

THE TECHNO-SPIRITUAL PARADOX: CAN SOFTWARE SIMULATE WHAT IS SACRED IN THE AGE OF THE METAVERSE?

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ABSTRACT

The evolution driven by artificial intelligence and digital simulation technologies has revolutionised how human beings conceive, create, and engage with artistic and spiritual experiences. This paper investigates an emerging paradox within this transformation. Drawing on African cosmologies, comparative religious aesthetics, and posthumanist theory, the study considers the extent to which the digital can simulate the ontological and affective aspects of sacred experience, rather than merely imitating its appearances. Through a philosophical and cultural exploration, the article calls into question the disembodied nature of code-based creativity by comparing it to the embodied practices of ritual, specifically in indigenous African cultures, where clay, spirit, physical materials, and the artist's body come together as forces of transformation. Prone propositions such as presence, aura, and the divine's intentionality are examined alongside contemporary manifestations such as AI-generated iconography, virtual altars, and algorithmic ritualism. Some religious bodies contend that, even though technology can emulate the representation of the sacred, it is often bereft of the ontological and metaphysical reciprocity that animates sacred encounters in ancestral traditions. By placing indigenous material epistemologies and the spiritual agency of material at the front and centre of its analysis, this article pushes back on universalist digital

transcendence narratives. It stakes an ethical claim for a more situated, multigrounded ethic of techno-spiritual creativity.

Keywords: *AI and Religion, Digital Ritual, Embodied Transcendence, Indigenous Futurism, Metaverse, Posthuman Theology, Ritual Aesthetics, Sacred Simulation, Techno-Spirituality*

Introduction

In an era where machines write music, create paintings (Oksanen et al., 2023), improve ceramic designs (Atuh, 2025) and regurgitate copies of holy icons and religious teachings (Chrostowski & Najda, 2025), with startling likeness, a very deep philosophical question gets progressively harder to duck: Can software simulate the sacred? As artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and algorithmic design venture deeper into domains previously set aside for human imagination, ritual, and spiritual being, the line between technical reproduction and ontological presence becomes visibly blurred. The sacred (understood in this sense as a realm of apartness, as filled with transcendent meaning and vivified through relational presence and ritual coherence) is not merely symbolic, but rather, it is ontological; in the sense articulated by Knott (2016) and Marion et al. (2012) of its irreducibility to that which is profane or representational. Historically embodied in gesture and material invocation, communal memory, or metaphysical resonance, the sacred is increasingly simulated in digital terms that mimic its forms and signs but often fail to convey the sense of force or presence that confers spiritual weight (Tsuria&Tsuria, 2024).

This research is born of what might be called a techno-spiritual paradox: the tension between the ability of technological media to duplicate the structural forms of sacred art and practice, and these fundamental metaphysical questions have been open since the earliest days of the information age, namely, whether the sacred can indeed be encoded. Across many indigenous and classical traditions, particularly African cosmologies, the sacred is not so much a symbolic construction as a relational happening: the co-presence of matter, spirit, and people is enacted in embodied ritual practice. The potter who shapes clay, for example, does not just create an object but participates in an ancient tradition in which earth, movement (performance), and intention converge to bring forth the sacred. They are resistant to abstraction, in which the sacred is rooted in touch, texture, time, and terrain. In stark contrast, digital simulation largely operates within the realms of disembodiment and abstraction. Here, AI-formed deities, 3D-rendered sacrificial vessels, virtual altars and other AI applications offer visual approximations of the sacred form without necessarily committing to endure its ontological force (Makimei et al., 2025; Papakostas, 2025; Tsuria&Tsuria, 2024). However, these

technologies are wondrous, convenient, and even hallowed, as they pose profound philosophical and ethical questions of a more troubling nature about what it means to be real, to be present, and at which point simulation ceases to be simulation. The question here is: do such digital relics possess a spirit, or merely signify it? Could code serve as a conduit to the divine, or was its logic inherently at odds with the ineffable?

This article is a philosophical and cultural reflection upon the possibilities and limits of sacred simulation in a posthuman age (Hui, 2019). It materialises African epistemologies of matter, particularly those grounded in material and earth-based ritual practices, into conversation with theories of aesthetics, embodiment, and digital mediation today (Menkiti, 1984; Lawal, 2007). Building on the ideas of Walter Benjamin, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Yuk Hui, and African theorists such as Ifeanyi Menkiti, Babatunde Lawal, and contemporary philosophers of African normative thought (Lougheed, 2025), the study contends that software easily mimics the look of the sacred but too often does not bring the ontological depth, affective presence, and metaphysical dialogic association found in actual sacred experiences (Benjamin, 1968; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Hui, 2019). In interrogating the paradox, the aim of the study is not to dismiss digital creativity, but to inquire: what gets lost, changed, or reborn when a form of the sacred is translated into code? When engaging with the divine technologically, what kinds of responsibility, humility, and cultural grounding must be maintained? By pursuing these questions, this paper seeks to help hone a more ethically and philosophically sophisticated grasp of posthuman creativity and spiritual simulation.

What is the Sacred? *Ontological and Phenomenological Foundations*

Though sacred has been notoriously hard to define, it has been a key focus in philosophical, theological, and anthropological traditions (Eliade, 1959; Otto, 1958). It is difficult to fully abstract the sacred, because it often appears as a presence that tears through everyday with awe, reverence, or metaphysical gravity. In Western phenomenology, the sacred is described as “*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*”, a numinous presence that is simultaneously terrifying and captivating (Otto, 1958). From the perspectives of Morgan (2022) and Eliade (1959), the sacred is expressed through hierophanies (the manifestation of the divine in material reality) and organises space and time in relation to the spiritual dimension. However, both Otto (1958) and Eliade (1959), while offering compelling frameworks, risk succumbing to a universalist inclination that could diminish cultural distinctions in the experience and performance of the sacred. Otto and Eliade attempt to explain the sacred by identifying what is common across all human experiences. The problem is that, by emphasising universality, their

frameworks may overlook how specific cultures understand, perform, and experience the sacred in unique ways, thereby potentially diminishing the importance of cultural diversity in sacred practices.

The sacred is ontologically not so much a quality found in objects or events as a modality of presence, a relating presence that summons and answers, or a phenomenon that fills and changes. In African philosophical traditions, the sacred is inextricable from materiality, from ancestry, and from communal memory. The earth is not a blank substrate but an animate presence, with clay honored as one of the substances that negotiates between the living and the ancestral, the visible and the invisible (The Albert Team, 2025; Nche& Michael, 2024). As Cordeiro-Rodrigues (2022) and Bayuo (2025) has argued, many African ontologies locate personhood, indeed being itself, not apart from or in opposition to others, but in relation to others as a becoming through time, ritual, and community. Sacredness, then, is not abstract or simulated but rather resides in concrete embodied relationships, spiritual intentionality, and ancestral remembrance. Furthermore, those interested in the phenomenological tradition in philosophy, for example, in Gallagher (2023), focus on the role of the body in our understanding of the world. To him, perception is not a receptacle for information but an eternal dance with the universe. If applied to sacred ritual, this would mean that the ritual is not simply symbolically representing the sacred but is lived as a pre-symbolic/non-symbolic act, a doing in which the sacred is made immanent. African ritual techniques, especially in sculpture, dance, pottery production, mask-making, etc., demonstrate this logic: they do not represent the sacred but embody it through form, rhythm in time and space, breath, and flesh (Abiodun, 2014).

In these contexts, the sacred is not “otherworldly” in the Cartesian sense, but it is deeply immanent; it is rooted in the textures of soil, gesture, voice, and a communal collective repetition. This has important ramifications when assessing digital forays into this sacred simulation. Is a code-based medium that is disembodied even capable of reproducing something whose very fact of being-in-the-world depends on touch, smell, weight, and communal intentionality? If the sacred is a being-in-relation, meaning something that is not just a design or a picture, then the digital raises an ontological question: it can simulate the appearance of the sacred even as it detaches the embodied and ancestral relations that render the sacred real. The argument, therefore, places the sacred not as a universal but as locally and materially situated – something that is born of a particular form of knowledge making and relating.

Simulation and the Question of Aura

The practical difference between representation and presence emerges at a time

when software-driven and AI-generated artefacts increasingly resemble the sacred objects, spaces, and rituals of developed religions. At the core of this discussion is attention to the relationship between the concept of aura and Benjamin's (1968) programmatic essay, *"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"*. Aura for Benjamin is the unique appearance of a work of art in space and time, closely linked to its ritual basis, its time of origin, and the materiality itself. Mechanical (and thereby digital) reproduction strips art of this aura as it takes art out of its sacral-cultic precincts and sends it circulating through an endlessly promiscuous universe in which the original is displaced by its reproduction. Nevertheless, when holy objects - religious icons, ritual objects, ceremonial vessels - are digitally simulated or AI-generated, they tend to keep form without force, symbols without presence, and design without intention. A 3D-modelled Ifá divination tray or AI-generated Yoruba mask may replicate surface aesthetics but cannot replicate the spiritual intentionality or communal relationality that undergirds their traditional production. In much of Africa, the artist is not just a maker; he is a conduit, and the object is not just a sign; it is a vessel containing spirit. The aura in this instance is not merely a stuff but also a form of sacred oracular transmission that is spatial, temporal, genealogical, and embodied (Abiodun, 2014; Lawal, 2007; Drewal, 1992)

Today, digital media increasingly create simulations of the sacred that challenge the ontological basis of aura. In VR applications, such as in AltspaceVR (Hsu, 2024; Gaudio, 2015; AltspaceVR, n.d.) and Spatial (Chaudhari, 2024; Spatial platform, n.d.), for example, one can "worship" at virtual temples in 3D immersive spaces, lighting virtual incense or partaking in avatar-led chant rituals. Hindu temples, Buddhist shrines, and more recently, Christian sanctuaries have all been reconstructed digitally, claiming a kind of spiritual accessibility but absent physical embodiment (Adria, 2024; Fadillah & Murad, 2024). In such environments, sacred space is captured as data rather than as sanctified ground imbued with the collective memory of its peoples and the continuity of their ritual lives. Equally, AI-crafted religious icons - produced via platforms such as Midjourney or DALL·E - are increasingly prevalent across e-commerce sites and digital devotional channels (Makimei et al., 2025; Chrostowski & Najda, 2025). They are not that dissimilar in their nature of idolatry and the craze of its visualisation: from hyper-stylised Krishna icons to mass-produced devotional figures, which become looped images, each of which creates meanings through mass reproduction. However, it has been removed from the original temple or ritual protocols. Even as they may inspire beauty, wonder, and curiosity, there is something still missing in them - a sort of ritual authority, performative invocation, and spiritual weight - that makes sacred images sacrosanct in cultures for whom making is a devotional act.

The problem is compounded further by the advent of AI-driven spiritual entities - like Oracular Chatbots, digital tarot apps, and predictive I Ching simulators - most of which offer some semblance of guidance, clarity, or spiritual insight; but lacks the cultural, ritual/religious, or metaphysical infrastructure that supports their source traditions (Adria, 2024; Papakostas, 2025; Dingler et al., 2024; Rahmi et al., 2025). For instance, apps can now offer digital Ifá divination, replicating Oduduwa signs and translations without the presence of a Babalawo (native doctor/herbalist) or community of witnesses. In this way, the sacred is separated from the body and also from ritual grammar, which traditionally structures the transmission and reception of knowledge across generations. In both such cases, Baudrillard's (1994) notion of hyperreality is highly illuminating. However, signs do not point to the real referent, even as an inversion; rather, they point to other signs – we have here a closed circle, in which the simulation gives way only to its own reproduction. Under these conditions, the sacred is flattened out into a visually overwhelming yet ontologically vacuous spectacle - a carapace animated by an algorithm, rather than infused with breath and godly embodiments.

Even if such means can have a pedagogical and a symbolic role in secular contexts, their ontological claim to sacredness is highly problematic. As Hui (2016) contends, digital systems are born out of some metaphysical preconceptions - usually based on instrumental reason, not reciprocal relational reason. In essence, they have been taught optimisation and not communion. Consequently, there will be a sacred simulation, quite beautiful, which does not succeed in taking part in the mutual becoming; that is, the definition of sacred meetings in traditions where the divine is mediated by earth, a body (human), and through ancestral intentional remembering. Accordingly, this study contends that simulation can effectively re-create the visual and auditory aspects of the sacred but is unable to recover aura – the embodied, situated, and intentional presence that endows sacred forms with ontological substance. The consequences are not just aesthetic but philosophical and ethical: as simulated sacredness threatens to defang or even dismember the forces it seeks to mimic, especially when it is ripped from the cosmologies and spiritual grammars that first animated it.

Case Reflections from African Material Traditions and Digital Mediations

Pottery is one of the oldest and most sustainable crafts in human civilisation, and it continues to hold deep cultural and ecological significance (Jawalekar, 2025; Varma & Menon, 2017). Pottery, which is an end product of clay, is not just a material but a medium of expression in African cosmological and artistic traditions (Ozidede, 2025, 2024); it is a spiritual materiality, imbued with ancestral weight and ontological density. For many people in Africa, working with clay is not only an artistic practice but also a ritual and metaphysical practice

(Abamwa&Diakparomre, 2020; Abamwa, 2002). The potter, the sculptor, or the ritual maker is not a lone genius but often a conduit, a link in a spiritual chain. The embodied, ritualised making of clay vessels and figures as a foil to the present move towards digital simulation of sacred forms. Among the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria, for example, clay is the medium through which Òrìṣà (gods) are invoked, not only in masks and shrine images, but in everyday ritual objects such as the ọ̀pọ̀nIfá (divination tray) and other earthen ritual containers used in Ifá practice (Drewal et al., 1989; Lawal, 2007). These vessels are not ornaments; they are places of encounter, thresholds between the visible and the unseen. The potter does not just design the object; she listens for ancestral instructions/guidance, works in ritual time, bodily discipline, and community consent. In each case, the vessel would be filled with herbs, blood, feathers, ashes or spoken lines (or language in the form of incantation) - all entities contributing in their own way to the ontological vibration of the essence and presence of the divine. As such, to duplicate its form from physical objects into a digital non-existence void of the performative, sacrificial, and intentional essence it holds, is to drain it of its sanctity.

In the Amai area of the Niger Delta region, as revealed through fieldwork and oral histories, pottery is both gendered and sacralized (Ojie & Egede, 2010; Ojie, 2000). Only specific women, frequently from initiated lineages, are allowed to collect clay from ancestral pits. They celebrate with singing and drinking, and they show gratitude to the spirit of the earth. To fire is not only technical, but spiritual, a process that sees the passage of clay through elemental trial (earth, water, air, fire) on its journey toward permanence. These are uncruise forms of practice that are not replicable through code, because they are rooted in tactile memory, community boundaries, and the sacred geographies of the maker. This contrasts with the increasing use of 3D printing in ceramics, where shapes are designed digitally and produced mechanically. These can be innovative in design, in speed, in scale, but they sever the form factor and haptic memory entangled in the coiling, pinching, and slabbing of classical production methods. Projects such as apps for Virtual Pottery Studio and AI-powered pottery design assistants, like Ceramic 3D designs, enable users to generate pottery/ceramics patterns and shapes without ever getting their hands dirty. Much as these systems are pedagogically helpful, they come from a place of mastery and efficiency rather than ritual and humility. They complement a contemporary ontology in which objects are outputs rather than intersubjective beings (Sennett, 2008; Ingold, 2013).

Another illustrative example is the digitisation of Nok terra-cottas, which is among the oldest known spiritually inflected ceramic figures in West Africa. High-resolution 3D scans of Nok sculptures are increasingly archived in museum

databases and on global digital heritage platforms such as Sketchfab, expanding access while abstracting these objects from their original ritual and archaeological contexts (Breunig & Rupp, 2016; Ghysels, 2016; Jeffrey, 2015). This is in the service of conservation and access. However, it also risks reducing sacred fragments into isolated artefacts, decoupled from their funerary, cosmological, or ritual dimensions (into a disembodied entity that lacks the authority or authorship with the divine). Since they are uninterpreted by local custodians, these objects become mute images rich in information yet silent regarding spiritual beings. This hermeneutical silence stands in stark contrast with the treatment of the body of clay in ritual performance. In traditions like the Egúngún festivals, the masked and costumed figures might be animated by libations, chants or even dance; this shows that they are not just for decoration, but to bring the object to life (through traditional or religious practices that involve communal ethics). These actions are not performances in aid of spectacle, but performances of invocation that involve the divinity through the culture of the people or local community. Divinity, in this sense, is not metaphorical but something to be felt and actualised through repeated physical acts of care and co-being. As Thompson (1993) would famously say, “shape in the Yoruba hand is force.” Force in this context would mean something that brings life. For the Yoruba, art and ritual are inseparable; the very act of making transmits power, imbuing the object with embodied spiritual energy through touch, gesture, and ritual practice.

Ultimately, even the most sophisticated digital reproductions, such as interactive museum exhibits or AI-generated mask forms, do not include this ritual circuitry. They are what appear out of nowhere: such as sight without scent, form without sound, shape without heat and being without authority. A digital Ògún sculpture on a screen might visually resemble the original, yet it cannot contain sacrificial ash, be anointed with palm oil or dance with fire. The digital, in this case, is a closed circuit of aesthetics without attributes of a living conduit of spirit elements. In addition, many sacred clay containers also hold the unseen, such as sacred medicine, blood offerings, ancestor relics, or sacred writing. These unseen contents tether the form to ritual cosmology, creating a multi-sensorial presence that cannot be reduced to pixels or algorithms. No simulation can duplicate burning herbs in a consecrated pot or the shaking hands of a potter who senses the clay resisting or yielding to ancestral force; that is not to say that all entirely digital interactions are without value. Artists such as Tabita Rezaire (her first solo exhibition *Exotic Trade*, 2017) work with Afro-Diasporic spiritual systems and technological themes in digital media, but in ways that are explicitly critical of colonial-capitalist models of simulation (Art Africa Magazine, 2017; Smith, 2021). Her work frequently interweaves sound, code, and symbol while remaining rooted in ritual intention and indigenous epistemologies.

These kinds of projects contest digital reductionism and reanimate the sacred as mixed media. Hence, they provide a case-based reframing of sacred simulation through African material, ritual, and creativity. Such practices assert that holy embodiment is not made, but found; not produced, but channelled through physical, tactile media such as vessels. The digital mimicry of sacred material forms, however true to surface detail, can surely not stand in for the processual, situated and ontological site of the emergence of such forms. In such a gesture, it risks not only mere superficial artistry but also spiritual emigration, when ritual presence gives way to a spectral image.

Ethical and Metaphysical Limits of Software-Sacred Simulation

If technology can replicate the presence of sacred forms, then can it also have access to presence itself? This is a question whose philosophical entanglements are hard to unravel, as it becomes more complex and pressing when viewed from the perspectives of ethics and metaphysics. Even as it grows in complexity, simulation cannot escape its ontological foundation: a process of abstraction, iteration, and detachment. The sacred, on the other hand, is rooted in relationality, ontological intimacy, and cosmic reciprocity that inform its essence. The ethical peril of sacred simulation lies not just in what it creates but in what it assumes and displaces. Firstly, there is the issue of intentionality and invocation. In much of African spirituality (Warekoromor, 2024), sacred presence does not magically infuse form; it is cajoled into being through intention, ritual enactment (through sacrifice), and ancestral mediation (through divination). Here, the holy is not inert; it is an entity that has to be invited, and to invite it in an unprepared or unauthorised manner is spiritually dangerous. For example, creating an Òrìṣà sculpture without performing the proper ablution, conducting cowrie-shell divination, or obtaining ancestor approval may not only be inappropriate but also lead to negative consequences, such as attracting imbalance or spiritual confusion to the individual. Here, the simulation's moral transgression is to hypothesise the ontological authority of visual resemblance. It brings sacred beings down to data - the levelling is nearly blasphemous, particularly when sacred forms are scavenged for philosophical or commercial worth without cultural responsibility. Second, simulation favours instrumental logic rather than relational wisdom of the divine's essence. Software fakes things by duplicating surface qualities such as geometry, colour, texture, and sound. However, the sacred is frequently stored in secret, in isolation, in place of ritual, in breath, and in time, as frequent or periodic sacrifices are made before the sacred is made open to public view for those who hold traditional authority. Among African peoples, however, some rituals and objects are kept secret and not accessible to everyone; they are shown only to initiates who have undergone a course of moral, personal, spiritual, and communal training (Mbiti, 1990; Turner,

1967; Kanu, 2018). This very digital imperative to make all things visible and shareable runs counter to the ethic of concealment and the sanctity of sacred objects. When sacred forms are turned into open-source 3D models or are trained into AI sets without caretakers signing off on their use, they are transformed into something we take from rather than the object we care for because of their purpose.

Furthermore, postcolonial African thinkers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Walter D. Mignolo have reminded us that technology is not neutral but is shaped by histories, ontologies, and power (Thiong'o, 1986; Mignolo, 2011; Bholá, 1987). Most AI systems and simulation platforms are grounded in Euro-American secular epistemologies, which invalidate and decimate indigenous forms of knowledge (systems) and reconstitute them as technical logics of utility and reproducibility (Ofosu-Asare, 2025; Khurana, 2025). When those sacred African forms are then represented or (re)modelled via such technologies, or divorced from their ritual contexts and cosmological frameworks, they are frequently exposed to epistemic extraction: the rewriting of their meaning or the removal of their agency becomes imminent. This process is particularly dangerous in a field where simulation services the world's entertainment, museum, or commercial markets, and the sacred is repackaged as exotic aesthetic or symbolic content.

The divine can only be a symbol for the divine, and language itself at this intersection is not just a system of spoken signs (when invoking the divine). Thus, the divine cannot be physically present; it can often be represented through objects (as vessels for the divine), such as sculptural images, ritual pottery, or traditional masks. Language, as a closed system of signs, cannot escape its own structure to capture what exceeds it: words do not refer directly to things, but to other words and conventions; the signifier is never the thing itself (but a vessel through which the divine is informed after a series of incantations), and the message relayed and interpreted by the signifier through spoken language. This shows why ritual and embodied practices are necessary - meaning must be enacted, not merely spoken. In many indigenous traditions, sacredness arises from intra-action, a concept coined by Barad (2007), in which being is not pre-given but emerges through relational becoming. A chalice is not holy because it looks different from every other cup; it is holy because of how it was made, what it contains, whom it serves, and what an invisible reality it mediates. A simulated pot, by contrast, is just a static, never-living representation, severed from the streams of time, labour, and spirit that constitute its ontological power as original. In addition, there are metaphysical issues of presence and non-presence. In sacred encounters, what matters is not simply perception or responsiveness, but a specific ethical posture of attention. Weil (2003) refers to this as "attention to attention": a loving, receptive mode of engagement that allows the other to remain other, rather than an instrumental or reactive attention oriented

toward control, capture, or manipulation. When simulation treats the sacred merely as source material to process, analyse, or code, it fails to engage with the sacred as a Thou and instead reduces it to an It (Buber, 1970). In this reduction, the sacred is objectified, stripped of relational depth, presence, and responsiveness; it becomes a passive entity to be manipulated rather than a living interlocutor that demands respect, attention, and ethical engagement. Buber's distinction reminds us that approaching the sacred requires openness, encounter, and dialogue - a recognition that it is not simply a resource for creativity, but a being or presence that participates in the intersubjective and spiritual life of those who engage with it. This ethical orientation matters especially in traditions for which the sacred is not a stable presence but a volatile force, one that calls not for mastery or control but for humility, discipline, and surrender.

These constraints apply even to experimental artists who work with ritual concepts in multimedia contexts. Nigerian artist Jelili Atiku, for example, frequently engages Yoruba divination and spiritual logic in interactive performances and digital media (Atiku, n.d.; Prince Claus Fund, n.d.). Even in these contexts, without embodied enactment, communion with ancestral spirits, and ritual sacrifice, the symbolic elements risk remaining merely metaphorical rather than serving as conduits of metaphysical energy. The sacred cannot be compressed into simulation without confronting its threshold of existence, a line that data can never cross. All in all, the ethical and metaphysical limits of sacred simulation are less technical than its ontological limits. To simulate the sacred is not to render its appearance but rather to risk presence for image, relation for function, and spirit for style. Such simulations would not simply be inadequate, because they might even become destructive, reinforcing a superficial understanding of the sacred and marginalising the very worldviews that undergird it, unless shaped by deep cultural humility, custodial collaboration, and metaphysical attentiveness.

Conclusion

This paper has identified a key paradox at the converging point of technology, art, and spirituality. By asking the ontological question, can software reenact the sacred? On digital platforms and through creative technologies, sacred images and other sacred forms (objects) are increasingly being produced, augmented, and even imagined with the aid of artificial intelligence and code-based language. These technologies provide new modes of access and visualisation that entail visibility and creativity, but frequently come through disembodied abstraction (such as sacred forms on the surface), so their ontological depth and metaphysical integrity are not reproduced. Through a comparative philosophical and cultural exploration, the study, drawing on African material epistemologies and posthuman theory, has suggested that simulation can copy the semblance but seldom the essence of the

sacred. Sacred presence in many indigenous traditions, specifically African spiritual and artistic practices, is not a matter of visual resemblance but one of ritual co-production, ancestral intentionality, and material complicity. The sacred happens in gesture, stillness, surrender, rhythm, and deep temporal connection with the divine or through divine collaborations – with the signifier. In African pottery and in shrine structures or architecture, clay, for instance, is not just rendered sacred through its form but through its formation; its passage through honed hands, breath, and the spirits of those who make and tend for it, and the spirits of those who came before us with the knowledge (since it is an indigenously inherited occupation).

Digital simulations, on the other hand, belong to ontologies of mastery, visibility, and circulation. They threaten to turn sacred forms into data, divesting them of aura, ritual severity, and cultural context. As demonstrated by examples ranging from AI-generated icons and VR temples to divination apps, these tech creations are by no means as deep as the ethical, relational, and custodial dimensions of sacred art. In some cases, they commit epistemic or spiritual violence when they take over sacred forms without community consent or metaphysical understanding. This is not an argument against technology within sacred fields but a call for a more profound ethical/ontological consideration of what is at stake. For software to interact with the sacred or draw essence from the divine in a meaningful way, it must move from simulation to relation (from simulating forms to participating in the cosmologies that give those forms life). With the correct philosophical and spiritual compass, this would necessitate cultural guardianship as well as possibly a rethinking of technology itself, not as a tool for control but as a potential co-mediator of the present. In the end, the sacred might oppose simulation, not because it is outdated, but because it transcends programming. Its opacity, its claim for presence, and its relational intensity are not barriers to be overcome but depths to be respected. As such, these paradoxes remain a technical and ontological phase, in that the sacredness that makes something sacred is what renders it unsimulatable.

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