Distant Writing: Literary Production in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

This article introduces the concept of "distant writing", a novel literary practice in which authors act as designers, employing Artificial Intelligence (AI) assistants powered by Large Language Models (LLMs) to generate narratives, while retaining creative control through precise prompting and iterative refinement. Unlike Moretti's *distant reading*, which uses computational analysis to interpret large corpora of existing texts, distant writing harnesses AI to author new narratives, reshaping the literary production process. By examining theoretical frameworks and practical consequences, and relying on an experiment in distant writing called *Encounters*, this article argues that distant writing represents a significant evolution in authorship, not replacing but expanding human creativity within a design paradigm. The distinction between writing (close) and "wrAIting" (distant) reveals how AI-assisted composition creates narrative possibilities previously inaccessible, transforming literature's modal space while challenging traditional notions of authorship, creativity, and literary production. This emerging practice merits critical attention as it shapes future literary landscapes and reconfigures relationships between human creativity and AI.

Keywords: distant writing, artificial intelligence, large language models, authorship, narrative design, modal logic, literary production, wrAIting.

1. Introduction: The Emergence of Distant Writing

Computational approaches to literature have transformed how we analyse and interpret texts for some time. Franco Moretti's concept of *distant reading* introduced methodologies for examining vast corpora of literature, revealing macro-level patterns and structures through computational techniques that traditional close reading could hardly discern or not at all (Moretti 2000, 2013, Kirschenbaum 2016, Piper 2018, Ramsay 2011). However, while distant reading represents a computational turn in literary analysis, we are now witnessing the emergence of a parallel phenomenon on the production side: *distant writing*.

Distant writing refers to a literary creation practice wherein human authors function primarily as narrative designers, while AI assistants based on Large Language Models (henceforth also simply AI or AI assistants) perform the actual writing. Unlike traditional authorship, distant writing—also occasionally termed *wrAIting* in this article to distinguish it from *close writing* (the ordinary kind)—positions the author not as the direct textual producer, but as the architect of narrative possibilities, *responsible* for specifying requirements, affordances, and constraints, and curating the AI-generated content. This shift represents not merely a technological intervention in the writing process but a fundamentally different conceptualisation of what it means to author a text.

In this article, I examine distant writing as an emerging literary practice, discussing its theory, methodology, and implications for authorship, creativity, and narrative structure. Drawing on recent experiments (Floridi 2025b), I argue that distant writing expands rather than replaces human creativity within a design framework, prompting essential questions about the boundaries and future of literature in an AI-driven culture (Floridi 2024, 2025a).

2. From Distant Reading to Distant Writing: Theoretical Frameworks

Moretti's distant reading emerged as a response to the limitations of close reading when faced with the vastness of world literature. As he argued

> distant reading ... allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems (Moretti, 2000, p. 57).

Through computational analysis, patterns emerge across texts that would otherwise remain invisible to traditional methods of literary analysis. Big data, in essence, reveals micro-patterns that demand specialised tools for their identification and analysis (Floridi 2012a). Distant writing operates on analogous principles but inverts the direction of the computational engagement. Rather than analysing existing texts to identify existing patterns, distant writing designs new patterns—through requirements, affordances, constraints, and other parameters—to instruct computational systems to generate new texts from existing ones. Where distant reading employs computation to expand interpretative options, distant writing uses it to open creative opportunities.

Given this inverse relationship, it is important to clarify a key point here that will become more evident later in the article. Moretti accurately defines distant reading in terms of *feasibility* relative to close reading, characterising it as an interpretative method best suited to tasks that close reading either cannot accomplish or would significantly struggle to achieve. This does not mean distant reading cannot replace close reading, but doing so forfeits its unique advantages. It is comparable to using virtual reality for a concert one could attend in person—a lesser experience. Virtual reality is most valuable when enabling otherwise impossible experiences, not when merely replicating achievable ones. Likewise, distant writing enables narratives that would otherwise be impossible or difficult to achieve. This does not mean that an author cannot fruitfully use distant writing to AI-generate texts that could be produced by close writing, but that this practice would fail to capture what is unique in the process adopted. Like distant reading, distant writing is a matter of expanded feasibility, not just increased efficiency or effectiveness, although the latter features are certainly a crucial part of the success of the AI-based production of texts.

The theoretical framework for distant writing draws upon several established domains. Let me anticipate here what I shall discuss in more detail below. From modal logic, it adopts the conception of narrative as a boundless space of possible worlds (Ryan 2006) constrained by coherence rather than mere consistency (Ryan 1991), and narrative structuring principles extensively discussed in narrative theory (Genette 1980, Herman 2002, Ricoeur 1984-1988). From design theory, it borrows the understanding of creativity as a process of exploration within affordances and constraints (Gero 1990). And from computational creativity, it takes the notion of the human-computer

partnership as generative of possibilities inaccessible to either in isolation (Boden 2004). However, distant writing also introduces novel theoretical considerations, like what one might term the "isotropy of the narrative space": the principle that any narrative domain is equally workable in any direction, provided coherence is maintained. Unlike traditional conceptions of narrative as having preferred directions or natural progressions, distant writing reveals a *boundless* number of alternative paths in a constructivist sense. This does not mean the paths are already there and only need to emerge. Following a classic distinction in the philosophy of mathematics between *boundless* and *infinite*,[1] distant writing, as I present it here, accepts boundless (potentially infinite) paths but rejects the existence of actual (completed) infinite paths. There are as many narrative patterns as needed, and more can always be added if our operations require more, but there is no infinite set out there, to be discovered independently of our "writing". To use one more distinction from the philosophy of mathematics, distant writing is not Platonist, it is Constructivist:[2] all stories are created, they are not mind-independent realities to be discovered or revealed. Figure 1 summarises the distinctions just introduced that frame the following sections.

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[1] In the philosophy of mathematics, particularly from the constructivist viewpoint, the terms "infinite" and "boundless" have distinct meanings. "Infinite" typically refers to a completed totality, an actual infinity—something that exists fully realised as a finished entity, e.g., classical mathematics' set of all natural numbers. "Boundless", by contrast, denotes a potential infinity—an indefinite process or construction that can always continue further, but is never actually completed or totalised, e.g., the constructivist conception of the natural numbers, where one can always produce the "next" number, but the entire infinite set never exists as a completed whole.

[2] I must acknowledge here the influence of Michael Dummett's version of mathematical intuitionism on my way of thinking about narratives, although we never spoke about narratives, only about logical proofs.

Granularity	Mode of Engagement: Reading	Mode of Engagement: Writing
Close	**Close Reading** Human interpreter engages directly with individual texts. Focus on nuances, e.g., language, rhetoric, character psychology. Exemplified by line-by-line exegesis in traditional literary criticism.	**Close Writing** Human author composes text directly. Emphasis on individual style, voice, and manual revision. Traditional authorship process: drafting, editing, and polishing by the writer.
Distant	**Distant Reading** Computational analysis of large corpora to detect macro-patterns, e.g., themes, tropes, genre systems. "Big data" methods reveal patterns imperceptible to close reading.	**Distant Writing** Human as the designer of narrative constraints; sets requirements through prompts; curates AI output. AI (LLMs) as the executor of text. Enables narratives infeasible by close writing alone.

Inverted Relation

Figure 1: Close and distant reading and writing

3. Methodology of Distant Writing: Designing through Prompting

The methodology of distant writing centres on designing the textual input that generates the desired textual output. This approach reconceives writing as a systematic interrogation: "wrAIting" becomes the art of crafting targeted prompts that guide an AI system toward generating the desired narrative output. The precision of these prompts—the correctness and accuracy of the Socratic maieutic exercised by the authoritative designer to nudge and ultimately force the AI system to generate the desired output—determines the quality of the narrative. Poor prompts yield incoherent texts, while well-crafted prompts may produce sophisticated, thematically consistent literary outcomes. The iterative process, known as *progressive refinement*,[3] leads to the outcome ultimately released by the author, whose approval bears all the *intellectual responsibility* for the shared content. The methodological process is well known to anyone who has used any LLM-based AI assistant, so I shall only briefly

[3] Progressive refinement is a methodology in computer science and software development where a solution is gradually improved through iterative steps, starting with a basic version and incrementally enhancing it until reaching the desired quality or functionality.

summarise it. It typically involves seven stages, although each writer will have their preferred approaches and solutions:

1. Conception and Development: this preliminary stage encompasses all activities involved in conceiving and developing the narrative idea. Although AI interactions may offer heuristic assistance here, they remain external to the core distant writing process; at this point, the author simply determines whether adopting distant writing is the most suitable approach to realise the intended narrative.
2. Requirements Formulation: establishing the affordances, constraints, and other parameters to guide the narrative generation, including style, themes, characters, and plot elements.
3. Prompt Engineering: formulating precise requirements as effective prompts designed to elicit specific responses from the AI assistant. Prompts can be crafted directly using natural language (NL) or, increasingly, by employing specialised systems that convert NL prompts into formats optimised (markup) for use by LLMs.
4. WrAIting: AI-based generation of text.
5. Progressive Refinement: in this iterative process, the author reviews AI-generated text, identifies shortcomings (often with the help of AI, see next step), and refines prompts or formulates new ones to address the relevant issues, re-wrAIting the text. The process does not end automatically—further refinements are always possible—the author terminates it.
6. Validation and Verification: using AI, possibly a different one, to ensure the generated narrative maintains coherence, plausibility, and adherence to established requirements. Some AI assistants, like the Claude series, are better at writing narratives, while others, like the GPT series, are better at validating and verifying them. Hallucinations are always possible, so this is a stage where *close reading* becomes crucial.
7. Curation and Assembly: selecting, arranging, and potentially modifying generated content to form a cohesive final work.

The process reveals an important distinction between traditional writing and distant writing: the latter operates through a logic of requirements rather than a logic of

composition. This is not surprising: the logic of design is the logic of requirements (Floridi 2017b), and in distant writing, the answer required follows the requiring question: the better the latter is, the more the answer is constrained and closer to the original design.

4. Authorship Reconfigured: The Meta-Author as Responsible Designer

In conventional literary production, the author functions as both the conceptual architect and the textual executor: the person who both conceives and writes the work. In distant writing, these functions are decoupled, with the human operating as what might be termed a "meta-author" who designs but does not directly produce the text.

Historically, this decoupling has happened before. We find it natural and obvious in architecture, fashion, industrial design, music, and all cases in which the authors are not (although sometimes they can be) the executors of the projects they design. Even in the history of art, great artists like Raphael would sometimes only design or sketch a painting, while the assistants in his workshop would execute it, with perhaps a final touch by Raphael himself. Nowadays, the decoupling is magnified in scope and depth as the effect of a broader trend characterising digital innovation's *cleaving power* (Floridi 2017a): the ability of digital technologies to aggregate or disaggregate phenomena that were considered in the past entirely independent or even unrelated—e.g., personal data and personal identity, when talking in terms of data subjects or individual profiles—or so strictly connected to be indivisible—e.g. law and its territoriality.

Culturally, the decoupling between text designer and text executor raises challenging questions about authorship, creative agency, attribution, and ownership. For example, to whom should we attribute a work of distant writing? The human designer who established the requirements? The AI system that generated the text? Or perhaps the original authors whose works might have been used to train the model?

The concept of a meta-author as a designer of textual content acknowledges the human's creative input while recognising the distributed nature of agency in distant writing. It suggests a model of authorship that is neither entirely human nor entirely artificial but emerges from the interaction between human intention and agentic capability (Floridi 2025a). I just mentioned that this reconfiguration of authorship

parallels developments in other creative fields. The crucial notion here is that of *responsibility*, not ownership. It is the designer that is accountable for the final text. The comparison to architecture seems particularly apt, as architects have long been recognised as the creative forces behind buildings they never physically constructed but were responsible for. Bernini neither made nor put in place the 284 columns in St Peter's Square, yet it is unquestionably Bernini's Colonnade. Distant writing extends this model to literature, positioning the meta-author as a designer whose creative vision is executed through technological means that shift the boundaries of the feasible. There is a final difference worth stressing here: Raphael and Bernini may not have delivered some of their masterpieces had they not been commissioned by Pope Julius II or Pope Alexander VII. On the contrary, digital technology, AI included, empowers individuals to be their own masters. Meta-authors can be their own commissioners.

All this means that the so-called "death of the author" as a writer (Barthes 1967, Foucault 1969)—even if exaggerated and correctly questionable in its radical interpretations (Hirsch 1967, Fish 1980, Burke 2010, Farrell 2017)—may be followed by the birth of the author as a designer and co-producer of a text, who initiates, supervises and is *responsible* for the collaborative wrAIting, with AI assistants, past generations of writers on whose works the LLMs are trained, past as well as potential readers, and at some point past AI assistants as well.

5. The Modal Space of Narrative: Boundless Isotropy and Experimentation

One of the interesting contributions of distant writing is its reconceptualisation of the narrative space as boundless. While narrative possibilities are inexhaustible, they do not exist until they are realised, and to be realised, they need to comply with requirements of coherence, plausibility, and other parameters established by the meta-author. Drawing on modal logic, distant writing shows more clearly what was always obvious, at least implicitly: *consistency*, that is, the absence of contradiction, is necessary but insufficient. Coherence is also required, understood as the consistent co-presence of meaningful connections. For example, consistency is necessary but insufficient for a meeting between Hamlet (*Hamlet*) and Caliban (*The Tempest*), even if an AI assistant can easily produce the following scenario and dialogue:

Hamlet, the melancholic prince of Denmark, is shipwrecked on Prospero's enchanted island while fleeing Denmark. Wandering the island, he encounters Caliban, Prospero's resentful servant, who mistakes Hamlet for another tormenting spirit.
Caliban: *What cruel spectre art thou, come to plague me further?*
Hamlet: *I am but a man, though burdened by the ghost of my father's will. And what art thou, this wretched creature, half man, half beast?*
Caliban: *I am the rightful lord of this isle, usurped by a wizard most vile. But thou, pale stranger, art no lord, just a shadow lost as I am.*
Hamlet: *A shadow indeed, for my purpose is as fleeting as the wind. Tell me, monster, dost thou suffer as I do, trapped between action and despair?*
Caliban: *Suffer? Aye, each moment, tormented by the lash of men who call themselves my betters. I curse, I rage, but what fruit bears my wrath?*
Hamlet: *Then we are kin, thou and I, for I curse my fate yet lack the will to end it.*

A narrative must also be plausible regarding features like characters' ages, times and places of the events, social classes, distances travelled, or financial means. If an AI assistant is not carefully instructed to curate it, it will fail to implement this, sometimes very subtly.

I already mentioned that this understanding of narrative as a modal space aligns with possible worlds theory in literary studies (Pavel 1986, Ryan 1991), but distant writing adds a crucial insight: the *isotropy* of narrative space. Traditional narrative theories often imply preferred directions or inherent progressions within narrative structures. By contrast, distant writing shows that narrative space can be shaped in any direction desired, similar to how marble can be sculpted freely, provided coherence is maintained. This isotropy has profound implications for literary creation. It suggests that any story is only one possible realisation of a boundless space of narrative possibilities, although not all narratives are genuinely possible. Other patterns can be designed within the same space, and distant writing provides access to these alternative realisations in ways traditional writing cannot, or struggles to do. This introduces a final remark about experimentation. Distant writing can be a powerful tool to navigate possible spaces of narrative development, in at least two ways.

Distant writing can test counterfactuals: whether the narrative logic of an existing narrative is robust. For example, one can use it to test whether the narrative

logic of *Pride and Prejudice* holds under perturbation—i.e., to check whether altering constraints, such as character, chronology, or causality, break the internal coherence and consistency of the story. For example, in a variation of *Pride and Prejudice*, what would follow if Elizabeth accepted Mr. Collins's proposal? This process uses the AI assistant not to wrAIte Austen, but to stress-test her text by simulating variant developments. The AI assistant helps explore narrative counterfactuals that would be impossible or too laborious to model manually, showing where Austen's plot is flexible or intricately rigid.

Distant writing can also help explore alternative or unimplemented narrative paths—that is, hypothetical scenarios that are allowed and plausible but unrealised developments—within the existing constraints of a text. Here are four examples (including a counterfactual one) using *Emma*:

1. Counterfactual: "If Frank Churchill had not been secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax, Emma would have fallen in love with him." This scenario contradicts the story's actual events, imagining an alternative outcome where Frank's sincerity leads to a romantic relationship with Emma, altering her path to Mr. Knightley.
2. Semifactual: "Even if Mr Elton had not proposed to Emma, Harriet would still have been heartbroken." This scenario keeps the actual outcome (Harriet's heartbreak) constant but imagines a change in the cause, suggesting her heartbreak would persist due to her insecurity or misplaced affections.
3. Forward-Looking Indicative Hypothetical: "If Mr Knightley were to express his feelings to Emma tomorrow, she would likely realise her own love for him." This scenario speculates on a plausible future event based on the story's actual development, without contradicting or altering established facts.
3. Open Hypothetical: "What if Emma lived in a modern world where matchmaking was done through dating apps?" This scenario reimagines the story in a speculative context, disconnected from the constraints of the original narrative, exploring how Emma's meddling might translate to a technological setting.

The point is not what testing can be done, but why it would be interesting to do it; that is an author's choice and decision.

6. Minor Characters and Network Narratives: The Connected Nature of Fiction

Encounters (Floridi 2025b) provides an application of distant writing as the exploration of minor characters from existing literature. By extracting secondary figures from canonical works and placing them coherently in new narrative contexts, distant writing reveals the connected nature of fiction as a single possible *directed graph*[4] where any character can be connected to any other character through a finite number of steps (other encounters). As Frigyes Karinthy famously suggested in *Chains* (Karinthy 1929), humans are all connected through just a few acquaintances. The degree of separation is likely to be higher than 6 for many characters in the narrative space, but they, too, are all connected; one only needs to design the right meetings.

This level of abstraction highlights minor characters as *nomina infinita*, defined by what they are not. Unlike essential major characters, minor figures represent open possibilities, connecting narratives across literary worlds. By focusing on these underdetermined nodes in the narrative network, distant writing can create connections between seemingly disparate literary worlds, revealing that in the narrative space, no single story is entirely disconnected from any other story. Some neighbourhoods of the narrative space are more densely populated than others and cab be more easily exploited. Thus, in *Encounters*, I experimented with minor characters from English-written novels to deal with an easier case. But more adventurous explorers have the languages and the stories of all humanity at their disposal. Because this connected nature of fiction allows distant writing to create narratives that span across different authors, periods, genres, regions and cultures, weaving together a tapestry of literary references and relationships that can be truly universal.

These network narratives represent a form of literary exploration previously difficult or impossible to achieve. Traditional comparative literature might identify influences and parallels between works, but distant writing actively creates new pathways between texts, demonstrating the interconnectedness of the literary landscape through generative rather than analytical means. The positive effect is that

[4] In *Encounters*, the directed graph is a simple directed path, but nothing prevents more complex structures.

distant writing expands the possibility of intertextual reappropriation, the reuse of characters from other works, which authors have exploited to create new and innovative stories about specific, familiar characters, with fresh perspectives or expanded narratives.[5] Humanity's *inexhaustible semantic capital* (Floridi 2018) is not only unique but also undivided and non-hierarchical, and distant writing can help put it to good use, for creative and hermeneutical purposes.

7. Dataprint: The Stylistic Signature of AI

A significant observation from experiments in distant writing is the emergence of what might be termed an "AI stylistic signature": identifiable patterns, rhythms, and structures that characterise texts generated by specific models regardless of the stylistic parameters established in prompts. Regardless of quality, and independently of the specific stylistic choices (e.g., emulating Austen) determined by the human designer, AI assistants exhibit common patterns—such as rhythm, narrative structure, distinct ways of initiating, developing, and concluding a story, lexical preferences[6]—forming an identifiable literary pattern that can be termed their *dataprint*.[7]

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[5] Famous examples of intertextual reappropriation include: James Joyce reusing Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as one of the central characters in *Ulysses*; Jean Rhys reimagining Bertha Mason, the "madwoman in the attic" from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, in her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, telling her tragic backstory and humanising her character; Gregory Maguire giving a new perspective to the Wicked Witch of the West from L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* in *Wicked*, portraying her as a misunderstood and complex character. And Tom Stoppard focusing on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two minor characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, presenting the events of *Hamlet* from their point of view.

[6] A classic is the overuse of the verb "to delve" (Juzek and Ward 2024).

[7] Dataprint is not a neologism, but a technical term in computer science. I am borrowing here to refer to the stylistic signature of an LLM-based AI assistant and hence to stylistic traces that can be identified (often through other AI systems) in the output of a distant writing process. This is not far from the original meaning, according to which a dataprint (also known as a data fingerprint or digital fingerprint) is a unique, structured representation derived from a dataset or digital content, typically generated through computational methods such as cryptographic hashing, pattern extraction, or feature encoding. In computer science, dataprint is designed to capture key identifying characteristics or patterns of the data, enabling verification, authentication, comparison, traceability, and detection of alterations without requiring full exposure or reproduction of the original dataset. So dataprints are commonly used in contexts

Clearly, the term "voice", often used to describe human authors, would constitute an inappropriate anthropomorphism (Floridi and Nobre 2024), but it is close in meaning, as it refers to the distinctive and consistent style, tone, and perspective expressed throughout a writer's works, making their writing recognisably unique. The difference is that "voice" encompasses not only *implicit features* of which an author may be unaware—for example, recurring thematic interests, underlying beliefs, attitudes, and emotional stances towards the topics they address—but, above all, the *deliberate choices* an author makes concerning vocabulary, sentence structure, rhythm, or punctuation, which collectively establish their narrative identity. A "voice" manifests through the specific rhetorical strategies, such as figurative language and imagery, that an author habitually employs, contributing significantly to the individuality and coherence of their literary output. Once more, distant writing decouples these two aspects, the intended and unintended sides of an author's voice. AI assistants have no intelligence or mental states, hence no deliberate choices, but they still show unique "wrAIting styles" that transcend the specific stylistic constraints imposed by prompts. Their dataprints do not show personal intent, emotions, or experiences to influence. They are regular, emergent features, often invariant and hence informative, that can identify them as the source of a text and distinguish them from each other. The reader who may be somewhat sceptical may wish to consider that it is because of their dataprints that we can guess, with a high level of probability, whether an AI assistant has written a text, and how a simple experiment with two AI assistants will show that they differ remarkably in style when responding to the same storytelling prompt.

AI's dataprint allows *distant reading* and computational approaches—stylometric analysis, lexical frequency analysis, syntactic complexity measures, and supervised classifiers trained specifically on outputs from different models—to detect and attribute AI-generated authorship. For example, when not prompted for a specific

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involving data provenance, integrity verification, cybersecurity, plagiarism detection, digital forensics, and machine learning to uniquely characterise data instances, facilitate deduplication, or support anomaly detection. In distant writing, all this remains true, but the emphasis is on style.

style, the GPT-series dataprint tends to be more lyrical, expansive, and introspective, favouring a nuanced emotional register. It crafts narratives rich with sensory details and elaborate, evocative descriptions, often weaving introspection seamlessly into the storytelling. The prose typically exhibits more complex syntactic patterns and a refined, sophisticated lexicon, underscored by a clear psychological depth. This dataprint prioritises emotional resonance, character-driven plots, and structured narrative arcs designed for emotional gratification. The Claude-series dataprint, by contrast, tends to be more direct, lean, and pragmatic, characterised by economical language and narrative efficiency. It typically employs a minimalist prose, emphasising concise action and forward momentum rather than intricate descriptions or introspective digressions. The storytelling is straightforward, often letting characters' actions and minimal dialogue imply emotional states, creating immediacy and clarity without extraneous ornamentation.

So how does a dataprint emerge? Since an LLM-based AI assistant is not inherently creative or expressive in the same way as a human, its stylistic signature emerges from a combination of its design, training data, and the way it generates responses. Here are the main factors behind a specific stylistic signature:

1. Training Data Influence: the corpus of text used to train the LLM shapes its tone, style, and depth of knowledge. For example, an LLM trained on formal academic texts may exhibit a precise, professional tone, while an LLM trained on conversational or creative texts might produce more casual or imaginative responses.

8. Output Patterns: AI assistants LLMs often develop distinct response tendencies based on their architecture and training. These patterns might include vocabulary choices (e.g., formal vs. colloquial language), sentence structure (more or less concise or elaborate sentences), tone consistency (e.g., neutrality, enthusiasm, or empathy), formatting style (e.g., bullet points, numbered lists, or essay-style responses).
9. Design and Parameters: these are the design choices of the LLM's developers, such as its model size, fine-tuning, and use cases, that impact its stylistic signature. For example, the GPT-series often aims for clarity and coherence, making their

responses accessible and user-friendly. Models specialised for creative writing might exhibit a more imaginative or poetic style.

10. Limitations and Repetitions: repeated stylistic quirks or limitations can also form part of an LLM's signature, such as a tendency to hedge statements (e.g., "it depends..." or "there are many factors..."), recurrent sentence starters, such as "in summary..." or "for example...", or an over-reliance on specific structures, like defining concepts before providing details.
11. Fine-Tuning and Applications: fine-tuning an LLM for specific industries or tasks can add unique stylistic elements. For example, a legal-focused model may consistently use formal and legalistic language, while a model fine-tuned for creative writing might emphasise metaphor, imagery, and narrative flow.

The emergence of AI stylistic signatures raises intriguing questions about the nature of style itself. Traditional literary theory has often conceived of style as expressing an author's unique sensibility or worldview (Barthes 1967). But if an AI system can develop a recognisable style without consciousness or intention, perhaps style is better understood as a set of statistical patterns and regularities, some of which are intended and purposefully sought ("voice" in a strict sense), while others are unintended and only emergent (dataprint). Humans have both, but AI has no voice, only a dataprint.

The implications extend beyond theoretical interest. If AI systems develop increasingly distinctive styles, future literary historians might analyse these computational signatures just as they currently study the styles of human authors. We may eventually speak of "early Claude" versus "late Claude" periods, or identify influences between different AI models in the same way we trace influences between human writers.

8. Creating New Literary Genres: AI and the Evolution of Narrative Forms

Distant writing not only reconfigures existing literary forms but also creates the conditions for new genres to emerge. Technological changes have often facilitated genre evolution throughout literary history, from the epistolary novel enabled by postal systems to the stream-of-consciousness technique influenced by new psychological theories. Distant writing represents a similar technological catalyst with the potential

to generate novel literary forms that would be difficult or impossible to achieve through traditional human writing.

One emerging genre might be "multiverse literature" (Booth 2024), texts that explore multiple narrative paths simultaneously rather than sequentially. While hypertext fiction experimented with reader-directed branching narratives, distant writing enables the efficient creation of vast narrative landscapes where countless variations of a story coexist. With distant writing, authors could design works that purposefully explore multiple carvings of the same narrative marble, presenting readers with a cohesive multiverse rather than a single storyline.

Another potential genre is what we might call "network narratives"—texts that systematically explore the interconnections between seemingly disparate fictional worlds. The *Encounters* experiment, bringing together minor characters from different works, represents an early example of this approach. Such narratives could evolve into complex literary ecosystems that map the "connected network" of fiction, creating meta-stories that exist in the spaces between established texts.

Distant writing also enables new forms of collaborative authorship that transcend traditional co-writing. "Conversational literature" might emerge as a genre where human designers and AI systems—which could also impersonate dead authors, imagine an interview with Italo Calvino on "mechanical writing"[8]—engage in structured dialogues that generate narratives through iterative exchanges. Unlike traditional collaborative writing, which typically involves humans working sequentially or in parallel, conversational literature would represent a genuine fusion of human and machine creativity, a dialogue between designer and system that produces texts neither could create independently.

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[8] Italo Calvino (1923–1985) was known for his experimental narratives and imaginative literary style. In his essay *Cybernetics and Ghosts* (1967, collected in (Calvino 1986) he speculates on literature as a combinatorial and computational process, suggesting that machines might one day generate literary works. Calvino's reflections anticipated contemporary discussions about computational creativity, AI-generated literature, and mechanical writing. Calvino was an active member of the Oulipo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle), a group of writers and mathematicians who created works using constrained writing techniques. See also (Calvino 1987), (Usher 1995).

The concept of originality itself requires reconsideration in this context. The Romantic notion of originality as *ex nihilo* creation has long been challenged by postmodern theories of intertextuality, which recognise all texts as "mosaics of quotations" (Kristeva 1980, Hutcheon 1988, Eco 1989). Distant writing makes this intertextuality more explicit and systematic. Besides, attempting to create something entirely new, distant writing can also embrace "deep remixability" (Manovich 2007), simultaneously recombining cultural elements at multiple levels. We saw that this recombinatorial approach to originality shifts emphasis from creating unprecedented content to discovering unprecedented connections. As (Boden 2004) distinguishes between *P-creativity* (psychological novelty, new to the individual) and *H-creativity* (historical novelty, new to human history), distant writing introduces what one might call *C-creativity*: combinatorial novelty that emerges from the systematic exploration of possible connections within the space of narrative coherence.

These emerging genres challenge traditional literary categories, like content, form, or effect, by focusing instead on their compositional logic or the human-AI collaborative process. This would represent a fundamental shift in classifying and understanding literary forms, moving from product to process-centred taxonomies. Such a shift would align with an ontology that values relational, network-oriented thinking instead of substantial, mechanical-oriented one (Floridi 2008, 2012b). I defined it elsewhere as *post-Vitruvian* (Floridi 2024).

As these new genres evolve, they may transform readers' expectations and competencies. Just as modernist literature required readers to develop new interpretive strategies, AI-generated genres might foster new kinds of literary literacy—abilities to recognise patterns across narrative multiverses, trace connections in network narratives, or appreciate the specific qualities of human-AI collaborative creation. The originality of distant writing may ultimately lie not only in the texts it produces but also in the new modes of experimental reading it enables.

9. Multiverse Literature: Exploring Narrative Branching at Scale

The concept of multiverse literature (Booth 2024) deserves further exploration as a genre enabled by distant writing. While traditional narratives typically follow a single path through a space of possibilities, multiverse literature systematically explores

multiple paths simultaneously, presenting not a single story but a coherent system of related stories that branch and converge in complex patterns. Traditional attempts at branching narratives—such as choose-your-own-adventure books, hypertext fiction, or interactive games—have been limited by practical constraints. The labour involved in manually creating multiple narrative branches quickly becomes prohibitive as the number of decision points increases, leading to what game designers call the "combinatorial explosion problem." Even sophisticated interactive fiction must severely limit the number and significance of branching points to remain manageable. Distant writing fundamentally changes this equation. AI can efficiently generate multiple narrative continuations from any given point, enabling the exploration of narrative possibility spaces at previously impossible scales. Multiverse literature exploits the isotropy of narrative space, intentionally designing multiple narrative paths simultaneously and regarding each path as equally valid, rather than privileging a single, linear progression.

The structure of multiverse literature might take several forms. The simplest would be a "parallel narratives" approach, where a single premise generates multiple distinct storylines that never converge. More complex would be a "branching and converging" structure, where narratives diverge at key decision points but may later reconverge, creating a network of interconnected possibilities rather than a simple tree. Even more ambitious would be full "quantum narratives" where multiple states exist simultaneously in superposition, with certain elements remaining constant across versions while others vary.

What distinguishes AI-generate multiverse literature from earlier experiments in branching narratives is not just scale but coherence. Rather than presenting disconnected alternative paths, multiverse literature would emphasise the relationships between variants, treating the system of possibilities as a unified work rather than a collection of separate stories. This systemic approach might reveal patterns and structures invisible in any single narrative instantiation, creating a meta-level of meaning that emerges from comparing alternatives.

The reading experience for multiverse literature would differ significantly from traditional linear reading. Readers might navigate the narrative space through various interfaces—perhaps selecting specific branches to explore, perhaps experiencing

multiple versions in parallel, or perhaps following algorithmically generated paths based on their preferences. Like in old hypertextual experiments, the boundaries between author, reader, and text become more fluid, as readers participate in determining which narrative possibilities are actualised in their experience.

This form of literature connects to philosophical questions about contingency, necessity, and possibility. As modal logic distinguishes between actual, possible, and necessary, multiverse literature makes these distinctions explicit within a narrative. Some elements might appear in all versions (necessary), others in only some versions (contingent), while still others remaining merely possible, creating a hierarchy of narrative inevitability that traditional storytelling can only implicitly suggest. The implications for characterisation are significant. Characters in AI-generated multiverse literature would exist not as fixed entities but as possibility spaces—collections of potential traits, decisions, and developments that manifest differently across variants. This approach aligns with the previous discussion of minor characters as *nomina infinita*, defined more by their possibilities than their actualities. In multiverse literature, all characters retain something of this infinitude, never fully determined by any single narrative path.

As a critical framework, multiverse literature might draw on quantum physics (Ryan 2006, Booth 2024), modal logic, and possible worlds theory to develop new vocabularies for discussing narrative. Critics might analyse not just what happens in a story but the probability distribution of possible happenings, the phase space of character development, or the strange attractors that pull disparate narrative branches toward common outcomes despite differing paths.

While early experiments in multiverse literature might focus on explicitly branching narratives, more sophisticated works could develop subtler approaches to multiplicity—perhaps embedding alternative possibilities within seemingly linear texts, creating palimpsest-like layers of potential meaning, or developing formal techniques for suggesting the ghost-presence of untaken paths within the chosen one. The full artistic potential of this genre remains to be explored as distant writing techniques continue to evolve.

10. Pedagogical Implications: Teaching Creative Writing in the Age of AI

The emergence of distant writing invites reconsidering how creative writing is taught. Traditional creative writing pedagogy has focused primarily on developing skills in direct textual production: crafting sentences, structuring narratives, developing characters, and refining style through practice and revision. Distant writing, however, shifts the emphasis from execution to design, requiring different skills and approaches. In this new paradigm, creative writing education might evolve in several directions.

Programs may need to incorporate "prompt engineering" as a core competency, part of a broader shift towards multiliteracies and digital literacy skills essential in contemporary education (Selber 2004, Gee 2007). Since *distant science* and *distant scholarship* follow directly from non-fictional distant writing,[9] it is already essential to teach students how to formulate effective requirements that guide AI systems toward desired textual outcomes. This approach requires precision in articulating creative intentions, an ability that differs from but complements traditional writing skills.

Creative writing pedagogy may increasingly emphasise meta-literary awareness: understanding genre conventions, narrative structures, and stylistic patterns at a systematic level. While traditional writing instruction often teaches these elements implicitly through practice, distant writing requires explicit knowledge of these patterns to design prompts effectively. Students would need to analyse and articulate the structural and stylistic features they wish to reproduce or transform in their work. In short, distant writing requires close writing and reading.

The workshop model that has dominated creative writing education since the mid-20th century may evolve toward what we might call a "design studio" approach. Rather than focusing primarily on the critique of finished texts, workshops might evaluate prompt strategies, compare multiple AI-generated variations of the same prompt, and collaboratively refine prompting techniques. This approach would emphasise process over product, teaching students how to navigate the space of narrative possibilities effectively.

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[9] I owe to Jessica Morley this remark.

Creative writing programs may need to incorporate elements from other design-focused disciplines, such as architecture, game design, or user experience design. Our age is the age of design, and these fields have developed sophisticated methodologies for working with constraints, balancing functional and aesthetic considerations, and designing experiences rather than objects, all skills relevant to the distant writing paradigm.

The evaluation of student work may shift from assessing textual quality to assessing design quality. Instructors would consider not just the final text but also the effectiveness of the prompting strategy, the exploration of alternatives, and the curation decisions made in selecting and refining AI outputs. This represents a significant departure from traditional assessment methods focused primarily on the text itself.

Beyond these specific pedagogical shifts, distant writing raises broader questions about the purpose of creative writing education: if AI efficiently produces proficient texts, what unique value remains for human-centred creative writing education? Rather than competing with AI capabilities, creative writing programs might focus on developing uniquely human strengths—conceptual originality, design skills, cultural and ethical awareness, and critical judgment—that complement rather than duplicate AI functions.

The democratising potential of distant writing also challenges the traditional gatekeeping role of creative writing programs. WrAIting might enable more people and empower those already enabled to care more about the novelty and the final result, and less about the execution. If technical proficiency becomes less of a barrier to entry, creative writing education might shift emphasis from teaching basic craft to cultivating more advanced conceptual and critical skills. Of course, this democratisation is always only partial, and its limits raise equity concerns in terms of exacerbating the digital divide. Access to advanced AI writing tools and the technical literacy required to use them effectively are unequally distributed. Creative writing programs may need to address these disparities to ensure that distant writing technologies expand rather than limit access to literary creation.

Finally, creative writing education must grapple with the ethical dimensions of distant writing. Students should understand the provenance of AI capabilities—

including the human-authored texts that form the training data—and develop frameworks for using these tools responsibly. This might include discussions of attribution, originality, cultural appropriation, and the changing value of creative labour in an AI-mediated environment.

Technological change often reveals implicit assumptions within educational practices (Warwick 2018). The emergence of distant writing helps clarify assumptions about authorship, creativity, and literary value embedded in traditional creative writing pedagogy, providing an opportunity to reimagine these practices for a new technological context.

11. Transforming Literary Criticism: New Paradigms for AI-Generated Texts

The emergence of distant writing necessitates new critical approaches that adequately address AI-generated literature. Traditional literary criticism has developed around assumptions of human authorship, intentionality, and cultural context that may not apply straightforwardly to texts produced through human-AI collaboration.

To begin with, distant writing challenges the notion that a text's meaning is determined and controlled entirely and only by its author's intentions. When authorship is distributed between human designers and AI executors, the locus of intention becomes ambiguous. Critics may adopt what could be termed *design-intention criticism*, explicitly examining the link between human prompts and AI-generated texts rather than assuming traditional authorial intent.

Second, distant writing complicates biographical criticism. The biographical details of human authors have traditionally informed interpretations of their work, but how might we apply similar approaches to texts whose direct producer is an AI system? Perhaps critics will develop methods for analysing the "biography" of AI models—their training data, architectural evolution, and deployment contexts—as relevant interpretive frameworks. A related challenge will concern versioning, the availability of drafts, annotations, and earlier, modified copies of a text. On the one hand, more could be known if authors were to keep and share their prompts and a complete record of the wrAIting process. On the other hand, the digital is incomparably more fragile and transient than the analogue, so much could easily be lost.

Third, AI-generated literature makes intertextuality more explicit and pervasive, as LLMs are trained on vast corpora, and we have seen that they inevitably echo patterns from their training data. Critics may need to develop new approaches to identifying and interpreting these computational echoes, distinguishing between patterns and features created by the designer, emerging from the wrAIting yet endorsed by the designer, and mere artefacts of the training process.

Fourth, distant writing invites the reconsideration and expansion of reader reception theory (Iser 1978, Jauss 1982). AI-generated texts, shaped largely by computational prompts, foreground the reader's active role in meaning-making, prompting renewed attention to reader agency, interpretative plurality, and participatory forms of criticism. Reception theory can thus elucidate how readers engage differently with AI-created literature compared to traditional texts, potentially shifting critical attention from authorial intention toward the diverse ways readers interpret and interact with computationally generated narratives.

Finally, distant writing invites a meta-criticism that examines the critical reception of AI-generated literature itself. How do readers' and critics' conceptions about AI authorship influence their evaluations? Do they apply different standards to human-written versus AI-generated texts? The reception of distant writing may reveal as much about human attitudes toward creativity and technology as the texts themselves. As (Hayles 2012) has argued about electronic literature, new textual forms demand new critical approaches. Distant writing requires critics to develop frameworks that can address the unique characteristics of AI-generated texts while maintaining the historical insights of traditional literary criticism.

12. Ethical Dimensions of Distant Writing: Questions of Attribution, Originality, and Value

I have briefly touched upon the new ethical responsibilities of the author as a designer and the ethical challenges that distant writing may generate, in terms of a new, exacerbated digital divide. Other ethical implications of distant writing extend beyond questions of attribution to encompass broader concerns about originality, intellectual property, cultural production, and creative labour, raising profound philosophical questions about technological mediation and responsibility. Here, the issues are well-

known and not unique to distant writing but to the whole world of AI-generated content, so I will only sketch them as a reminder.

By distributing creative agency among human designers, AI systems, and the authors of the original training texts, distant writing complicates attribution and accountability in literary production. This disruption has practical implications for intellectual property regimes. Copyright law has traditionally protected the expression of ideas rather than ideas themselves, but distant writing blurs this distinction by making the human contribution primarily conceptual rather than expressive. (Boden 2010) notes that our legal frameworks for creative work are still rooted in Romantic conceptions of individual genius that may be inadequate for collaborative human-AI creativity.

Beyond legal considerations, distant writing raises ethical questions about the nature of creative work and its value. When writing becomes primarily a matter of design rather than execution, how should we value different forms of creative labour? Does the meta-author who designs prompts deserve the same recognition as the traditional author who produces text directly? These questions echo debates in conceptual art about whether the conception or execution of an artwork should be privileged (Goldie and Schellekens 2007).

Training data complicates ethics further: since LLMs may use extensive copyrighted texts, distant writing raises critical issues about proper compensation and acknowledgment of original creators. This leads to a further concern: cultural appropriation. If prompt designers generate texts in the style of authors from historically marginalised groups, for example, without lived experience of the cultural contexts those authors represent, this may constitute a form of digital colonialism, or at least cultural disrespect. Cultural appropriation involves power imbalances that must be critically examined (Coombe 1998), and distant writing may exacerbate these imbalances by making cultural styles more easily replicable.

Distant writing also raises sustainability concerns due to its reliance on computationally intensive AI technologies. This is not an issue specific to distant writing, but the significant energy consumption required by training LLMs in general poses environmental challenges, prompting ethical considerations around responsible

and sustainable use of resources. Future discourse on distant writing should address these impacts explicitly, balancing creative innovation with ecological responsibility.

Lastly, distant writing also raises existential questions about the value we assign to human creativity itself. If AI systems can produce compelling literature based on human prompts, does this diminish the special status we have traditionally assigned to human creative expression? Or does it simply redirect human creativity toward design rather than execution? These questions echo philosophical debates about authenticity and meaning in an increasingly technological world (Taylor 1991).

All these questions will become increasingly pressing as distant writing becomes an ordinary experience. The sooner we deal with them, the better.

13. Publishing in the Age of AI: Industry Transformations and New Business Models

The publishing industry stands at the threshold of significant transformation as distant writing becomes more prevalent, continuing historical patterns of technological disruption and adaptation within publishing practices (Striphas 2009, Bhaskar 2013). Traditional publishing models have been built around identifying, developing, and marketing the work of human authors, individually or collectively, but distant writing introduces new possibilities and challenges that may fundamentally reshape the industry.

It is true that distant writing potentially *democratises* (in the computer science not the political sense of the word) literary production by lowering barriers to entry. Yet, this democratisation could lead to an explosion of new content, challenging publishers' traditional gatekeeping, selection processes, quality checks, and archival roles. Publishers may need to develop new criteria for evaluating the quality and marketability of texts produced through distant writing. This may lead to a significant shift in the economics of publishing. Traditional royalty models assume one or more authors, who receive compensation based on sales. Distant writing complicates this model by introducing multiple stakeholders: prompt designers, AI system developers, potentially the creators of works used in training data, and potentially readers who may co-design the new texts (see below). Publishers may need to develop more complex compensation models for these distributed contributions (Elkin-Koren 2017). Still part

of the economic transformation is that the text production timeline will accelerate significantly. While traditional publishing involves lengthy processes of drafting, editing, and revision, distant writing can potentially generate polished manuscripts more quickly. This acceleration may pressure publishers to streamline their editorial and production processes or risk being outpaced by more agile competitors leveraging AI capabilities.

Distant writing could foster customised publishing, even allowing novels to be rapidly generated or revised based on reader preferences, similar to TV series adaptations. In that case, publishers might offer personalised versions of texts tailored to individual readers' preferences or needs. This customisation could transform reading from a mass consumption activity to a more individualised experience (Murray 2012). Agile and on-demand publications may become more common. The roles of editors and copywriters may shift from direct textual revision towards designing and optimising effective prompts, and carefully curating AI-generated narratives. Editors may assume responsibilities akin to film producers, managing and overseeing the overall creative process rather than engaging primarily in manuscript correction. This shift would require editors to develop new skills in prompt engineering and AI system management.

Finally, distant writing may give rise to entirely new publishing business models. Publishers might offer subscription services for access to AI writing tools with premium prompts, create marketplaces for effective prompts rather than finished texts, or develop platforms that allow readers to generate their own literature based on specific parameters. These new models would represent a significant departure from traditional publishing approaches centred on the production and distribution of fixed texts.

The publishing industry has historically adapted to technological changes, from the printing press to e-books, by transforming its business models and value proposition (Thompson 2021). Distant writing represents a major technological shift, challenging publishers to reconsider how they create and deliver value in an era when the production of written content is increasingly automated and distributed.

14. WrAIting and the Future of Literary Production

Looking forward, distant writing represents not just a novel approach to literary creation but potentially a fundamental shift in how written communication is produced more generally. One day, people may wonder how past generations could write all their texts without AI doing most of the work. They will look at writing a bit like we think about sewing our own clothes or growing our own vegetables, doable, but not an ordinary practice.

Close writing might become an exceptional skill rather than the norm, comparable to home-baking bread in a world of mass-produced goods. In the future, most textual production may involve human-AI collaboration, with humans establishing parameters and AI systems executing the actual writing. Such a shift would not necessarily diminish human creativity but might redirect it toward design rather than execution, with significant consequences which one can only begin to imagine. We live in a culture based on close reading and close writing. If writing becomes wrAIting, hence primarily a matter of design rather than execution, what will happen to the intimate relationship between language and thought that has characterised human expression? If everybody is an architect and nobody a mason, how will this affect our relationship with the processes linked to reflection, understanding, or creative thinking? For millennia, we have become accustomed to thinking through writing. What will happen when we will think through wrAIting? These questions highlight the need for critical engagement with distant writing not merely as a technological innovation but as a cultural and philosophical transformation with far-reaching implications for understanding human expression.

15. The Fourth Revolution: Decentralising Human Information Production

Distant writing can be positioned within a broader historical context, what I have described in the past as a *fourth revolution* (Floridi 2014), following the Copernican, Darwinian, and Freudian revolutions that displaced humanity from the centre of physical, biological, and mental spaces. This fourth revolution, which I attribute to Turing, displaces us from the centre of the information space (infosphere). This framing locates distant writing within a larger philosophical shift away from anthropocentric conceptions of information production. As previous revolutions

challenged human centrality in various domains, distant writing challenges the assumption that meaningful textual creation must be exclusively human. Drawing on the philosophy of information (Floridi 2010), we can understand distant writing as part of a broader reconfiguration of human-information relationships. In this reconfiguration, humans shift from being the sole producers of meaningful information to being mostly designers, curators, and interpreters within an increasingly complex informational ecosystem that includes artificial agents. This perspective suggests that distant writing is not just a technological development but part of a fundamental philosophical reorientation that requires one to reconsider traditional assumptions about human exceptionalism in creative production. It invites us to explore "distributed morality" (Floridi 2013, 2016) and "distributed creativity" (Literat and Glaveanu 2018, Bruno and Canina 2020, Mejia, D'Ippolito, and Kajikawa 2021), where meaningful creation emerges from networks of human and non-human agents rather than from individual human minds alone.

16. Conclusion: The Bounds and Horizons of Distant Writing

Distant writing represents a methodological innovation in literary production and a conceptual challenge to traditional understandings of authorship, creativity, and narrative. Positioning the human as a designer rather than a direct producer of text reconfigures the creative process along lines previously more familiar in fields like architecture or fashion design than in literature. This reconfiguration reveals several valuable new insights about narrative and literary creation. It shows the boundless but constrained nature of narrative possibilities, the isotropy of narrative space, and the connected network structure of fiction. It challenges us to think differently about narratives, stylistic signatures, and the future of literary production. Distant writing should not be perceived as replacing traditional writing but rather as expanding creative possibilities. It provides novel tools for navigating narrative spaces, linking diverse literary universes, and democratising literary production. As with all significant innovations, it inevitably raises complex questions about authorship, creative agency, and the evolving human-technological relationship. However, these challenges do not justify rejection or resistance; instead, they invite deeper reflection on human creativity

itself. They should be welcomed as opportunities to reflect and understand human nature and predicament more deeply and refine and expand human ambitions.

As we continue exploring the potential of distant writing, we should approach it not with uncritical enthusiasm or reflexive scepticism, but with thoughtful engagement that recognises its possibilities and limitations. The future of literature may involve increasing collaboration between human designers and AI writing systems, but the value of this collaboration will depend on our ability to develop frameworks that preserve meaningful human creative agency while embracing the expanded possibilities that distant writing offers. In the end, distant writing invites us to reconsider not just how we produce literature but what literature is and might become—a reconsideration that may prove as significant for our understanding of human creativity as Moretti's distant reading has been for our understanding of literary analysis. Some good news is certain: there is plenty of exciting intellectual work to make the most of and understand distant writing.

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