

Human, Soul, and AI: Generative Systems as Reflexive Media for Introspection

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence increasingly participates in domains traditionally associated with human creativity and self-expression. This paper examines whether generative AI can function not merely as a representational tool but as a medium that may encourage processes of self-interpretation. Drawing on biblical anthropology (Hebrew *nephesh*, Greek *psychē*) and the metaphor of the soul as a non-reductive model of human identity, we analyze the deployment of the AI Soul Imprint Generator (AISIG), an interactive system that transforms user responses into AI-generated imagery. We argue that such systems may be understood as reflexive media: their significance lies not in representation but in staging encounters with one's own articulated elements. By framing the interaction through the concept of the soul, the application redirects visualization from evaluation to coherence, inviting users to reflect on the unity of their lived identity. The study contributes to creative media and UX research by proposing a shift from epistemic visualization toward existential orientation and by demonstrating how theological concepts can function as conceptual resources within design theory.

Keywords

Generative AI, visualization, introspection, reflexive media, theological anthropology, UX design.

1. Introduction

In recent years, generative artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed the landscape of creative media and visualization. Algorithms and systems capable of producing text and images have moved beyond their traditional domain of processing numerical data and entered the sphere associated with human imagination, expression, and identity. As a result, machines operating according to AI algorithms seem to us now practically involved in meaning-making processes [1]. In this sense, they are beginning to attract interest not only in the field of theoretical media research but also in disciplines such as theology.

Visualization research has long been concerned with rendering the invisible visible—data structures, emotions, social relations, or cognitive states [2]. Yet most visualization paradigms remain representational: they assume that something pre-existing can be depicted, mapped, or clarified. Generative AI challenges this model. Rather than depicting something that already exists, it generates images that have no stable referent. Their meaning emerges through interaction with the user and remains open to interpretation.

Because AI-generated images lack a stable referent, their meaning emerges through interpretation rather than representation. This interpretive openness, however, shifts the focus from what the image shows to what the viewer does with it, or how the viewer is engaged. Thereby, raising a broader question: can generative AI function not merely as a tool of depiction but as a medium that may encourage processes of self-interpretation? Or, more specifically, how might ambiguous AI-generated imagery foster processes of inner introspection?

In this paper, we introduce the concept of generative AI as a reflexive visualization medium. Building on the interpretive openness of AI-generated imagery, we argue that such systems may foster self-reflection precisely because their meaning is not fixed but emerges in the very act of interpretation. Rather than claiming to reveal a stable inner truth about the person interacting with the system, the AI-generated image may serve as a prompt for self-interpretation. In this sense,

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reflection does not reside in the visual artifact itself, but in the interpretive engagement it eludes. Or as the famous quotation of Ben A. Schneiderman reads: “The purpose of visualization is insight, not pictures” [3].

To explore this claim, we present the AI Soul Imprint Generator (AISIG), an interactive application created by the Theology and Contemporary Culture research group¹ members that converts user responses into AI-generated visual artifacts. Drawing on biblical anthropology and the notion of the soul as a conceptual metaphor and affective visualization research, we analyze how ambiguity, personalization, and language-based interaction foster interpretive engagement. We conclude by discussing implications for creative media and UX research, proposing generative AI as a new class of reflexive media. At the same time, we propose theology as perhaps an unusual cluster of inspiration for the realm of visualization and related research.

2. Introspection and the Metaphor of the Soul

The present study approaches generative AI from an explicitly anthropological perspective. While the systems we examine are technical artifacts, the question at stake—how individuals interpret themselves in interaction with AI-generated imagery—concerns the human subject. Precisely for this reason, we turn to theology, drawing on it not as a confessional framework but as a discipline that has long reflected on the nature of personhood, interiority, and human unity.²

Theological discourse has already developed conceptual tools for articulating dimensions of human existence that are not easily reducible to observable behavior or measurable data. In this context, the concept of the “soul” has served to name the human person in its depth and coherence, without fragmenting it into isolated capacities. Our interest in this concept is therefore not doctrinal but rather methodological: it provides a non-reductive vocabulary for discussing introspection and self-interpretation.

Moreover, our guiding question about the role of AI in introspective processes implicitly presupposes some understanding of what is meant by the “self” being interpreted. The language of the soul represents one of the historically influential attempts to articulate this dimension of human identity. Even when detached from strong metaphysical claims, it continues to function as a metaphor for what individuals experience as essential, yet difficult to define [5].

Within biblical anthropology, the language of the “soul” does not denote a separable immaterial substance opposed to the body. Both the Hebrew term *nephesh* and the Greek term *psychē* are polysemous and context-dependent. They can refer to “life,” “person,” “self,” or “vitality,” and do not, on lexical grounds alone, imply a body–soul dualism [6][7]. Contemporary biblical scholarship has therefore moved beyond simplistic contrasts between “Hebrew monism” and “Greek dualism,” recognizing instead a range of anthropological perspectives in both traditions [8].

In the Hebrew Scriptures, *nephesh* most often designates the living person as a whole—an embodied being characterized by desire, affectivity, and relational existence. It may even be translated simply as “person.” At the same time, biblical Hebrew distinguishes between *nephesh* (or, in Greek, *psychē*) and *ruach* (*pneuma*). While *ruach* denotes the life-giving breath or animating principle that comes from God, the “soul” names the concrete, embodied person who lives, acts, and relates within the world. The material and the immaterial are therefore not conceived as two independent components but as dimensions of a unified existence animated by divine breath. In this framework, the soul does not function as a detachable metaphysical entity. It articulates the human

¹ <https://tcc.etf.cuni.cz/cz/>

² In dialogue with new technological developments “(...) theology appears as a relevant and needed discipline: it presents an alternative approach to ethical issues, together with other disciplines; it assists in discerning our hopes, or what is reasonable to believe regarding our future; it provides an accurate analysis on anthropological issues, to avoid many risks and to lead toward right models of human flourishing; and it provides qualified expertise on religion and transcendence, helping to discern between the right and the wrong forms AI eventually assumes. Theology dealing with scientific and technological advances recovers a sense of identity and mission, which could be missed when just trying to exercise the right hermeneutics on ancient texts.” [4]

being as a unity marked by tension—between finitude and transcendence, temporality and meaning—without dissolving that unity into dualistic oppositions [9].

For the purposes of this study, we adopt this biblical, functional, and non-reductive understanding of the soul. Further on, the soul will name the human being as a unified, embodied, relational, and affective reality, not merely reducible to a spiritual substance. This anchoring of our anthropological framework in the biblical and partially also Western Judeo-Christian tradition is intentional: it provides the conceptual coordinates for the research, directly aligning with both the cultural background of the participants and the historical context of the setting. In this sense, the soul cannot be treated as an object available for direct representation. It does not belong to the category of entities that can be depicted, localized, or measured.³ Rather, it points to a dimension of personal identity that becomes accessible only through interpretation and lived experience. Any attempt to “visualize” the soul must be understood as a stimulus for reflective engagement and not as an attempt to visualize the soul itself. This shift—from representation to interpretation—will prove crucial for understanding the role of generative AI in the context of introspection.

3. Visualizing the Invisible: A Brief Historical and Conceptual Background

Visualization research has long been concerned with rendering perceptible phenomena that are not directly visible: data structures, emotional states, social relations, or abstract patterns. In this sense, visualization does not merely depict what is already given to the eye; it constructs visual forms for what would otherwise remain hidden. Historically, this ambition has extended beyond scientific data to domains traditionally considered intangible—including the human soul.

Attempts to visualize the soul have appeared in various cultural and theological contexts. In early Christian and catechetical traditions, the soul was represented through symbolic diagrams that depicted its moral or spiritual condition. Illustrated hearts filled with demons, virtues, angels, or scriptural inscriptions functioned as normative images: they did not portray an empirically observable reality but presented a moral model of what the soul should be (see Fig. 1, 2). Such images sought to instruct and transform the viewer rather than to describe psychological states.

³ Of course, we are well aware that attempts to “measure” the soul were numerous in history. From weighing human hearts/bodies to measuring brain waves or photographing “aura”. The best known is most probably the famous “21 gram experiment” published by Duncan MacDougall in 1907. Even though we may regard such an experiment as bizarre, similar experiments inspired by McDougall’s were conducted more recently in 2001 by Lewis E. Hollander Jr. and in 2005 by Gerard Nahum. All these rank among obscure activities, but in their own way, they confirm a general human curiosity to understand what it is, what we call the “soul”. We can actually say very little about the soul. We may perhaps just say it is something immaterial. It is a metaphor for what we know just a little, but at the same time, we experience it as something very important and even essential to humanity. Renowned American scholar on religion, science, and technology, Robert M. Geraci, convincingly concludes: “Human beings are not able to define what makes the species conscious, prove that human beings have free will, or easily justify our emotional uniqueness. Certainly, we are quite incapable of identifying, locating, or proving the existence of souls!” [10]



Figures 1, 2: Illustrations from the book *The Heart of Man; Either a Temple of God, or a Habitation of Satan; Represented in Ten Emblematical Figures* (1851) [Public domain], via Public Domain Review [11].

Other historical visualizations adopted cosmological or allegorical frameworks. Early modern diagrams associated the human being with the macrocosm, portraying the body as a microcosmic reflection of the world soul (*anima mundi* – see Fig. 3). In Comenius's *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, the soul was suggested through a dotted human silhouette—simultaneously present and elusive, visually marked yet resistant to full representation (see Fig. 4). These images acknowledged the limits of depiction: they gestured toward interiority without claiming to capture it.

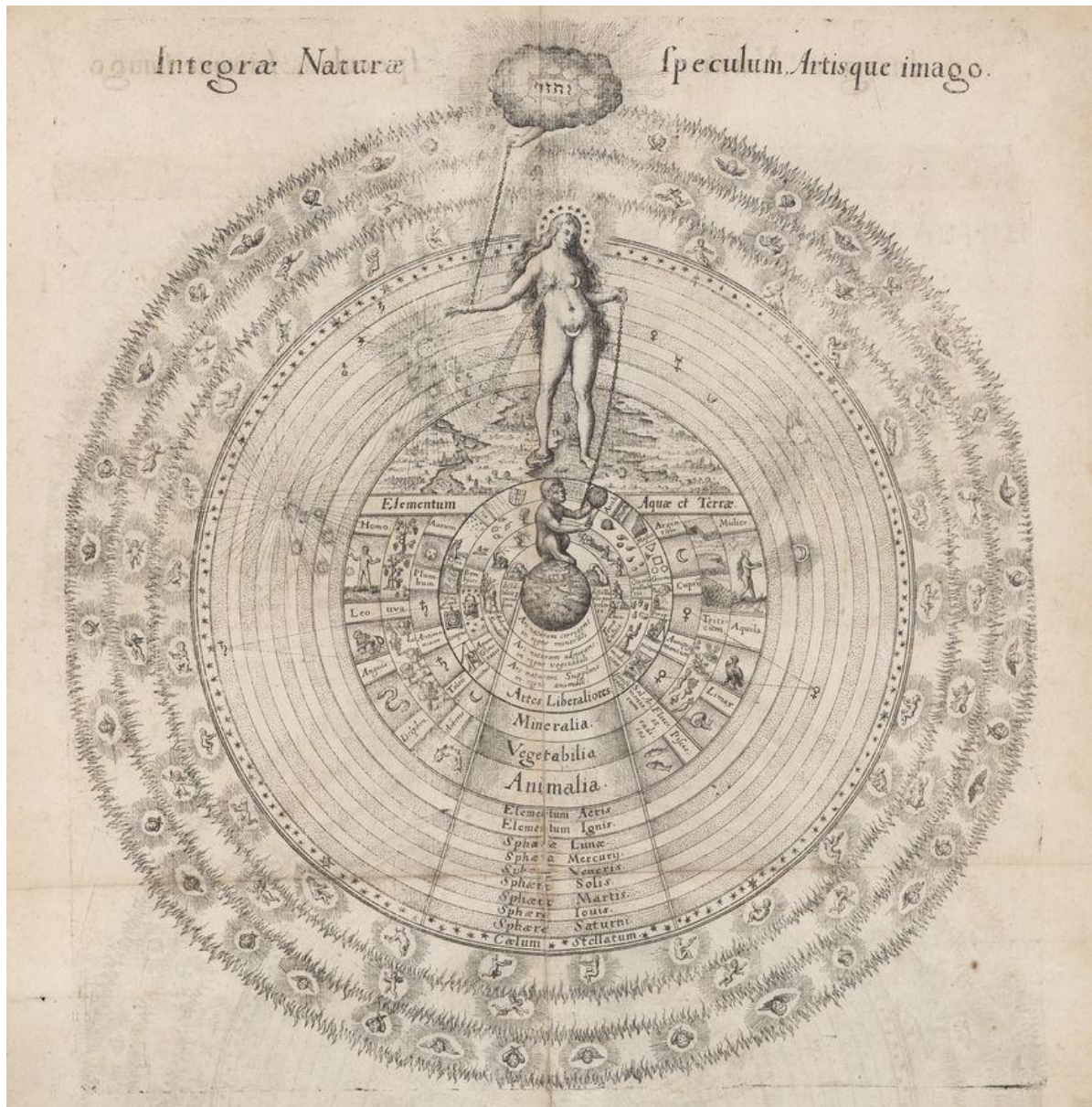


Figure 3: “The Wholeness of Nature Reflected in the Mirror of Art” showing the human body as the world soul. From Robert Fludd’s *Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technica historia* (1617). [Public domain], via Public Domain Review [12].

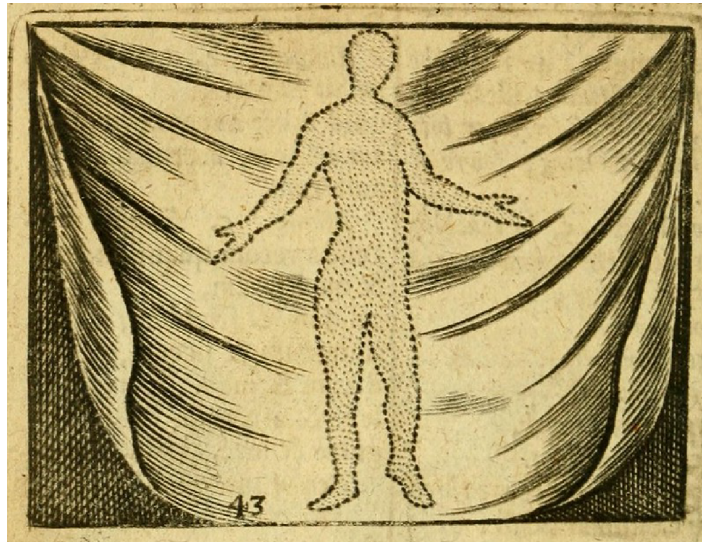
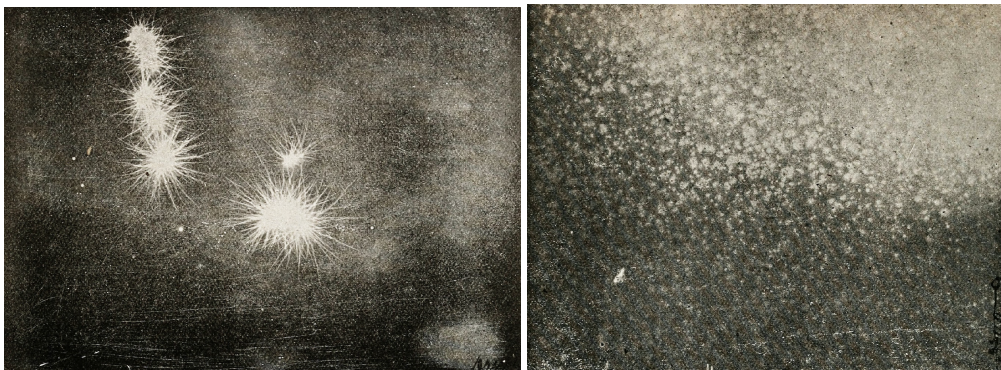


Figure 4: Illustration for The Soul, from the 1705 English edition of *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*. [Public domain], via Public Domain Review [13].

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, emerging scientific and spiritualist movements attempted to make the invisible visible through technological means. Hippolyte Baraduc's photographic "iconographs of the soul" aimed to record energetic or emotional emanations on photographic plates (see Fig. 5, 6). These images blurred the boundary between empirical trace and metaphysical speculation. They may be understood as early examples of what has later been described as autographic visualization [14], in which material traces stand in for otherwise inaccessible phenomena.



Figures 5, 6: Photographic "iconographs" by Hippolyte Baraduc, presented as visual traces of the soul or emotional energy capture during moments of spiritual intensity (1913). [Public domain], via Public Domain Review [15].

Across these diverse examples, a common feature emerges: visualizations of the soul have never been literal representations. They have operated symbolically, normatively, or metaphorically. Whether moral diagrams, cosmological schemas, or photographic experiments, they have mediated interpretation rather than delivered direct access to an inner essence.

Contemporary visualization research has extended this trajectory into new domains, including affective visualization and interactive systems that foreground user engagement. Here, the emphasis shifts from depicting a predefined state to eliciting emotional resonance and personal reflection. Visualization becomes less about revealing an objective interior and more about structuring conditions under which meaning may emerge.

Our project is situated within this broader historical continuum. Rather than prescribing what the soul should look like or attempting to prove its existence through visual traces, we treat

visualization as an interactive and generative process. The image does not claim to represent an invisible entity. Instead, it functions as a mirror that reflects the user's interpretive engagement. In this respect, the move from static diagram to generative AI marks a transition from representation to reflexive interaction—a transition that will be explored in the following section.

4. From Representation to Interaction: Generative AI as Reflexive Medium

Traditional visualization presupposes a referent. Even when symbolic or abstract, it assumes that something pre-existing can be mapped into visual form. Generative image models operate differently. Rather than depicting an inner idea or retrieving a stored representation, they synthesize images by sampling from learned statistical distributions [16]. The generated output does not correspond to a prior object but emerges as a probabilistic configuration conditioned by linguistic input. Its meaning is not derived from isolated fragmentary components—forms, textures, symbols, spatial relations—but from the coherence of their arrangement. Significance arises through configuration and interpretation.

Against the background of this shift, the theological notion of the soul becomes particularly relevant. As discussed above, the biblical concept of *nephesh/psychē* denotes the human person as an embodied and relational unity characterized by desire, affectivity, and orientation. The soul names this lived coherence rather than a separable inner substance. In this sense, it provides a conceptual parallel to the logic of generative imagery. Just as the soul, in our functional understanding, names the unity of embodied life, a generative image stages a possible unity that invites recognition. The image does not depict an essence; it composes a configuration whose coherence must be interpreted.

Crucially, this unity is not imposed by the system alone. In text-to-image interaction, users select or formulate the symbolic elements they consider meaningful through prompts, themes, or descriptors. The model then composes these elements into a visual configuration. Introspective engagement may emerge not because the system uncovers a hidden truth, but because it enables an experiment with identity: a testing of how selected elements hold together. The strength of the experience increases in proportion to the viewer's recognition, that is, when the configuration resonates as something that "fits" their lived self-understanding.

Visualizing the soul can thus be understood as a compositional practice. It is not an attempt to depict an invisible substance; it invites users to articulate what they take to be constitutive of their own unity and to encounter a visually mediated configuration of those elements. What is at stake is an exploration of coherence, tension, and self-recognition.

The following section presents the AISIG as a practical instantiation of this compositional approach. Rather than serving as an empirical evaluation of psychological effects or user behavior, the case study functions as an exploratory, conceptually oriented examination of how generative AI may structure conditions for interpretive and introspective engagement. By offering participants a structured environment in which they can experiment with configuring elements they consider constitutive of their own identity, the AISIG provides a setting in which interaction with generative imagery may serve as a reflexive medium. Observations concerning participant reactions are therefore intended as illustrative rather than systematic empirical findings.

5. Case Study: AI Soul Imprint Generator

AISIG is an interactive web-based application designed to provoke reflective engagement rather than deliver analytical insight. It was designed in cooperation with the community of Discalced Carmelites for the Night of Churches event in their Church of Our Lady Victorious and St. Anthony of Padua, better known as the Church of the Infant Jesus of Prague. Here, in an exhibition composed of eleven panels, we sought to familiarize visitors with the biblical concept of the soul and its relationship to the Spirit and the body, and at the same time, we presented an interactive application as an example of how generative AI works in its basic contours. The entire evening was also accompanied by AI-generated music. We wanted to draw attention to the fact that AI is a technology that is beginning to significantly influence the lives of all people and that this influence will only

grow in the near future. In 2023, our program certainly had a strong educational element as well, because at that time, the general public was not yet well acquainted with how generative AI works. Therefore, we wanted to show how this technology (especially its generative form) works and connect it with Christianity and its theology through linking it with a typically religious notion of the soul.



Figure 7: AI Soul Imprint Gallery displayed on the Baroque altar. The Night of Churches, 2023. Photo by František Štěch.

5.1 Conceptual Framing

At first glance, the idea of generating a visual “soul imprint” may appear paradoxical. As indicated above, the soul—understood here as a metaphor for personal identity and interiority—is not a measurable entity. The aim of the AISIG was therefore not to visualize or diagnose anything about the participant, but to create a situation in which reflective engagement could occur.

The application was designed to function as a prompt. The visual artifact does not claim to depict what a person's soul “is” (or “is like”), but invites them to think about and interpret what they see in relation to themselves—their “souls” or what they think “the soul” is in general. Outwardly, it was intentionally framed as a “toy”, a playful and accessible interface rather than a serious diagnostic tool. This framing lowers defensive barriers and allows participants to engage without the pressure of correctness or performance. In this context, play becomes a legitimate mode of reflection: the apparent lightness of the interaction enables deeper personal engagement.

5.2 Technical Setup and Aesthetic Strategy

The application uses a Stable Diffusion 1.5 model (*v1-5-pruned-emaonly.ckpt*)⁴ to generate images from concatenated user responses. The prompt consists of the selected answers translated into descriptive keywords, followed by a consistent stylistic suffix (e.g., “painting, movie still, beautiful”).⁵

The translation of the answers into the prompt is quite straightforward and transparent. For example the image generation prompt “mountains, van Gogh painting, movie still, beautiful, psalms, lazy, hope, depth, no steaks” is used for a user who indicated that they like *mountains* and *van Gogh*, in the Bible they are inspired by *psalms*, *laziness* is the most acceptable sin for them, the most important is *hope*, the soul is *depth*, and they would not *make a steak* for a loved one.

Instead of striving for photorealism or technical precision, we intentionally selected lower-fidelity parameters that produce slightly ambiguous and dreamlike imagery. This aesthetic decision was deliberate. Excessive clarity or literalism would risk suggesting that the system reveals something definitive about the participant. By contrast, interpretive openness encourages projection and personal meaning-making.

Each generated image is unique, even when identical answers are provided, due to variation in random seed values. This reinforces individuality while avoiding deterministic claims about representation.

5.3 Questions and Flow of Interaction

The interaction unfolds in stages. Initial questions are simple and aesthetic in nature, allowing participants to enter the process playfully and without pressure. Subsequent questions gradually introduce value-oriented themes, inviting deeper consideration. A final, partially humorous option reduces emotional intensity and prevents the experience from becoming overly solemn.

This progression is intentional. In this sense, the system does not produce reflection; it structures the conditions under which it may occur. During deployment, participants often appeared to pause, hesitate, or reconsider their choices. By the time the image is generated, an interpretive context has already been established.

The resulting visual artifact does not conclude this process but reactivates it. Participants may interpret the image in light of their own responses, often projecting personal meanings that exceed the literal content of the visual output. In this way, introspection is distributed across the interaction and emerges through interpretive engagement rather than from the image alone.

5.4 Public Deployment and Engagement

During the presentation of our program on the Night of Churches three years ago, we were surprised when, in a single evening, more than 2,000 people viewed our program, and more than 700 of them participated and tried out our AISIG. We were initially worried that the attendees of the Night of Churches might not view our intervention favourably, as it can be thought of as a disturbance of the setting, both physically as well as spiritually. However, we were surprised by the absolute lack of negative reactions, with a small number of visitors staying indifferent to the programme, while most of the visitors of the church did engage with our programme. Often, they would initially be intrigued by the rather prominent projection of the generated images at the altar, keep watching for a while, and then, due to a lack of explanation in the projection itself, search around the church for clues about what was happening. At this point, members of our team would actively engage with some of the participants, briefly explaining the project and assisting them in taking part. However, the design of the application as well as the accompanying explanations on physical panels proved to be sufficiently understandable and easy to use, and the vast majority of attendees did not require any

⁴ The model parameters are: Steps: 13, Sampler: Euler, CFG scale: 10.0, Seed: randomly generated for each user, Size: 512x512, Model hash: cc6cb27103, Model: v1-5-pruned-emaonly, Seed resize from: -1x-1, Denoising strength: 0.

⁵ For instance, if a user chose the first option for every question, the resulting prompt would be: “mountains, van Gogh painting, movie still, beautiful, psalms, proud, faith, spatiality, no stealing”.

assistance from us at all; some would thus rather engage with us only after taking active part in the experience, presumably because “revealing one’s soul” was perceived as a deeply personal act, preferably undertaken in privacy.

We observed a varied range of reactions to receiving the generated soul imprint, including bemusement, fascination, and occasionally even slight shock, particularly when participants perceived the image as resonating with internal features that were in no way mediated through the questions. At the other end of the spectrum, some participants appeared indifferent or disappointed, especially when the generated image seemed little more than a straightforward reflection of the selected answers, such as a plain forest with minimal additional symbolic complexity. With many participants, we also observed that after having their souls generated, they would eagerly watch the altar, waiting for their souls to be beamed onto the screen. As the number of participants and thus the number of generated soul imprints strongly exceeded our expectations, it could often take a very long time before one’s imprint was shown at the altar, which prompted us to make some quick live changes to the algorithm to prioritize recently generated images. We also observed a certain sort of pride or delight in many of the participants demonstrating their image—whether on the altar or on their device—to their friends, being clearly satisfied that they can share their soul imprint with people close to them.

The application remains publicly accessible; readers may experience it themselves via the link:

<https://bit.ly/clovek-duse-ai>



Even though we encountered an enormous interest in our first event, we did not expect interest to become continuous. It, however, sparked great attention. Major Czech media referred to our program [17].⁶ Since then, we have been invited to perform our program at multiple public and academic venues, including Prague AI Days, the Divine Digitalisation exhibition at Campus Hybernská in Prague, ministerial conferences, and subsequent Night of Churches 2024 events across the Czech Republic. The surprising fact is that the interest in AISIG sustains, and we monitor continuous access to our web-based application even in 2026, when the program will be performed again during the National Gathering of Protestant Youth in the Czech Republic for an audience of more or less 500 participants.

All in all, while the system does not provide evaluative feedback, the willingness of many participants to publicly share their generated images suggests that the experience was perceived as personally meaningful.

⁶ Media coverage included a feature on Czech national television [17].



Figures 7, 8, 9: Examples of AI-generated images of the soul.

6. Discussion: AI as a Catalyst of Introspection

Visualization theory and aesthetics alike have long acknowledged that meaning is not simply embedded in images but arises through interpretive engagement [18]. What changes in generative AI systems is that the interpretive situation is not preceded by the artifact itself: the image comes into being through a specific configuration of user input. This structural shift allows generative AI to be approached as a reflexive medium. As it returns a recomposed configuration of what the user has articulated, the resulting arrangement may confront the user with a coherent—or tension-filled—unity of their own expressed elements. In this sense, interpretation is not an afterthought to the work, but part of its very production.

This reflexive quality is reinforced by the genealogical structure of generative models themselves. Contemporary image generators are trained on a vast corpus of human-produced texts and images. They recombine patterns sedimented in cultural production. In this sense, generative AI already operates as a condensed archive of human imagination, aesthetic conventions, and symbolic associations historically situated within Western digital culture and iconographic traditions. Drawing from a latent space rich in European aesthetics and Christian visual tropes, the AI-generated imagery establishes a shared cultural framework for the European participants. The resulting interaction generates an anthropological tension, as users negotiate their unique, individual self-understanding against these collective cultural archetypes.

Consequently, when users engage with generative models, they do not encounter an alien intelligence but a statistically mediated echo of collective human expression. The reflexive dimension of AISIG thus unfolds on two levels. On the surface, the user interprets a configuration shaped by their own linguistic input. At a deeper level, the system's responses are grounded in patterns derived from human cultural traces. The resulting image, therefore, stages a confrontation with a broader reservoir of shared symbolic forms. In this respect, generative AI may function as a mirror in a double sense: it reflects the individual's articulated elements while simultaneously refracting the cultural imaginaries from which those elements draw their meaning.

By framing the reflective process through the metaphor of the soul, we intentionally redirected the configuration inward. AISIG was not designed to visualize preferences as data, but to stage them as aspects of personal coherence, and thus potentially function as a prompt for introspection. Rather than revealing the soul, it invited the user to consider how their articulated fragments might hold together as a lived unity.

The same technical configuration could have been framed as a personality test, a profiling tool, or a data-driven visualization of preferences. By naming it otherwise, we displaced the logic of measurement and redirected it toward coherence, inviting the user to ask whether this arrangement resonates with their lived self-understanding. This design choice shifts the interaction into a well-established lineage of hermeneutic and semiotic scholarship—particularly resonating with Paul Ricoeur's view of identity as interpretively mediated rather than reducible to objectifiable

representations.⁷ Within this framework, meaning is never passively decoded from an artifact but co-constituted through the user's interpretive horizon. The AI-generated image thus ceases to be a definitive statement; it functions as a symbolic text that requires the user's active appropriation to complete its communicative loop. This interpretive openness also reflects a broader theological-anthropological assumption about the human person. Contemporary theological anthropology has increasingly resisted reductionist understandings of identity, moving away from viewing the soul as a separable substance toward a relational and embodied understanding of personhood [20]. In this perspective, the human being cannot be reduced to measurable traits, isolated capacities, or externalized data. The metaphor of the soul employed in AISIG therefore functions not as a claim about a hidden metaphysical object awaiting visualization, but as a way of approaching human identity as something that exceeds objectification and calls for interpretation.⁸

The shift from evaluation to coherence is decisive. A test seeks accuracy; an introspective prompt seeks recognition. The metaphor of the soul suspends the expectation of objective validity and opens a space for interpretive negotiation. Framed as a “toy,” the AISIG further reduces the pressure of correctness. It does not trivialize reflection but makes it inhabitable. Play creates a liminal space in which identity can be explored without ontological commitment. Because the system does not claim authority, users are free to negotiate meaning without fear of misclassification. The absence of diagnostic ambition may create conditions more conducive to introspective engagement. In this way, AISIG becomes a medium in which identity may be tentatively composed and reconsidered.

Theology in this project functioned as a conceptual resource. The metaphor of the soul provided a non-reductive model of identity and resisted the translation of personhood into measurable traits. Without this framing, the same technical configuration could have remained a personality quiz, an AI profiling toy, or merely an aesthetic generator. However, by invoking the soul, we altered the ontology of the application: identity was no longer treated as data to be assessed, but as coherence to be sought. In this sense, the project also suggested a shift in visualization theory itself and challenged traditional, purely data-driven visualization paradigms in computer science. Rather than making epistemic claims, displaying data in the name of clarity, accuracy, or insight, visualization here has an existential orientation, becoming a staging of self-relation. This way, it shows how creative media can support human self-reflection rather than merely optimizing information processing.

7. Conclusion

This paper set out to examine whether generative AI can function as a catalyst for introspection. Drawing on theological anthropology and a case study of our AISIG, we explored how ambiguous, AI-generated imagery, framed through the metaphor of the soul, can structure conditions for introspection and self-interpretation. By situating the project within a broader history of visualizing the invisible, we argued that generative AI systems invite a shift from representation to reflexive interaction.

Our central claim has been that generative AI may be understood as a reflexive medium. In such systems, interpretation does not simply unfold around a finished artifact but participates in its instantiation. When framed through a non-reductive anthropological concept such as the soul, the generated image ceases to function as an assessment or diagnostic output. Instead, it stages a provisional configuration of articulated elements, inviting the user to consider their coherence. Visualization here may become a sort of an existential practice: a mediated encounter in which identity is tentatively composed, recognized, and reconsidered.

⁷ Ricoeur distinguishes between identity understood as sameness (*idem*) and identity understood as selfhood (*ipse*). In Studies 5 and 6 of *Oneself as Another*, he argues that self-understanding is never directly transparent to itself but mediated through interpretation, language, and symbolic forms [19].

⁸ For a broader overview of this shift in contemporary theological anthropology—including critiques of dualist accounts of the soul and relational understandings of personhood—see [21].

This reconceptualization carries implications for creative media and UX research. First, it suggests that introspection can be intentionally structured through design. The sequencing of interaction, the cultivation of ambiguity, and the suspension of evaluative authority are not secondary aesthetic choices but constitutive elements of the reflexive experience. In this way, designers shape the conditions under which users interpret themselves and therefore assume a significant responsibility. The framing of prompts, the calibration of ambiguity, and the presence or absence of evaluative language influence whether AI systems reinforce reductionist self-descriptions or open space for reflective self-negotiation. Second, it challenges the assumption that visualization must primarily serve epistemic goals. While traditional information design emphasizes insight, precision, and transparency, generative AI systems open a space in which visualization may facilitate orientation rather than knowledge. They may provide engagement rather than measurement. Finally, the interdisciplinary use of theological concepts demonstrates that visualization theory can benefit from conceptual resources beyond its usual technical or cognitive frameworks. In this project, theology provided a vocabulary capable of resisting reductionism and rethinking identity beyond datafication.

Within our research, generative AI does not reveal who we are, nor does it grant authoritative access to an inner essence. What it can do, however, under particular framings, is reshape the conditions under which we interpret ourselves. In doing so, it neither replaces introspection nor guarantees it. Rather, it intensifies the question of coherence: how the fragments we articulate might hold together as a lived unity. If generative systems are approached in this way, they may occupy not only a technological, but also a reflexive and existential space within contemporary media culture.

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Generative AI Statement

Generative AI tools (OpenAI ChatGPT) were used in a limited and supportive capacity during the preparation of this manuscript, primarily for language refinement, editorial assistance, and discussion of structure and argumentation. All substantive scholarly decisions, interpretations, and final formulations were reviewed and approved by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of the paper.

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