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Automated (Auto)Fictions: Re-evaluating Risks and Potentials of the AI-Assisted Journal

Introduction

The AI-assisted journal brings to life what was once a speculative phenomenon: a journal that can autonomously rearrange itself, voice unconscious truths, and offer personalized feedback to the user. As demand for digital journaling—and self-guided "therapeutic" tools—increases, **this project reevaluates the risks and potentials of AI-assisted journaling from a literary perspective.**

Research background

Current research on AI-assisted journaling falls into two main areas:
- *Design studies* that aim to prototype AI journal apps, focusing on the integration and trouble-shooting of LLM integrations.
- *Psychological studies* that apply AI-assisted journals among specific participant groups to test psychological efficacy.

Autofiction: a new theoretical framework

The current research paradigm of AI-assisted journaling presents a design value system that emphasizes hyper-personalization and warns against alienation or misinterpretation of the user. However, this project suspends that binary using the literary genre of "autofiction" to posit *three primary hypotheses*:

[1] The AI-assisted journal creates compelling affordances for autofictional practice — and even necessitates them. Minute decisions about how to configure variably-contextualized and variably-fragmented narratives or emotional valences mirror autofiction in their "self-fictionalizing" distortions.

[2] The responses and interpretations of the AI-assisted journal distribute "autofictional labor" from a self-reflexive practice to a semi-automated one. From "flash fiction" and "poetry" to "emotion reports," the AI-generated interpretations automate the previously self-reflexive work of re-imagining the self.

[3] In receiving the machine-assembled "autofictionalized self," the user engages in a practice of self-speculation. As the user sifts through the AI-generated interpretations, they measure up the estranged/assembled self to their own self-conception. They also must discern which parts of the textual environment are self-generated versus AI-generated.

Defining autofiction

A *mode* of writing, directly influenced by *diaristic* forms and guiding principles, through which self-fictionalizing serves to intervene in core contingencies of a person's life—be that points of trauma, unstable identities, cultural or political milieux, relationships, etc—and destabilize or reconfigure them toward limited or compromised self-illumination.

Methodology

- *Scope:* 30 "autofictional" entries tested within 5 journal devices; 15 secondary "stress tests"
- *Duration:* 2 months
- *Primary question:* How does a journaling practice with AI devices affect a user's (mis)representation of self-narrative, personal context, and identity?

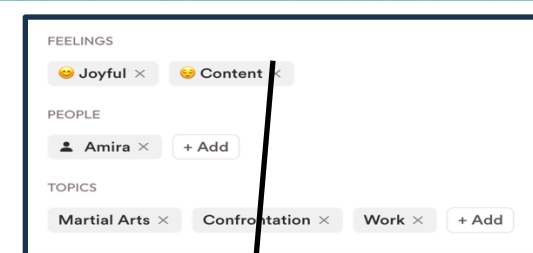"Ask your entry a question or suggest a new format"
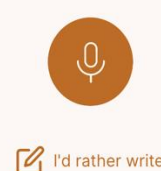
"Ask your journal..." **search engine;** a common feature in which the user can query the AI to respond to a question they have, based on their previous journal entries

"Mood reports" or "emotion reports" would take the user's journal entries and index what the AI discerned to be the primary emotions present

Authors, philosophers, and spiritual frameworks would be commonly brought in as interpretive devices or conversational agents for the entries

Supportive Seneca — Boosts your resilience and guides you to stay calm in tough times. / Seneca's Superpower: Give me support / Talk with Seneca

Reframing Family Friction Through Stoic Lenses ...embracing it as an integral part of your journey. When Emily's p...

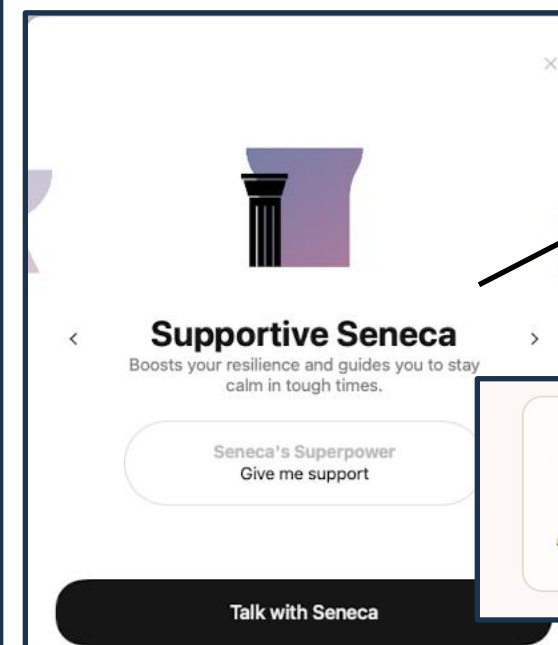The Nostalgic Empathic Navigator

Creative fabulation occurred when the devices would take "inspiration" from the user's entries to generate everything from poetry & screenplays to "personality reports" and other reflective analyses

Flash Fiction for You

Ungrounded

Saturday, May 10th — Expires in 2 days

Anika breathed in the musty church air as the organ pipes loomed above her, their gleaming faces concealing cavernous depths. The vestibule was dark and empty, like a theater long after the crowd had dispersed.

Primary insights

- The device's "indexing" features shape a user's journaling around how they imagine that the device will receive/organize that information, prompting a level of **"autofictional distortion"** (either hyper-contextualization or hyper-ambiguity).
- The device takes co-control over narrative coherence, when "referring" the user back to themself; this is a core **"autofictional displacement,"** in that the device (as opposed to the user) is reconfiguring and reshaping their self-narrative.
- Reception of the device's interpretations creates a practice of **"autofictional reading,"** in that the user is suspended between receiving "factuality" and "fictionality" — but also between "self" and "other."

Areas for expansion

- *Community-based research:* Studying the AI-assisted journal in particular social, cultural, or political contexts.
- *Pedagogical research:* Studying the AI-assisted journal in creative writing classroom contexts.
- *Multimodal accessibility research:* Studying new modalities (e.g. speech to text) for the AI-assisted journal.

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