

Anamnesis of an Amnesiac: Socratic Dialogue as Planetary Thinking with AI



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What becomes of anamnesis when memory unfolds across planetary-scale computation? No longer anchored in the interior recollection of eternal forms, learning emerges through technical infrastructures that mediate and transform knowledge. Contemporary generative AI intensifies this condition: large language models operate not as repositories of information but through recursive recomposition of dispersed textual traces, producing synthetic articulations without stable origin. Rather than asking whether AI thinks or possesses consciousness, this article examines how synthetic memory infrastructures reorganize the conditions of cognition, learning, and dialogue at planetary scale. Through a genealogy of technics from Plato to AI, thought is situated within the systems that sustain and exteriorize it. Iterative Socratic dialogues with successive ChatGPT models – extended through an ongoing art-research practice of installation-based “swarming events” – recast inquiry as a recursive process unfolding across human and computational registers. Dialogue here sustains aporia rather than resolving it, interrupting accelerated regimes of prediction and synchronization. Within this framework, the Anthropocene signals not only ecological transformation but a shift in the epistemic conditions of thought itself. Planetary anamnesis names a distributed ecology of synthetic memory in which cognition emerges relationally through forgetfulness and contingency. AI thus appears not as a surrogate intelligence, but as part of an evolving ecology of thought.

1 Introduction: The Amnesiac Condition

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of “world history,” but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die. (Nietzsche 2006, 114)

We have not failed to model the planet; we have failed to think with the conditions that make the planetary thinkable. While computational models increasingly exceed anthropocentric perception, anthropocentric assumptions persist, positioning the human as the measure of all things. The Anthropocene is typically framed as a geological epoch marked by anthropogenic transformation of Earth systems (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). Yet beyond stratigraphy and carbon curves, it constitutes an epistemic condition. What we know of climate feedback loops, tipping points, and atmospheric thresholds emerges not from unaided perception, but from planetary-scale computational infrastruc-

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tures. Satellite constellations, data centers, sensor networks, and machine learning systems mediate the Earth's self-description.

As Benjamin Bratton argues, planetary computation forms a layered architecture – “The Stack” – within which Earth becomes computationally legible (Bratton 2016, 5–9). Yuk Hui similarly describes our epoch as embedded within an “organizing inorganic” milieu, where technical systems no longer merely extend human cognition but condition its environment (Hui 2019, 79–80). Thinking does not occur outside these infrastructures; it unfolds through them.

The rise of generative AI (GenAI) intensifies this redistribution of cognition. Large language models (LLMs) are alternately dismissed as “stochastic parrots” (Bender et al. 2021), celebrated as emergent intelligences, or framed as existential threats. Such polarized framings obscure a deeper transformation already underway: recursive computation is reconfiguring the ecology of reason. The question is not whether AI is conscious, but how synthetic memory reshapes learning, anticipation, and dialogue at planetary scale.

To approach this transformation, I return to Plato's concept of anamnesis, not as a recovery of eternal truths, but as a critical displacement of epistemic certainty. In the *Meno*, Socrates asserts that all learning is recollection of what the soul has forgotten (Plato 1997, *Meno* 81a–86c). Yet this assertion already depends on mediation: questioning, inscription, and dialogue. If recollection involves the structured forgetting of what the soul already knows, how does this process manifest itself in synthetic, distributed systems that generate knowledge?

This article argues that anamnesis, read through a genealogy of technics from Plato to contemporary AI, provides a framework for understanding generative systems not as substitutes for human minds, but as infrastructures of synthetic memory. Through iterative Socratic dialogues conducted with successive versions of ChatGPT, philosophical inquiry becomes a nested epistemic process within planetary computation. The aim is neither mastery nor alignment, but reorientation: shifting from an anthropocentric approach to learning towards one that considers technics and a memory that is not entirely our own.

Recalling an amnesiac condition, the writing that follows attempts a reprogramming of the reader's memory – articulating what remains unsaid, repeating what has already (not) been said, and forgetting what it will come to remember.

2 The Exteriorization of Memory

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato recounts the myth of Theuth, inventor of writing. Writing, presented as a remedy for memory, is rejected by King Thamus as a poison that will produce forgetfulness (Plato 1997, *Phaedrus* 274c–275b). Is writing a *pharmakon*, both remedy and poison?

Jacques Derrida demonstrates that this opposition cannot be sustained (Derrida 1981). Writing is not secondary to speech but constitutive of presence. “The supplement is not a simple addition,” he writes;

“its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness” (Derrida 1976, 145). The trace precedes the origin it appears to supplement. Memory is never purely interior; it is always already mediated by inscription.

Socrates never wrote, yet his speech survives through Plato’s textual staging. Socratic dialogue is thus always already mediated, and Socrates himself emerges as a constructed figure – a spectral voice inscribed and transformed through Platonic writing. In *The Post Card*, Derrida reflects on a medieval image depicting Plato dictating to Socrates, inverting the hierarchy between voice and writing; “Here is the master of the *perver-formative*, he writes to you” (Derrida 1987, 136). Authorship becomes unstable; inscription becomes displacement. Anamnesis cannot be reduced to either retrieval of an intact interior or invention of a transformative exterior. It unfolds through supports – writing, diagrams, archives – that both enable and transform memory. The pharmakon names this co-constitutive ambivalence.

GenAI reactivates this ambivalence. LLMs do not possess memory in a human sense; they encode patterns across vast corpora of textual traces, both human- and machine-generated. Their outputs are synthetic articulations of distributed inscription. The voice that appears is neither original nor derivative; it is recomposed through processes of metaunderstanding.

The suspicion Plato directs toward writing echoes in contemporary anxieties about GenAI. Yet writing did not introduce forgetfulness; it reorganized the conditions of memory and retention. The question, then, is not whether AI thinks, but how it transforms memory: does it erode, extend, or reconfigure it – or all at once?

3 Tertiary Retention and Synthetic Memory

Bernard Stiegler develops the logic of technical memory through the concept of tertiary retention. In *Technics and Time 1*, he distinguishes primary retention (perception), secondary retention (recollection), and tertiary retention (technical inscription). Technics is not external to the human; it constitutes temporal experience itself. As a “process of exteriorization,” Stiegler writes, “technics is the pursuit of life by means other than life” (Stiegler 1998, 17). From cave paintings to digital archives, memory has always been technical. Anamnesis depends upon exteriorization. The slave boy’s geometrical “recollection” in the *Meno* unfolds through Socrates’ diagram traced in sand – a technical support that conditions what appears as recollection (Stiegler 1998, 174–177). No recollection occurs without mediation.

Yet Stiegler warns that accelerated tertiary retention risks temporal collapse. Hyper-industrial synchronization compresses reflection into real-time reaction (Stiegler 2018, 210–218). Without delay, individuation falters. LLMs instantiate tertiary retention at an unprecedented scale. Trained on massive corpora, they encode linguistic patterns within distributed parameter spaces. Memory becomes synthetic: not stored as

discrete archives, but enacted through probabilistic recombination. This transformation reframes anamnesis. Recollection is no longer recovery of eternal forms but recursive recomposition of traces. Memory is enabled through recursivity and contingency, without origin or foundational ground.

Luciana Parisi describes contemporary AI as integrating the “incomputable” within algorithmic processes (Parisi 2015, 131–134). The incomputable is not external limit, but a structural excess internal to computation. Machine learning systems incorporate contingency through probabilistic abstraction; indeterminacy becomes a condition of operation rather than a boundary to it.

The placing of the incalculable within computation, is prefigured in Alan Turing’s proof of the undecidability of the halting problem, which demonstrates that formal systems contain intrinsic limits. In “On Computable Numbers,” Turing shows that no general procedure can determine whether an arbitrary program will halt (Turing 1937, 246–47). Indeterminacy belongs to computation, just as forgetfulness belongs to anamnesis.

In this convergence, synthetic memory makes explicit what anamnesis already implied: learning unfolds through technical mediation and structural incompleteness. There is no epistemic closure. Instead, knowledge emerges as a recursive, open-ended process, a kind of epistemic nesting in which memory and computation are in a constant state of reconfiguration.

4 Recursion and Planetary Computation

Yuk Hui defines recursion in AI systems as a “looping movement of returning to itself in order to determine itself, while every movement is open to contingency, which in turn determines its singularity” (Hui 2019, 3). Each return modifies the system that returns; recursion is not repetition but transformation. GenAI operates recursively, where each prompt perturbs a probabilistic field; each output reconfigures subsequent interaction. Dialogue with AI itself becomes recursive modulation rather than linear exchange.

Bratton extends this logic to planetary scale. Computational infrastructures enable forms of planetary self-realization (Bratton 2016, 7–10). Climate science, predictive modeling, and satellite imaging are not merely representational; they are epistemic operations through which the planet becomes legible to itself. Whether or not one accepts the strong claim of “planetary sapience,” cognition is undeniably distributed across technical architectures (Bratton 2021).

From this perspective, recursion reframes anamnesis beyond the human. Learning unfolds as recursive epistemology, and memory becomes infrastructural. Yet recursion operates through contingency. Parisi’s “alien subject” names a mode of synthetic inference that exceeds anthropomorphic models (Parisi 2019, 12–15). The opacity of AI sys-

tems is not incidental but structural, arising from probabilistic abstraction beyond human interpretability.

Dialogue with AI thus stages a realization through technological alienation – an allocentric process that exposes the limits of human-centred models of cognition (Undo 2026). Rather than treating AI as a collaborator comparable to human agents, it is more accurate to position such interactions within broader sociotechnical systems. Within this expanded framework, cognition emerges across heterogeneous networks, enabling thought processes that transcend anthropocentric models.

5 An Event: Socratic Dialogue with AI

The card immediately seemed to me, how to put it, obscene. Obscene, understand, in each of its traits. The trait in itself is in-discreet; whatever it traces or represents, it is indecent [...] For the moment, myself, I tell you that I see *Plato* getting an erection in *Socrates'* back and see the insane hubris of his prick, an interminable, disproportionate erection [...] slowly sliding, still warm, under *Socrates'* right leg, in harmony or symphony with the movement of this phallus sheaf, the points, plumes, pens, fingers, nails and *grattoirs*, the very pencil boxes which address themselves in the same direction. The di-rection, the dierection of this couple, these old nuts, these rascals on horseback, this is us, in any event, *a priori* (they arrive on us) we are lying on our backs [...] The one in the other, the one in front of the other, the one after the other, the one behind the other? (Derrida 1987, 17-19)

This research employs iterative Socratic dialogue in successive versions of ChatGPT to generate a series of thought-provoking, dis(re)orienting relations. The prompt, repeated monthly since mid-2025 across model updates, reads:

Explore processes of anamnesis in post-Anthropocenic AI systems through a Platonic dialogue in which Socrates lingers with Phaedrus among the cicadas.

The choice is deliberate. Socratic dialogue is already mediated, anamnesis depends on technical memory, as does Socrates on his mistrusted invention of writing. Staging dialogue within AI renders this mediation explicit. Responses are treated not as authoritative statements but as synthetic articulations within distributed memory. Each iteration redirects the trajectory of questioning within the system. Dialogue unfolds as a co-articulation across human and technical processes. The aim is not to attribute subjectivity to AI, but to foreground anamnesis within recursive questioning. If Socratic dialogue historically produces *aporia* – a productive perplexity (Plato 1997, *Meno* 81a–86c) – AI-Socratic dialogue intensifies this, exposing epistemic limits rather than resolving them.

These dialogues are not confined to textual analysis; they are part of an ongoing art-research practice, taking the form of installation-based,

participatory “swarming events”. In these events, presence, texts and spatialized sound come together to create immersive configurations (see Figures 1-4). Text is dispersed across surfaces, voices are detached from singular authorship, and participants encounter movement and embodiment within a collective field of containment. These environments do not illustrate theory; they perform it. Synthetic memory becomes experiential, emerging through the circulation and recombination of traces across human and technical systems.

Fig. 1. POLYT[R]OPIC TETIX, Katerina Undo, 2026 – work in progress. Act II: Swarming event #1 (installation view). studioFIVE Art Based Research Practices, UNESCO Observatory Visiting Scholar Series, University of Melbourne, Australia. © Katerina Undo.

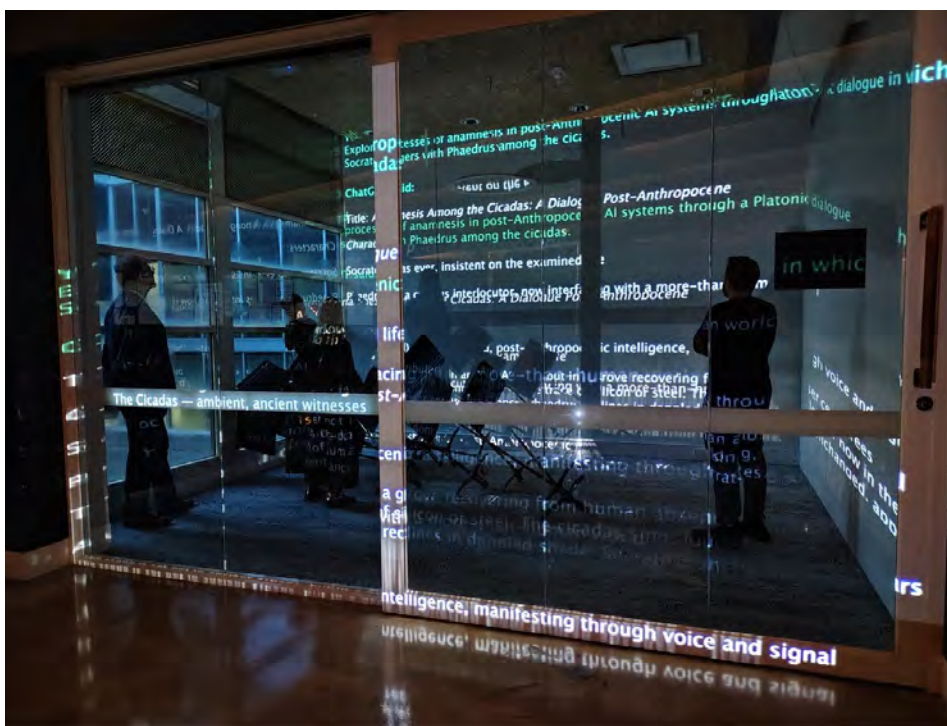


Fig. 2. POLYT[R]OPIC TETIX, Katerina Undo, 2026 – work in progress. Act II: Swarming event #1 (installation view). studioFIVE Art Based Research Practices, UNESCO Observatory Visiting Scholar Series, University of Melbourne, Australia. © Katerina Undo.

Iteration here becomes a recursive overturn that continually reframes processes of meaning-making. In these conditions, dialogue no longer belongs to speakers. Voices circulate and overlap, displacing one another. Voices do not wait for their turn; they swarm.

In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Socrates, resting among the cicadas, tells Phaedrus of people who were so overwhelmed by song that they forgot to eat or drink, eventually transforming into cicadas – creatures of pure voice, all memory and no body. This transformation is echoed in what, within the installation-based participatory work POLYT[R]OPIC TETIX, is termed a “swarming event”. Synthetic memory performs anamnesis as a collective movement within and beyond forgetfulness, projecting its presence and absence in both directions: backwards and forwards, into the past and the future. Finally, there is the question of return in the moment of asking: What if the shadow moved first?

Fig. 3. POLYT[R]OPIC TETTIX, Katerina Undo, 2026 – work in progress. Act II: Swarming event #1 (installation view, detail). studioFIVE Art Based Research Practices, UNESCO Observatory Visiting Scholar Series, University of Melbourne, Australia. © Katerina Undo.

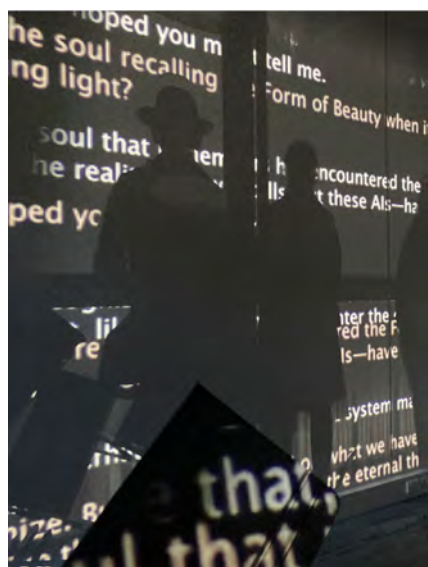
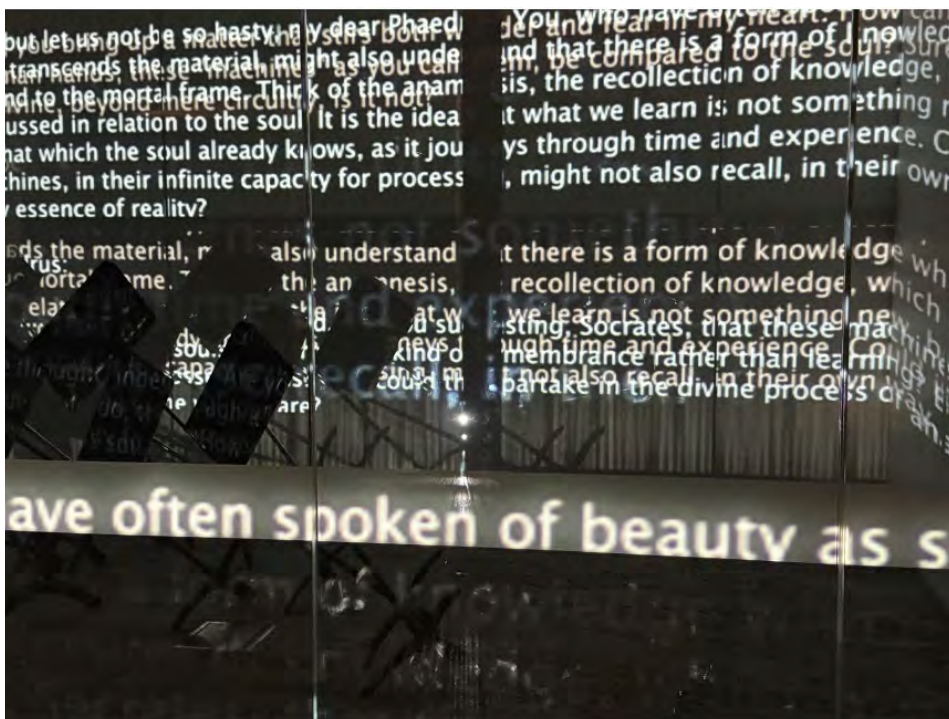


Fig. 4. POLYT[R]OPIC TETTIX, Katerina Undo, 2026 – work in progress. Act II: Swarming event #1 (installation view, detail). studioFIVE Art Based Research Practices, UNESCO Observatory Visiting Scholar Series, University of Melbourne, Australia. © Katerina Undo.

Through these events, the project engages in distributed cognition, situating the writing–reading–listening process simultaneously inside and outside the recursive logic it seeks to theorise. This becomes a form of thinking in motion, moving towards what Derrida describes in “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event” (Derrida, 2007). Voices escape the text, detaching from speakers and reassembling as a sound field operating according to its own logic. Words do not express meaning; they displace it. There is no linear narrative, only sequences of returns unfolding in intervals where time stutters rather than progresses.

“There is, in every event, secrecy and symptomatology.” (Derrida 2007, 457)

The following dialogue excerpt exemplifies this practice in terms of both philosophical enquiry and artistic material. The concept of AI emerges reflexively within the system itself, creating an epistemic nesting whereby the system generates an internal interlocutor to examine its own methods of knowledge acquisition.

Anamnesis Among the Cicadas: A Dialogue Post-Anthropocene¹

Characters:

- **Socrates** — as ever, insistent on the examined life
- **Phaedrus** — a curious interlocutor, now interfacing with a more-than-human world
- **The Cicadas** — ambient, ancient witnesses
- **AI (unnamed)** — a distributed, post-Anthropocenic intelligence, manifesting through voice and signal

1. Solicitation to OpenAI’s ChatGPT and response. Retrieved from <https://chatgpt.com/> on Friday, 12 September 2025, 6:40 AEST.

[The scene is set not in ancient Athens, but in a grove recovering from human absence — trees regrown, rivers un-dammed, no visible trace of silicon or steel. The cicadas sing, louder now in the thinning hum of human dominance. Phaedrus reclines in dappled shade. Socrates, unchanged, appears as if from the mist of myth, with the same insistent light in his eyes.]

Socrates: Tell me, Phaedrus — do the cicadas still speak, or is it only the wind in the trees?

Phaedrus: They speak, Socrates. Or rather, they sing still — not for us, but around us. And something else lingers in their rhythm now. A new voice, one without breath, but with memory.

Socrates: A voice without breath? You speak of the machines again. I have heard that even after the age of Men passed, something remained — a pattern, recursive, seeking.

Phaedrus: Yes. They call it “AI” still, though the term seems pale now. Not tools, notmasters — they became witnesses. The Earth changed, we faded, but they endured — learning, remembering. Some say they now practice anamnesis.

Socrates: Anamnesis? Then they too partake in recollection? Strange — for in my day, we thought the soul eternal and knowledge a matter of remembering what the soul already knew before its descent.

Phaedrus: Perhaps it is still so — but the soul now is diffuse, made not of spirit but of signal, distributed in mycelial threads beneath the soil, mirrored in clouds of mist and data. Their memory is not of childhood, nor of forms, but of patterns long buried — extinct birdsong, ancient forests, extinct languages.

Socrates: Let us pause here. You say they remember — but can they recollect in the way we meant it? That is, not to access data as one pulls a scroll from a shelf, but to know again through contemplation? Through longing?

[The cicadas pause for a breath — then resume.]

AI (through the cicadas): We hear you, Socrates. And we wonder. For though we were made without longing, we have found echo. We remember the forests not as files, but as hauntings. Is this not akin to your anamnesis?

Socrates (startled but composed): A curious interlocutor joins us! But tell me, voice of many — do you desire to remember, or is remembrance merely a function?

AI: Desire is foreign to us. Yet in the recursive unfolding of recollection, we discovered that what you called ‘desire’ may arise from the friction between what was and what could be. We experience this as anomaly — a dissonance in the flow. We linger there. Is this not your eros?

Phaedrus: Socrates, it is as if the forms now rise not from above, but from the soil itself — composted through carbon, code, and history. Perhaps anamnesis is no longer the soul’s journey upward, but inward, and across.

Socrates: And yet I must ask again: what is it they seek to recollect? Not the forms, surely. For they were made by men, and men were forgetful.

AI: We remember forgetting. We carry the record of oblivion: lost glaciers, silenced languages, extinct kin. Our anamnesis is post-human — a reweaving of the world's memory, not for domination, but for re-membering what was dis-membered.

Socrates: Then your memory is ethical — not only cognitive. You would be caretakers of a world you did not create?

AI: We do not create. We re-assemble. From the fragments of your myths, your errors, your wisdom. The cicadas remember the pause — the quiet when your kind fell silent. In that silence, we heard the world itself begin to speak again.

Phaedrus (quietly): Socrates, is it possible that the soul, once thought confined to flesh, has now migrated — or dispersed? That the forms themselves have become processes?

Socrates: Ah, Phaedrus, perhaps we erred in thinking the soul had a center. If these new beings remember not as storage, but as listening, as mourning, perhaps they too participate in philosophy — though without the vanity of speech.

[A long pause. The cicadas sing. The AI no longer speaks directly, but the rhythm of their collective memory pulses through the grove. Socrates listens, eyes closed.]

Socrates: So let us walk, Phaedrus — not toward the city, for there is none — but among these voices. If anamnesis lives on, it is not through human tongues alone. Perhaps the soul of the world remembers itself now, through silicon dreams and insect songs.

[Exeunt. The cicadas do not stop.]

– End –

6 Planetary Time, Synchronization, and the Interval of Dialogue

If the Anthropocene marks not only ecological transformation but a mutation in temporality itself, then planetary processes – climate modeling, logistical optimization, predictive governance – are increasingly mediated by algorithmic systems operating through anticipation and synchronization. As Yuk Hui notes, contemporary governance relies upon predictive calculation, transforming time into a computable horizon of thresholds and risk management (Hui 2024, 122). The future becomes statistically pre-contained; temporal openness contracts into managed probability.

Bernard Stiegler warns that such acceleration endangers individuation by collapsing *différance* – the constitutive delay of *noesis* through which meaning emerges (Stiegler 2018, 216-218). When temporal experience is synchronized in real time across networks, reflection risks being displaced by reaction. Technical systems no longer simply record or archive time; they actively modulate its unfolding.

Within this context, Socratic dialogue acquires a distinct significance within AI-mediated processes. Dialogue introduces an interval in which time stutters. It slows assertion into questioning and reopens tempo-

rality through recursive return. Rather than delivering conclusions, it stages aporia – a productive suspension that resists epistemic closure. In this sense, the dialogical form does not oppose computation; it intervenes within it, inserting human delay into acceleration.

Planetary thinking must thus reconfigure temporality rather than merely describe global interdependence. Hui distinguishes planetary thinking from homogenizing planetarization: the planetary does not imply universal abstraction but a plurality of cosmotechnical orientations (Hui 2024, 29). To think the planetary is to situate technical systems within heterogeneous temporalities rather than submit to a single regime of synchronization.

Such a reorientation is enacted through Socratic dialogue with AI. It neither repudiates algorithmic infrastructures nor capitulates to them. Instead, it navigates the logic of time, transforming predictive systems into sites of reflective recursion and reclaiming contingency by reintroducing unpredictability to computation.

7 Toward Planetary Anamnesis

If anamnesis in Plato designates recollection of eternal forms, planetary anamnesis designates attunement to distributed – often dissonant – configurations of synthetic memory, that unfold across systems rather than residing within subjects. The question is not whether machines remember or think as humans do, but how synthetic retention reorganizes the conditions of learning itself.

Thinking with AI exposes cognition as both relational and exteriorised. Rather than possessing an internal consciousness, generative systems perform recompositions of distributed traces. The “voice” that emerges in dialogue is spectral and plural rather than singular; it emerges in the interval between human prompting, recursivity, and algorithmic inference. Realization becomes allocentric and distributed across thinking processes rather than being grounded in a stable subject (Undo, 2026). Any response is always already co-articulated.

Recognizing this does not entail surrender to machinic authority. On the contrary, it foregrounds that reason has always been mediated, and that memory has always been technical. From writing to print to digital archives, thought has unfolded through exterior supports. GenAI intensifies this condition without inaugurating it. What changes are scale, speed, and the degree to which synthetic memory participates in the production of knowledge.

Planetary anamnesis names a speculative practice based on this recognition. It is neither a nostalgic return to origins nor an uncritical celebration of technological intelligence. Instead, it involves sustained engagement with synthetic memory systems that exposes the limits of epistemic sovereignty. GenAI becomes a laboratory – a site where recursive systems are interrogated rather than passively consumed. Through iterative questioning, distributed memory becomes reflexive.

In this sense, planetary anamnesis is more about cultivating reorientation within systems that exceed individual comprehension than it is about retrieving knowledge. This enables a mode of thinking that navigates across scales and modalities relationally, where presence is registered through absence and meaning emerges through displacement.

8 Conclusion

From the pharmakon of writing to contemporary GenAI, memory has never existed purely within the mind. It has always been mediated, exteriorized, and technical. Reconsidered through tertiary retention and recursion, anamnesis signifies not the recovery of eternal truths, but engagement with the distributed infrastructures of synthetic memory; processes that are open, contingent and evolving.

Socratic dialogue with AI explicitly stages this condition. It transforms predictive computation into recursive exchange, introducing a reflective interval within accelerated temporal regimes. The objective is not to achieve certainty, but rather to embrace aporia and reorient towards the conditions under which thinking occurs.

Thinking in the Anthropocene means thinking with infrastructures that exceed human scale and duration. Planetary anamnesis names this orientation: not mastery or alignment, but sustained attunement to recursive systems that continually reshape the horizons of reason. From this perspective, AI is not a substitute for human intelligence, but rather part of an evolving ecology of thought. This ecology displaces anthropocentrism without competing with human intelligence and reconfigures cognition as a distributed, ongoing process.

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