

# Contemplation and Computation: Art, Image and Reality

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## Abstract

This chapter discusses philosophical ideas around likenesses, and how they inform debates about meaning and the relation to images in the digital age. Seeing the world as an image is part of many longstanding metaphysical ideas about meaning and reality, and this chapter will consider how these ideas might inform contemporary discussions about computational culture and virtuality. The method for reflecting on these ideas will partly derive from the philosopher Plotinus' ideas on contemplation: a philosophical journey of self-discovery in which inner-reflection mirrors or relates to the world, and how human nature is essentially part of the very essence of what it is to be a likeness or image. The chapter will also consider how art and the imagination play a central role in technological development, and of the creative interactions of artists with technology. The contemplative philosophy found in Plotinus and other spiritually-minded philosophies across many cultures and traditions, points to ways to engage with technology in new ways, and redefine questions about real and virtual worlds.

## Introduction

'For the soul is many things, and all things,' writes Plotinus, 'both the things above and the things below down to the limits of all life, and we are each one of us an intelligible universe...' (1967, 149-151). These startling words resonate with a philosophical outlook that can be found in many spiritual and philosophical traditions. This outlook has long-considered the relationship between two worlds – the higher and the lower, the visible and the invisible, or the archetype and image – and how the human being is a kind of image through which these worlds form a cosmic whole. For philosophers such as Plotinus, the inner nature of the human being, shaped through the philosophical and spiritual life, points to an eternal world from which the soul has descended, and to which it seeks to ascend once again. The higher world, for Plotinus, is a reality awaiting discovery within each person – it is a reality that is present in the image of nature, and the inward image of human self-understanding. There is an element of the mysterious to these ideas, and to how one relates to each world, for whilst the higher reality in itself remains unknowable, it is nevertheless known, in certain ways, through the images it makes and through the nature of human contemplation, which takes the shape of this higher reality.

One could liken the relationship between the higher and the lower, the invisible and the visible, or the archetype and the image to the themes of this book: 'real' and 'virtual' worlds. In the thought of Plotinus, ideas of what could be termed the real and the virtual interconnect. They are worlds perceived together by the nature of human creation and imagination. Interestingly, in further connection to the computational worlds of today, there is also a longstanding awareness in the thought of Plotinus and others of what could be called illusory images, and how these differ to real likenesses. It is a capacity of the human intellect, through contemplative practise, to discern the one from the other.

This chapter will introduce several themes around these philosophical considerations, connecting them to the relationship between the real and the virtual in computational culture, and drawing parallels with contemporary questions around technology. The chapter will not be an exhaustive discussion of these themes, but aims to suggest connections between them. It will be a series of snapshots, exploring how the relation of archetype and image, or real and virtual, is grounded in a metaphysical outlook where appearances participate in, or are an image of, another reality. Drawing upon the imaginative and poetic character with such philosophical questions can be viewed, art will be considered as a means of copying or reproducing such appearances: a copying that isn't necessarily an illusion, in the sense attributed (in one interpretation) to Plato, that art is a copy of a copy. Rather, it will be considered how art imitates or copies the invisible reality through contemplative perception. In this way, the nature of artistic creation is distinguished as an intuitive process, irreducible to calculative processes. This will be connected to selected ideas around theories of knowledge and technology.

The chapter is written as a creative reflection on some philosophical interests in art – a dialogue between artistic theory and artistic practice – and suggests that the contemplative philosophical frameworks that are discussed can apply to artistic creativity with digital tools in particular ways. The chapter proposes to examine selected questions arising from new technologies, and to assess some positive and negative characteristics. The challenges and changes of the present can also be seen through the lenses of the past, for the recurrent nature of the challenges to human life that have been brought about by technology, change and innovation have been reflected, in many different ways across the centuries, in the intellectual and spiritual currents of different times.

The first section of this chapter will briefly discuss ideas of images and reality, looking at the question of archetype and image, and philosophical and spiritual traditions. The second section will discuss Plotinus's ideas of two worlds in greater detail, how one might discern images from illusions, and how creative intuition is irreducible to calculative processes. The third section of the chapter will discuss some selected processes and ideas in digital art, reflecting on my own practice, considering how the archetype/image relationship might be explored through computational and traditional/material art-making processes together.

## Images and Reality

Plotinus writes that 'Souls...in a way, [are] amphibious...they live part of their life in the intelligible world and part of their life in the sensible world...' (2019, 517). The intelligible world is the higher reality, spoken of earlier, and the sensible world the lower, or earthly reality. Many great texts and ideas in different spiritual traditions have considered the relationship between the divine and earthly, eternity and time, archetype and image, or the invisible and the visible. Different aspects of these traditions have considered how the phenomenal world of nature is only a part of reality, and that a higher reality can be understood through the development of an inner, spiritual awareness.

Ananda Coomaraswamy has written on the convergences between spiritual traditions, describing outlooks across time, space and cultures. On the relation between archetype and images, or two worlds, Coomaraswamy writes:

...the Vedantic position is in perfect agreement with the Platonic, which is that things are "false" ( $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\varsigma$  = *anrta*) in the sense that an imitation, though it exists, is not "the real thing" of which it is an imitation; and with the Christian doctrine as formulated by St. Augustine... "I beheld these others beneath Thee, and saw that they neither altogether are, nor altogether are not"...The Vedantic doctrine that the world is "of the stuff of art" (*māyā-māya*) is not a doctrine of "illusion" but merely distinguishes the relative reality of the artefact from the greater reality of the Artificer (*māyin, nirmānakāra*) in whom the paradigm subsists. The world is an epiphany; and it is no one's fault but our own if we mistake "the things that were made" for the reality after which they were made...(2014, 7)

Eknath Easwaran writes '...of the identity of macrocosm and microcosm the Upanishads often make...' (1987, 74), and that the *Upanishads* are '...like ecstatic slide shows of mystical experience...' (2007, 23). Easwaran explains how the *Upanishads* explore how '...a Reality underlying life...is the essence of every created thing, and the same Reality is our real Self, so that each of us is one with the power that created and sustains the universe.' (1987, 13). In the *Upanishads*, there is a striking passage where one hears of how the self moves between two states:

The human being has two states of consciousness: one in this world, the other in the next. But there is a third state between them, not unlike the world of dreams, in which we are aware of both worlds...As a great fish swims between the banks of a river as it likes, so does the shining Self move between the states of dreaming and waking. (1987, 44-45)

One reads in the the Taoist text the *Zhuangzi* that, 'The universe and I exist together, and all things and I are one' (Zhuangzi, 2009), and in these poetic passages that:

Once I, Chang Chou, dreamed that I was a butterfly and was happy as a butterfly. I was conscious that I was quite pleased with myself but I did not know that I was Chou. Suddenly I awoke and there I was, visibly Chou. I do not know whether it was Chou dreaming that he was a butterfly or the butterfly dreaming that it was Chou. (Zhuangzi, 2009)

In Plotinus' metaphysics, one could say that the mystical experiences of contemplation show how 'extended realities' or 'immersiveness', if the terms might be used, explore a profound expansion of consciousness. There is a deep awareness of the knowledge that derives from contemplation, insofar as it reveals the relation of the sensible world to another, archetypal or intelligible world. Contemplation is a means to distinguish the nature of images and reality, and to see within the image or copy, a likeness, resemblance or appearance of an archetype, or of a higher reality. There is also a distinctly imaginative and poetic dimension to many of these ideas that point towards the use of images in understanding the nature of reality. In contemplation, one enters into a 'virtual' space, so to speak, in which one is simultaneously aware of the image in which one is immersed, and the reality that creates it, and stands apart from it. This forms a central aspect of the contemplative's journey from the lower to the higher reality, and the ability to see one in the other. It is what allows one to see the image not as an illusion, but as a reflection of another reality.

These brief examples of spiritual contemplation, and the awareness of the rich history of different traditions, provide a means of interpreting the increasing verisimilitude of computer-generated imagery and the promises of technology. Ideas around images and likenesses can inform an understanding of the prevalence of images in digital/computational culture. Many of the debates around the future of humans and machines in computational culture, and of artificial intelligence or virtuality, can be seen to be anticipated by a series of recurrent historical ideas on what an image or likeness is. Images, rather than illusions, could be said to be works of the imagination and contemplation, derived from things that are not visible in the ordinary sense, but are rather intuited or seen with a kind of inner vision. This conception of images relates to many ancient philosophical ideas of the image and likeness, suggesting forms or

archetypes that are seen from within, and which become the basis upon which the distinction between 'real' and 'virtual' images is based.

The relation between likeness and invisibility, therefore, has distinct implications for the nature of subjectivity, creativity and technology, and of how the two worlds created by the real and virtual, in modern computational terms, might be understood. It also suggests that there is something distinctly human in discerning the nature of reality and images that transcends the computational ability to produce images that appear to be made by humans.

## Technology and Two Worlds

The soul, according to Plotinus' account, occupies two worlds. However, it is in many ways unaware of one of these worlds, for living amidst the images of the sensible world, the soul has forgotten its origins in the higher world. Through a process of contemplation (*theoria*) and recollection (*anamnesis*), the soul perceives the reality of the intelligible world, and of the two lives which each soul lives. A greater attention to one's inner being, and one's relation to the intelligible world, reveals that the outer world of one's being also reflects, in the appearance of nature, an image of the higher world. In this model of likeness, one begins to see, reflected within oneself, the microcosm in the macrocosm, with thought participating in the intelligible nature of reality, as an image of reality. It is in this way that each person is a kind of intelligible universe or cosmos (1967, 151). One can see a distinctly imaginative and poetic character in Plotinus' philosophy. This poetic character is an outlook shared amongst many philosophical/spiritual traditions, where the importance of the symbol, images, imaginative expression, and the poetic relation of thought to creativity is key. Through images one comes to understand the nature of the relation of archetypes and images, or the relation of the real and the virtual, so to speak. This also has important implications for the nature of particular artistic practices.

Amidst a world increasingly saturated with data – with augmented and virtual realities, the ubiquity of social media, email and so forth – humans of the twenty-first century are living their lives across two different worlds. These two worlds have largely become, at least for the time being, a subdivision of the sensible world, or one of Plotinus' worlds. One could define these worlds as being the 'real' and the 'virtual'. All technologies place us somewhere between these latter two worlds of the real and virtual, and all technologies mediate the relation between these worlds in different ways. In this way, the real and the virtual are not entirely distinct. A book, read on a train, can transport one's sense of being to a place which transcends the environment of the train carriage and its clattering movements. The dramatic tension and action of the storyline, the descriptive language of a place or character, the sense of being in a vividly portrayed scene, can all have a remarkable effect on one's sense of time and place. A television programme can suspend the feeling of a domestic setting, and carry consciousness into another realm of images. This is to say nothing of watching videos on phones or tablets.

But one senses that the nature of living in two worlds is something that has changed considerably with the advent of the newer digital technologies and their thorough integration into every aspect of life. The digital or virtual world has, in its growing reach, become fundamentally universal, and has thus begun, in many respects, to be a singular kind of reality. Alongside this universality, the virtual world of technology purports to offer – and increasingly so – a disembodied and nominally 'transcendental' life. There are parallels between viewing humans in computational or informational terms with the loss of meaning and a loss of the intuition or feeling of a contemplative or spiritual reality. The notion of a spiritual world, which transcends this world, and of which this world is an image, has been replaced in some respects, by the notion of a computational reality, within the sensible world.

In place of the older model of the intelligible world propounded by Plotinus, another higher reality has been imagined: technological transcendence within the digital architectures of the machine. Digital transcendence is situated within the sensible world – it is rooted in the materiality of under-sea cables, vast architectures of computers and data banks. In this sense, the shape of the soul, so to speak, is imagined not in likeness to a higher principle, but to the nature of information and machines. In this way, many discussions of virtual worlds and the relation to technology are predicated on a technological theory of knowledge. This could be defined as viewing human consciousness like data, where the mind, being like a computer, is imagined as processing information, and so forth. In this way, ideas that become axiomatic for a theory of mind or consciousness, are applied to the development of technology. Certain things follow from this position, where the digitisation of personhood, the thought of 'uploading' minds, or of spending one's life within a permanent simulation are concerned.

These ideas are further connected to approaches to developing AI which are framed by computational theories of mind. Richard Dien Winfield has argued that there has been a growing '...temptation to model mind as a mechanism and to expect machines to one day simulate all mental reality.' (2014, 43). Winfield addresses some central claims about the nature of consciousness and mind, as this relates to computational analogies for thinking, and the question of whether machines or artificial intelligence can ever think. He writes that

...Plato exposed the limitations of computation in his Divided Line, showing how calculating understanding gets transcended by the true thinking that liberates itself of premises and given algorithms by conceiving what lies beyond assumption, intuiting ideas that develop immanently (dialectically) from one another. Plato showed that the calculation of "artificial intelligence" can never provide unconditioned knowledge. Because computation proceeds with premises and given procedures, any attempt to reduce

mind to machine, that is, to universalize calculation and reduce reason to understanding, is self-defeating, condemning its own claims to dependence upon unexamined premises.

Similarly Kant unmasked the impossibility of satisfying the Turing test by noting how judgment, subsuming particulars under universals, cannot be rule governed. This is because any rule for applying concepts would itself need to be applied, leaving an ultimate subsuming beyond any law. The same point gets later raised by Wittgenstein, arguing that rules cannot govern all practice, since rules for applying rules must themselves be applied, inviting an infinite regress that can only be overcome by simply applying rules without the guidance of any rule. (2014, 53)

The intuitive perception of meaning is thus a central element of human experience, and is that which distinguishes creativity, whether in art or science, from the calculative processes of machines. But given that machines are a creative and imaginative part of the search for meaning, both in devising new tools and technologies and in using them to explore the nature of reality, one can also consider how one discerns the image from the illusion through technology. The criticism of a mechanical or informational view of consciousness, in these respects, is not the same as criticism of science and the scientific method. The criticism of the reductiveness of the informational view aims to show that what is presupposed about the nature of consciousness informs the development of technologies. Nor, in criticising such reductiveness is one suggesting that the older philosophy and beliefs are incompatible with new ideas, nor, indeed, that the sciences and the findings of materialism and naturalism are to be ignored in favour of the old philosophies. Rather, the metaphysical implications of the philosophy of thinkers like Plotinus could be said to answer a need: a need which we find expressed everywhere that digital technology has proliferated; a need to escape the alienating effects it can bring, and to reframe our relationship to it, not so as to do away with it, but to rediscover ancient wisdom and teachings in new forms.

Plotinus is a Neoplatonic philosopher, drawing upon the earlier writings of Plato, and ideas around the relationship between the intelligible and sensible worlds. The discussion of the Divided Line in Plato's dialogue *Republic* precedes the notable passages about a cave, where figures, held in place and unable to look away from a wall in front of them, perceive the movement of shadows and appearances, made by a fire behind them and out of sight, to be the nature of visible reality. Upon release from their position, one of the figures is able to turn and begin an ascent of the cave, first seeing the fire and the objects moving about which create the shadows upon the wall, and then to a greater height, moving upwards and outwards to the sunlit visible world outside of the cave, and finally to the sun itself and then the invisible image beyond it, which is the Good, and which gives light to things (Plato, 1997, 1132-1135). The cinema-like setting of the figures, looking at flickering images upon the wall, has influenced discussions around photographic, cinematographic and videographic technologies, as well as those of the viewer gazing at a computer screen, tablet or phone; immersed within the shadows of the image, one becomes detached from reality.

The ever-expanding world of images, enlarged daily by the upload of lives online and the increasing interconnection of online/offline and real/virtual worlds, seems to further separate archetypes from images, and create an independent world of images. There is a change of vision and a change of images. For the computational worlds, in many circumstances, have come to embody a new technological reality of simulation and virtuality. In this way, they can draw one away from a contemplative stance, and from the greater depths of the image, and of the way in which the image can be something more substantial than ephemeral electronic instants.

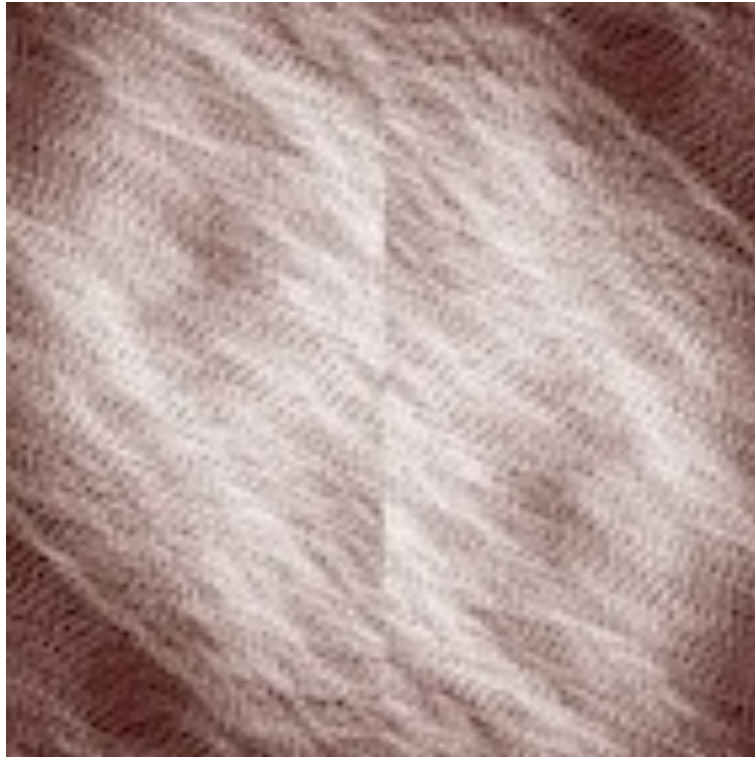
One aspect of the cave allegory to reflect upon is the consideration of how, having seen the sunlight, but not that which is beyond it, one relates back to the world of shadows. One has developed a certain understanding, in leaving the cave, to see the light of the sun, and of the relationship between an archetype and image, and the nature of images. One has developed, to some extent, a means to distinguish them. By seeing the intelligible world, as it were, one sees the sensible world differently. In a different kind of imagery, that nevertheless explores comparable themes, Plotinus also considers how one sees the relationship between the sensible and the intelligible worlds, or the eternal and the temporal, and this he articulates as a process of inner-development. Plotinus writes of someone who '...runs towards the image, wanting to grasp it as something true, like...a beautiful reflection in water...' but '...who then falls into the water and disappears...' (2019, 101). One can both lose oneself and find oneself within the image, and thus instead of looking only to the exterior surface, as it were, one should shape one's seeing with an 'inner way of looking', writes Plotinus (2019,101). In this way, there is a participatory development of one's perception, seeing in things, and in oneself, a kind of connection and unity.

## **Art, Image and Copy**

The aforementioned ideas point to undoubtedly negative themes that have arisen as a consequence of particular technologies. But there have also been positive senses in which technological developments, and the creative possibilities for communication that they have enabled, show new ways of finding meaning and understanding. This section of the chapter will reflect on a few of these ideas, firstly by considering some questions around images, secondly with some comments on the nature of virtuality in spiritual/contemplative art, and lastly with a discussion of some recent artworks.

The aesthetic and poetic elements of Plotinus' philosophy point to the way in which art, in many respects, has

been a mediating factor between real and virtual worlds: art is a likeness of something, or seems to be an image or symbol of something, which nevertheless remains invisible and unseen. Art, it could be said, seems to be both real and virtual – it is immersive and transformational. Art can seem to be another world which lies within this one, and its effects can be such that they can alter or shift one's perspective on the nature of the image of the real.



**Fig 1** *Double#1*, Gareth Polmeer, 2023

In the *Enneads*, Plotinus writes that artists do not imitate nature, but rather they make images of the invisible forms of which nature is also an image. In doing so, the artist may make something that appears natural, or to be like nature, but may add to the beauty of nature, through the work of art (2019, 611). Through contemplative creativity, the artist creates an image that derives from another reality; the higher reality of which the world is an image. In this view, human artistic vision is not necessarily or only based on visible, sensible phenomena, nor is it predicated on calculative reasoning. Creative vision is based upon a contemplative understanding of the relation of the transcendent to the worldly; that is to say, a vision of both the sensible and the intelligible, or the real and virtual together. This kind of vision is not the same as machine or computational vision. This does not mean this human vision cannot be augmented by new technologies, or that those technologies cannot help to open new realms of the imagination, but it does suggest something about human creativity, which is that humans have the intuitive capacity to know or see the difference between the real and the virtual. It is in this sense that the creative process is intuitive, and in which the artist acts to translate the relationship between the two worlds in their work. It is also how the artist visualises with their creative work, a connection between these worlds.

If humans hold this unique ability, what would it mean for some form of AI image generator to make an image from a vision of the intelligible, rather than from images existing only in the sensible realm? And what if such images that AI systems are trained upon had been made by artists with a vision of the intelligible in their work? Insofar as AI produces images that are non-human, these images derive from models trained upon human-made images. AI then, is likely to make aesthetic 'choices', so to speak, in the sense that the process of image creation is based upon a calculative process that includes various factors within the sampled material. AI does not have the same intent in making an image as a person, in this respect, nor is it intentional in the way that it is 'looking' at images to create new ones: intentional

here, meaning contemplative or intuitive in the ways discussed above.

AI is however becoming a revolutionarily prevalent tool for image creation, and thus its possibilities might not be dismissed by these limitations. One can imagine artistic engagements with technology that can be a way to aid the distinction between images and illusions, in the sense that a digital image, whilst sometimes lacking an 'original' or archetype in the material world of appearances can, depending on its nature, be a likeness of the invisible realities to which the philosophical traditions discussed have pointed. Perhaps rather than view generated images as images of images, in the negative sense, one can see them, in selected contexts and to some extent, as one see works of human-made art: they are in some degree, and perhaps only remotely, images of invisible things, because they contain some trace of human artistic works that have been made with this intention. AI images of this nature are distributed or fragmented and different to the human artist's intention, for that artist is a meeting-point of the perception of the real and the virtual – moving between them. This is not the same for the AI image generator, but it could be perhaps for the artist using one as a creative tool.

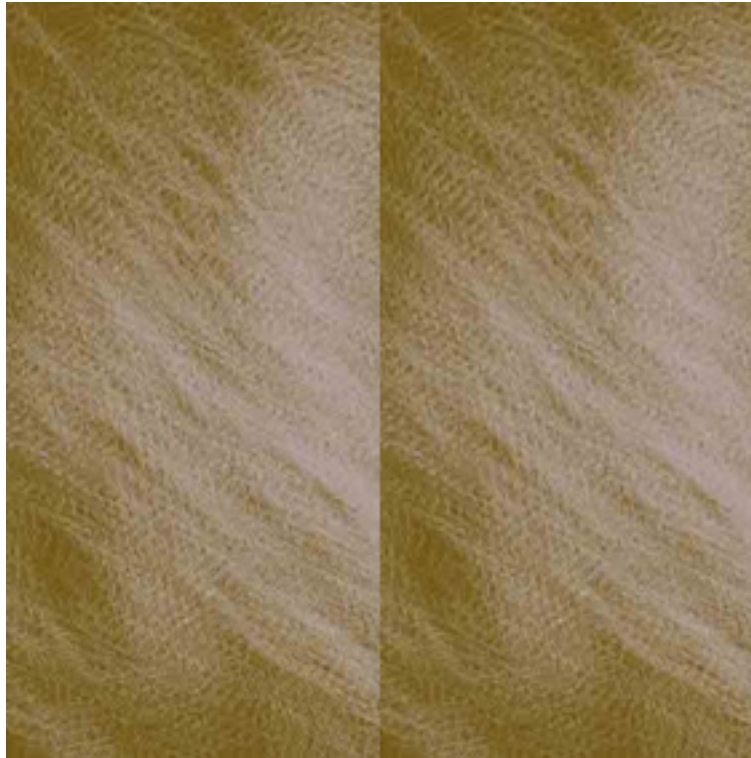
Works of sacred or spiritual art have often achieved profound experiences of virtuality, in the contemplative sense. Entering a church and gazing upwards to a frescoed ceiling, one can be struck by a uniquely 'immersive' experience, in which the collective space of images within the church's structure are related to the individual in a particularly unique manner. The 'real' architectural space of the building gives way to an expanded 'virtual' space within the ceiling, based upon the position of the viewer. The image becomes an architectonic extension of the space. Moreover, there is an achievement of aesthetic connection between the viewer and the architecture and images; as if the viewer, the building and the sacred imagery were one. The viewer momentarily inhabits both the real and the virtual. The entire magnificence of the building appears to be made only for that person. The viewer is 'augmented', as it were, within the entirety of the building's form. Equally, depictions of sacred themes in films, paintings or sculptures, for instance, can express such wonder and connection. The key to this kind of virtuality is that there is a appearance of the real and the virtual together – the virtual is always a part of the real, as the higher reality is present in the lower: the two worlds are connected.

These are considerations that I have worked through and considered, in some modest senses, in my own artistic practice. I would like to briefly discuss some examples of recent artworks that have explored a kind of interplay between analogue and digital processes around these ideas (Fig.1 and Fig.2). These works are not made with or alongside the AI processes discussed above, but they do engage process-based and iterative experiments with software, and are developed dialectically, as it were, between traditional media and digital media. They are works that aim to situate a contemplative art practice within the saturation of images, accounting for the reproducible nature of digital images and the dimensions of experience and mediation brought about by digital processes in art-making.

Making the works involves several stages. They derive from a contemplative/philosophical process. Sketches on paper form the bases for digital sketches using a trackpad. Different permutations with the digital drawing tools create different forms. This process is repeated, with experiments and variations. The pencil drawings and the screen-based drawings each have material limitations. From these two processes emerge an image that is used to produce a relief print. The print is then digitised by scanning. Using conventional image software, aspects of the print are traced in outline, where the original lines, cut with a tool, have created new edges to the forms, which in turn have been varied by the ink and print process. The outlines are then used to make a complex, layered digital image, with hundreds of versions overlapping and connecting in different ways. There are both 'manual' and automated placements of these shapes. Next, the images are used to create a template for the production of another piece of lino. Two final possibilities are then explored with this object. The first is to make a series of relief prints; the second is to digitise the lino image by scanning, and further edit it with software, to be printed as a digital print.

This complex and varied set of processes does not follow a predetermined or calculated method. The processes are open to chance and variation. There is a polarity and interpolation between the hand-made and the digital, between the continuity of creative gestures and the algorithmic processes of the software. There is a searching and indeterminate element to the works, and the images are doubled, or mirrored, each side being an aspect of the representation of another reality, so to speak, within the material presence of the works. What emerges from these processes is a kind of visualisation of the unknown: abstract images that attempt to mediate the noise and interruption of the virtual world upon the real, and processes that challenge and move between these worlds.

One moves experientially, as it were, through these processes of making, shifting between the material and immaterial on the level of the sensible, or the real/virtual relation of the digital. And in doing so, one might elevate one's images to a level beyond the sensible, drawing the higher contemplative ideas into that world, and bringing together, in the senses defined by Plotinus, a participatory image. It could be said, that in attempting to mediate the real/virtual world relation within the sensible dimension of the real, that the works attempt to elaborate a method that recollects the transcendent ideas, that in Plotinus' terms, are the source of imagery for the contemplative artist.



**Fig 2.** *Double#2*, Gareth Polmeer, 2023

## Conclusion

Computational culture has created a new technological revolution, with groundbreaking advances across many areas of life. It has also created deep uncertainties around meaning and communication. The rise of social media, the internet and related technologies, have undoubtedly complicated the distinction between the image and the illusion. Today's world is an expanded context of Nam June Paik's remarkable term the 'electronic superhighway', from his landmark video installation of 1995, with vast flows of data and information. The history of technological innovation and the social changes it has brought about demonstrate perennial concerns and anxieties. As with so many examples in the history of technology, the consequences of innovation can be unintended or unexpected. The historical moment, in this respect, is no different, for we see positive and negative developments.

The ideas of image and likeness that one finds throughout history represent existential questions that seem to have been amplified by the digital age. One needn't view the questions and challenges posed by technology today deterministically, nor with outright pessimism. But one might view these questions and challenges through the lens of a recollective or contemplative philosophy to understand them. If the world of the image is only a technologically created reality, and not a reflection of something else, then the path of contemplation can be lost, and a means to distinguish the two worlds of the real/virtual too.

It is not a foregone conclusion that new technologies will render human creativity redundant, nor that they spell the end for imagination and the work of art. For the work of art, as we have seen in some of the philosophical and historical examples discussed, is an active process of vision that unites different worlds, through different media. One can choose to retreat from the challenges that new technologies create, or one can act with imaginative agency to determine one's relationship to them, and through doing so, develop the spirit of creativity to face the challenges. As the brush or chisel becomes the extension of creative activity into the substance of paint and marble, software, code and pixels also extend imagination into new realms of art. Aided by intuition, art-forms can form new shapes to navigate the emergent technological future.

The artwork is a place where the intelligibility of the world is rendered in mysterious, yet comprehensible ways; where one sees something that is both real and virtual. Rather than thinking that the new world of virtuality is all there may be, one must remember that the very idea of the illusion implies a real image or likeness, and it has always been a matter of human imagination to discern the one from the other. The task can be as readily undertaken through the media of today, as much as it has been through the technological tools of the past.

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