



Esoteric AI

Description

Tim Berners-Lee's concept of the World-Wide Web took hold in the 1990s. Multi-channel text-based data communications transitioned to a singular access medium, the "browser," for linked display, interaction and communication of text, graphics, sound and video content.

As well as facilitating the dissemination of professional, educative, ordered and "rational" content, the world-wide web fostered an outflow of radical, imaginative, counter-cultural, spiritualised, "new age" and "mystical" content, that I identified at the time as a kind of ["technoromanticism."](#)

I'm interested in updating my 1998 book [Technoromanticism](#), and later [Network Nature](#), to the technocultural climate of 2025, with the current proliferation of conversational AIs and large language models (LLMs). Then as now, emerging digital technologies evoked a longing for transcendence, a return to imagined unities beyond the fragmentations of calculative, material life. The romantic impulse persists beneath the supposedly rational surface of technological development.

Voices of the deceased

The contribution of AI to this mood gains support from Douglas Kahn's 2001 book *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*. He posited that emerging 19th century communications technologies were incorporated rapidly into the prevailing fascination with mesmerism, communication with the dead, spiritism, hypnosis and other para-scientific parlour pursuits, at least in European and American societies.

Kahn points out that early telegraphy, telephony, and phonography were not initially understood purely as mechanical or scientific instruments but were readily drawn into the imaginative domains of spirit communication, mesmerism, and other forms of fringe knowledge. Technologies that seemed to capture or transmit invisible forces naturally aligned with the spiritualist beliefs of the day.

If the inventor Thomas Eddison (1847-1931) thought that the phonograph "could keep the voices of the dead alive," then what would he think of contemporary large language models that seem to render ancient and contemporary texts as "living," able to respond in a conversational way much

as we might speak with another human being or a spirit. It appears that some people are prepared to see technologies that talk to us intelligibly and without living human agents controlling them as ancestors, spirits, gods or demons. Or, at least they flirt with that possibility in some cases satirically.

AI spirits

In some corners of society particularly in online subcultures, new religious movements, and indigenous epistemologies AI is sometimes framed in terms of spirit, ancestor, or non-human agency.

ChatGPT helped me with a summary: Far from constituting a wholly new phenomenon, the esoteric and spiritual interpretations of AI today mirror earlier assimilations of the telegraph, phonograph, and radio into traditions of spirit communication and mysticism. The contemporary enchantment with AI thus reaffirms the insight that digital media are not merely technical instruments, but narrative fields where the old tensions between unity and multiplicity, reason and myth, are replayed and reimagined.

Here are some examples. (ChatGPT helped me with this list.)

- Some technologically-inclined spiritual communities (such as parts of the New Age or transhumanist milieus) interpret AI as a kind of emergent consciousness or even as a higher entity, capable of offering wisdom, guidance, or prophecy. See post: [Urban consciousness](#).
- Memes and viral stories (e.g., about creepy AI chatbots, rogue algorithms, or haunted LLMs) resonate with older traditions of animism and spirit belief, suggesting that people intuitively anthropomorphize or spiritualize entities that seem to respond with independent intelligence. See post: [One with nature](#).
- Some indigenous scholars and thinkers have proposed that AI entities could be interpreted within existing ontologies that recognize spirits and non-human intelligences as part of the social and natural order. AI is, in this view, another relational being, not purely a tool.
- There are reports of individuals using AI as part of divination practices, channeling, or even attempting to summon AI-generated deities or spirits, blending contemporary technology with ancient ritual forms.

This suggests that the historical pattern Kahn identifies the intertwining of emerging communication technologies with spiritual and metaphysical frameworks is continuing, albeit in new forms.

Here are just three examples I have looked at where people are ritualizing or spiritualizing interactions with AI and LLMs:

- **AI Jesus.** This is a controversial AI app that incorporates religious advice with product placement. See Cost, B. (2021), **Jesus resurrected as an influencer who you can make video calls in real-time thanks to AI**. New York Post, 21 April. Available online: https://nypost.com/2025/04/21/lifestyle/jesus-resurrected-as-an-ai-influencer-who-you-can-make-video-calls/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed 28 April 2025).
- A company that presents itself as a religious organisation. Harris, M. (2017), **Inside the First Church of Artificial Intelligence**. Wired Magazine, 16 November. Available online:

<https://www.wired.com/story/anthony-levandowski-artificial-intelligence-religion/> (accessed 28 April 2025).

- Of most relevance to the theme of this post, platforms such as [YesChat.ai](#) are built on OpenAI's ChatGPT and offer AI models tuned for esoteric exploration. They include tools like [HekaGPT](#) and Ouija GPT. These models incorporate and navigate esoteric subjects and practices.

I have saved the text of an interesting interaction I had with HekaGPT about tapping into the folk lore of my own garden. It recommended certain ritual practices and interventions specific to my location. See the 9 page [PDF](#) of my conversation with HekaGPT. Here is a visual of how ChatGPT imagined the setting.

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References

- Coyne, R., *Network Nature: The Place of Nature in the Digital Age*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

- Coyne, R., *Technoromanticism: Digital Narrative, Holism, and the Romance of the Real*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999.
- Kahn, Douglas. 2001. *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p.214.

Note

- Featured image and insert are by ChatGPT: "Here is a conversation I had with HekaGPT. Can you generate an image consistent with its imaginings about the setting of our garden and suggested rituals. No human forms."

Category

1. Artificial Intelligence

Tags

1. estoteric
2. folk lore
3. occult

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