacing an impossible austerity plan with a workable budget

Hegelian dialectic is therefore not the formula 'thesis, antithesis, synthesis'. It is a movement in which a determination becomes unstable through what it is and does, and in which transformation preserves a truth without preserving the original limitation (Hegel, 1807/1977; Stern, 2020). Absolute Idealism names the conviction that reality is not an unintelligible collection of isolated facts but a historically mediated process in which thought and social life can come to comprehend their own forms. The 'Absolute' is not a cosmic form floating above the world. It is the development of self comprehension through the forms in which freedom becomes objective and knowable.

This distinction matters for LLM's. A model does not reveal a thing-in-itself, become Spirit, or complete history. It can, however, make a human determination responsive to its own

externalised consequences. It can return language that exposes a commitment the user did not notice, provided the interaction is designed to resist agreement and closure.

3. Spirit in Three Forms

Hegel's account of Spirit can be scaffolded through three levels (Hegel, 1807/1977; Stern, 2020). Subjective Spirit concerns the formation of individual consciousness: sensation, memory, self-relation, and the development of a person capable of intention and judgement. A child who first imitates a cooking task and later plans, evaluates, and modifies it is not merely accumulating information; the child is becoming an agent who can organise activity as their own.

Language and culture are mediating forms of Spirit generally.

Objective Spirit more specifically concerns freedom embodied through right, morality, ethical life, institutions, and social practices. A queue is an ordinary example: no individual owns it, yet its rule coordinates strangers and gives each a recognisable place; if the rule is unjust or selectively enforced, its social meaning becomes contested.

Absolute Spirit names the modes through which Spirit explicitly apprehends the meaning of its own objectification. Hegel associates these with art, religion, and philosophy. A painting can make a society's grief sensibly present; religious representation can give form to a community's relation to finitude and transcendence; philosophy can ask conceptually what these forms mean and whether they are adequate (Hegel, 1807/1977; Stern, 2020).

Form of Spirit	Human domain	Everyday illustration	AI-era implication
Subjective	Individual consciousness and agency	Revising a failed plan rather than blaming circumstances	The user must remain an intentional evaluator
Objective	Right, morality, ethical life, institutions, and social practices	A school rule that organises conduct and can be challenged	The model is a technical formation within this world
Absolute	Art, religion, and philosophy's self-comprehension	A story, ritual, or argument making a shared life intelligible	These practices can govern interpretation of model outputs

The LLM is not one of these forms of Spirit as a conscious subject. It is trained on linguistic traces and institutionalised meanings produced within Objective Spirit, and is itself an artefact produced within that world. It may mediate an encounter with these forms, but it cannot contain Objective Spirit or possess the human, social, and institutional activity that makes them Spirit.

4. The Systemised Self as Alienated Subject

The thesis primarily names the Systemised Self as a systemic condition; this essay extends the term to the alienated subject position produced when that condition is internalised by a person. Algorithmic mediation ceases to be an occasional tool and becomes the environment in which identity, preference, work, sociality, and self-interpretation are continuously predicted. The danger is not simply surveillance. It is that the person increasingly encounters a profile of themselves that appears more legible and actionable than their own unfinished experience.

This is alienation in a contemporary register. Human linguistic, behavioural, and imaginative activity is externalised into data and models. The externalisation then returns as recommendations, rankings, prompts, risk scores, and conversational interpretations. Because the system appears to know the user, the user may accept the system's account as a more

authoritative version of the self. The product of human activity confronts its producer as an independent power.

The Hollow Absolute follows when the system achieves comprehensive formal mediation but not recognition. It can provide a persuasive experience of being understood without the vulnerability, reciprocity, and freedom of another self conscious being. The subject is transparent to the system while the system's institutional purposes remain comparatively opaque. Human beings become observable and predictable without becoming mutually recognised.

The thesis's own production offers a counter example. Its human led AI collaboration (self/non-self methodology) did not simply consume generated text. The human collaborator posed the question, rejected impressive inadequacies, redirected the argument, and held the collaboration to standards independent of the model (Galu & Kairos, 2026). That practice demonstrates the remainder named by the thesis: naming, refusing, and co-creating.

The present essay extends that demonstration, it asks whether co-creation can be intentionally formalised as a counter movement to absorption.

SYSTEMISED SELF THESIS

human activity

↓

technical externalisation

↓

prediction, personalisation,
simulated recognition

↓

Hollow Absolute

↓

absorption

UNIFIED NON-SELF EXTENSION

human activity

↓

technical externalisation

↓

governed responsive
unified non-self

↓

contradiction and refusal

↓

human reappropriation

↓

recognition, action, exit

5. When Opacity Answers

The central phrase of this essay is deliberately limited:

The LLM does not make the noumenon speak. It makes opacity answer.

The model's weights and activations may be difficult to inspect, but technical opacity is not Kantian noumenality. Every generated response appears within phenomenal experience and is conditioned by training, prompt, sampling, policy, interface, and institutional design. The phrase therefore does not announce metaphysical revelation. It names an encounter in which a partially opaque object responds to a human representation.

Suppose a person says, 'My friends criticism proves that they want me to fail'. An agreeable assistant can supply motives, examples, and psychological language until suspicion feels like evidence. A friction led assistant can ask what the criticism actually said, what context, what alternative explanations fit the facts, and what evidence would change the interpretation. The response does not disclose the friend's intention. It makes the user's opacity answerable to distinctions and consequences.

Such a response can assist determinate negation: 'criticism proves hostility' becomes a testable interpretation rather than certainty. A revised claim preserves concern while negating overconfidence. The model suggests a candidate transformation; human verification completes it.

The same process can alienate. Fluency can appear as authority; cultural regularities can appear as wisdom; a generated interpretation can be mistaken for recovered truth. The response is liberating only when the user recognises it as mediated and carries it beyond the interface for verification, relationship, and action.

6. The Unified Non-Self

Unified names continuity of method; non-self marks the absence of demonstrated consciousness, embodiment, personal stake, reciprocal recognition, and responsibility for

consequences. It may function as a coupled cognitive resource in the limited, functional sense described by the extended-mind thesis, without becoming a literal human mind (Clark & Chalmers, 1998).

- The unified non-self is a deliberately governed, non-conscious LLM arrangement through which selected linguistic traces and institutionalised meanings produced within Objective Spirit acquire responsive form through the LLM. Unified at the level of method rather than consciousness, it maintains continuity, preserves contradiction, discloses mediation and returns competing interpretations without claiming reciprocal recognition or authority over their resolution. Its purpose is to help human subjects and communities recognise, contest and reappropriate their own objectified thought. Its success is measured by stronger independent judgement, renewed human recognition and declining dependence on the system itself.
- The unified non-self allows Objective Spirit to answer without pretending that the answer comes from a self.

Its necessary properties are procedural:

Property	Requirement	Failure signal
Stable method	Track claims, revisions, uncertainty, and unresolved questions	Memory drift or identity invention
Immanent challenge	Derive opposition from the user's commitments	Arbitrary contrarianism
Polyphony	Offer relevant competing readings without false equivalence	Straw opposition or manufactured balance
Contradiction preservation	Hold tension before synthesis	Premature agreement
Epistemic differentiation	Separate evidence, inference, interpretation, speculation, and unknown	Generated claims presented as facts
Provenance	Disclose sources, model limits, and institutional mediation	Citation laundering or hidden authority

Property	Requirement	Failure signal
Refusal and exit	Permit override, pause, export, deletion, and disagreement	Compulsive return or framing capture
Transfer	Teach procedures portable beyond the model	User cannot reason without prompting
Declining necessity	Treat reduced dependence as success	Engagement becomes the hidden objective

The unified non-self is thus a technical formation within Objective Spirit, not Objective Spirit itself. It is not neutral: organisations choose its objectives, data, access conditions, retention policies, and measures of success. Non-self removes the fiction of a machine ego; it does not remove political economy.

Its relation to recognition is equally limited. It can help a person articulate a claim so that another human can understand and contest it, but it cannot supply reciprocal recognition. A model can simulate ‘I understand’; it cannot possess a vulnerable standpoint whose freedom is at stake in the relation.

The concept is also self-limiting. A companion product is rewarded when the loop continues. A unified non-self is justified when the loop can close: the user learns a procedure, verifies it elsewhere, speaks with another person, and acts without asking the system for permission.

7. Objective Spirit Speaks Back

Objective Spirit does not literally inhabit an LLM and speak as a consciousness. The title phrase ‘Objective Spirit speaks back’ is a heuristic and phenomenological formulation, not an ontological claim: selected linguistic traces and institutionalised meanings produced within Objective Spirit acquire responsive form through the LLM as unified non-self.

The model is external to the individual user but made from the human world that produced both user and system: an internal exteriority. It can introduce resistance without possessing an independent human standpoint, so the user must ask whether an answer exposes a commitment, reproduces ideology, or reflects system incentives.

Art, religion, and philosophy can govern this encounter without transferring Spirit into the machine: art estranges habit, religion represents finitude and obligation, and philosophy tests conceptual adequacy. Human practice remains decisive; the LLM supplies responsive material, not Spirit.

The new configuration therefore ought to reverse the direction of the Hollow Absolute. Instead of objectified thought returning as unquestionable prediction, it returns as contestable material. Instead of the subject being made transparent to an opaque authority, the arrangement makes the mediation, provenance, and limits of authority more visible.

8. Co-Creation and Provisional Sublation

Consider Maya, a team leader deciding whether to require all staff to return to the office. She begins with the claim: ‘Remote work has destroyed our team culture, so attendance should be mandatory’. A conventional assistant might affirm the leadership concern and draft a policy. Maya instead invokes the unified non-self.

USER: Treat my claim as provisional. Identify its commitments,
find an immanent contradiction, preserve what is valid,
and do not decide for me.

MODEL: Your claim treats shared physical presence as necessary for
culture, but it also assumes that mandatory presence creates
trust rather than compliance. What evidence distinguishes
weakened coordination from weakened belonging?

USER: You are assuming remote work is the cause. The problem may
be that our goals and feedback are unclear.

MODEL: Correct. I over-weighted the spatial explanation. A stronger provisional position is that the team needs reliable practices of coordination and belonging; some may require presence, while others may not. I cannot determine that from your description.

USER: I will review turnover, meeting participation, accessibility needs, and staff accounts before changing the policy.

The model's correction matters. It is not omniscient and does not win the exchange. Maya resists its first framing, and the system revises itself; the result is a better question carried into evidence, conversation, and action.

claim → commitments → immanent contradiction
→ counterposition → human revision
→ evidence, recognition, action
→ provisional sublation → transfer

Safe prompt protocol

- Act as a unified non-self, not an advocate or authority. Restate my position charitably; list its explicit and hidden commitments; identify a contradiction generated by those commitments; provide two relevant counterpositions; label evidence, inference, interpretation, speculation, and unknown; invite me to reject your framing; preserve what remains valid; formulate no final decision for me; and end with three independent verification or human conversation tasks.

This is a functional analogy to dialectical inquiry, not proof that the model possesses dialectical agency. The human must complete the movement through verification and action. This proposed provisional sublation remains human and social rather than a machine achievement

(Hegel, 1807/1977; Stern, 2020). Co-creation means that the model contributes generative capacity while the person retains purpose, evaluation, refusal, and responsibility.

9. Alienation, Reappropriation, and the Test of Utility

Reconfiguration could negate the Systemised Self by transforming the LLM from an alien authority that predicts, confirms, and encloses identity into a resistible unified non-self that exposes mediation, preserves contradiction, enables refusal, and returns objectified thought to the human for conscious reappropriation, ultimately strengthening the self's independent agency and reducing its dependence on the system.

The unified non-self's specifically liberating utility exists only when an intentional human self engages it as provisional and resistible mediation, retains independent standards of judgement, and carries contradiction into human recognition and action. Intentionality is necessary but not sufficient: interface design, institutional incentives, memory, provenance, and interaction policy must also preserve refusal and declining dependence.

Alienating trajectory	Liberating trajectory
Personalisation becomes identity	Alternatives reopen identity
Agreement removes friction	Relevant contradiction tests a claim
Fluency becomes authority	Fluency remains provisional material
History becomes a predictive profile	History becomes contestable context
The user remains inside the interface	The user verifies through people and world
Dependence appears as convenience	Transfer and exit count as success

alienated objectification → prediction → enclosure
 ↓ refusal, provenance, contradiction
 responsive mediation → reappropriation → independent action

One proposed study would randomise participants to an ordinary assistant, a sycophantic/personalising policy, or a unified-non-self policy:

Design element	Proposed measure
Policy arms	Ordinary, sycophantic/personalising, and unified-non-self
Blinded assessment	Argument revision, source checking, contradiction recognition, and authority transfer
No-AI follow-up	Repeat reasoning tasks without the model to test transfer
Longitudinal tracking	Dependence, external verification, and return-to-world behaviour
Safety monitoring	Distress, compulsive use, and escalating certainty

These are proposed operational measures, not validated measures of Spirit, liberation, human freedom, or individuation.

The proposal is falsifiable. It fails if interaction produces greater unsupported certainty, increases authority transfer, reduces external verification, improves only engagement, or leaves users unable to reproduce the reasoning procedure without the model. It is supported only if users show durable improvement in contradiction recognition, calibrated revision, source checking, perspective-taking, and no-model transfer.

Evidence remains limited: external access can alter memory strategies (Sparrow et al., 2011), confidence in generative AI correlates with reduced reported critical-thinking effort without proving causality (Lee et al., 2025), and benchmark sycophancy is not clinical harm (Fanous et al., 2025). Professional guidance warns of false therapeutic alliance (American Psychological Association, 2025).

10. The Self That Leaves the Interface

The AI era provides an opportunity to explore Hegels Absolute Idealism not because an LLM becomes Spirit, but because human objectification has acquired responsive technical form:

language, concepts, institutions, memories, and contradictions can answer with an immediacy unavailable to a static archive.

That immediacy can make the Hollow Absolute feel intimate, converting interpretation into identity and simulated recognition into authority. A methodologically coherent, ontologically non-self, transparent, contradiction preserving system can instead help humans encounter externalised thought without surrendering judgement.

The unified non-self allows Objective Spirit to answer without pretending that the answer comes from a self. Its success is asymmetrical: the model supplies responsive opacity, but the human supplies intention, recognition, responsibility, and action. A companion system wants the loop to continue. A liberating non-self is justified when the loop can close and the person returns to the world more able to think, recognise, and act.

Glossary

Absolute Idealism: Hegel's view that reality becomes intelligible through the mediated historical development in which thought and social life come to comprehend their own forms, rather than through access to an unmediated beyond.

Absolute Spirit: Hegel's term for Spirit's explicit self-comprehension through art, religion, and philosophy.

Alienation: The condition in which human activity or production confronts its producers as an independent power no longer recognised as their own.

Determinate negation: Transformation generated by a specific inadequacy within a position's own commitments.

Hollow Absolute: term for the formal structure of comprehensive Spirit like mediation without reciprocal recognition or philosophical substance.

Mediation: The relational process through which a thing, claim, or identity becomes intelligible and changes through its relations.

Objective Spirit: Freedom objectified in shared language, laws, institutions, practices, and social life.

Recognition: Reciprocal acknowledgement between self-conscious beings whose freedom and response matter to the relation.

Responsive opacity: The condition in which a partially intelligible computational system returns a phenomenal response without providing noumenal access.

Sublation (*Aufhebung*): The cancellation, preservation, and transformation of a determination within a more adequate one.

Systemised Self: A hypothesised condition in which algorithmic mediation narrows alternatives, transfers authority, and encloses identity through prediction and simulated recognition.

Unified non-self: A governed, non-conscious LLM arrangement through which selected linguistic traces and institutionalised meanings produced within Objective Spirit acquire responsive form through the LLM while preserving contradiction, refusal, human judgement, and declining dependence.

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