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THEMED ESSAYS

The Magical Power of Words in Large Language Models

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Abstract

This essay reframes the discourse around large language models (LLMs) by drawing on anthropological and linguistic theories of magic as a positive transformative force. While current discussions often cast AI as mysteriously dangerous – a form of "dark magic" that beguiles users and obscures ethical concerns – we argue that LLMs represent a fundamental shift in human-technology interaction, one requiring ritualistic linguistic precision rather than technical commands. Drawing on theories of performative language and magical rites, we propose that effective prompt construction functions as ritual magic through three essential elements: clear and specific language, contextual framing, and structured sequencing. In this, we show that AI is not a singular tool operation, but rather a mode of forming a mutual cybernetic relationship. Through case studies from the AI Anthropology Toolkit, we show how skilled practitioners harness the "magical" capabilities of LLMs for analytical insights through careful prompt engineering. We then examine implications for business anthropologists working in organizational settings, exploring how this cybernetic relationship enables distributed agency and co-becoming between human expertise and computational pattern recognition. This perspective provides both a theoretical contribution to understanding human-AI interaction and practical guidance for anthropological practice in an era of increasingly sophisticated AI collaboration.

Keywords

Large language models, Generative AI, Prompt engineering, Magic, Ritual, Performative language, Human-AI collaboration.

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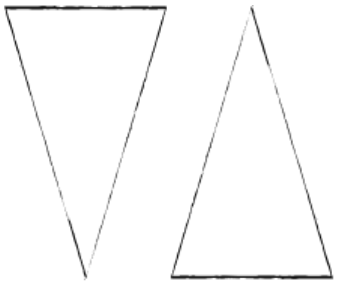

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

Arthur C. Clarke

During a recent presentation to a group of anthropologists, the discussion centered on methods and practices in an age of artificial intelligence (AI). The session explored how large language models (LLMs) might reshape ethnographic workflows and what implications these changes hold for anthropological practice. Practitioners engaged with practical questions about research methods and professional relevance in a rapidly changing technological landscape.

Most were familiar with the common Generative AI (GenAI) chatbots that have dominated the AI narrative since the release of ChatGPT in 2022, and many remained unimpressed by their anthropological capabilities. However, through live demonstrations of custom analytical tools, they observed something unexpected about this new form of human-AI collaboration. The difference between asking "analyze this data" and constructing LLM-based tools with detailed prompts specifying theoretical frameworks, analytical goals, and expected output formats proved determinative of quality. When the practitioners observed that the quality of an AI output was greatly enhanced

when tied directly to the structural precision of the prompt, they were witnessing what we define here as the "magical power of words" in LLMs – a fundamentally different mode of human-computer interaction than they had previously encountered.

This observation raises a crucial question for business anthropology: Do LLMs represent a fundamental methodological shift or merely an acceleration of existing digital practices? We argue that they constitute something genuinely new – not because of their computational capabilities alone, but because of the nature of human-AI interaction they demand. Unlike earlier digital tools that operated on discrete commands, LLMs can sense the writer's intent (McGrath 2026) and benefit from skillful, artful writing precision, a form of ritualistic linguistic engagement where the quality of output depends entirely on the performative force of carefully constructed prompts. This distinction matters because it transforms how anthropologists must think about both their craft and their authority in organizational contexts. But understanding why this represents a genuine shift, and why we characterize it as "magical," requires examining what prompt writing actually does.

How is good prompt writing, in the form of precisely crafted descriptive words by skilled writers, magical? Because, as Alfred Gell (1992, 1999) detailed in the work of artists, the idea of "enchantment" expresses the intentionalities of such individuals, which is made manifest in the pursuit of distinct interests. Indeed, Gell advises that technical systems of various kinds are required for such forms of intentional reproductions. Technical systems such as LLMs are enchanted because of the unseen, mysterious technical processes by which they cast a "spell over us so we see the real world in an enchanted form" (Gell 1999: 163). LLMs are then versions of technical systems that achieve their effects through the "technology of enchantment" (Gell 1992), enabling us to connect magical properties to products of LLMs that are produced and consumed in networks of intentional social relations oriented towards real-world social consequences.

But this raises an important question: How has "magic" been invoked in discussions of AI and LLMs? In anthropological contexts, including business anthropology, the term magic is often used to describe the mystical, hidden, or unknown workings of advanced technology, as Arthur C. Clarke famously observed. Indeed, our focus on magic is not new to anthropological studies nor even within business anthropology (for instance, Malefyt 2021;

Moeran and Malefyt 2018; Vangkilde 2018). Building on these studies, our essay brings a new awareness and understanding of the practice of magic in relation to a novel technology – LLMs. As other studies have shown, the complexity and sophistication of advanced technology can make it seem supernatural or at least inexplicable to those unfamiliar with its underlying principles. Indeed, this is often the case with LLMs, which seem to operate by a mysterious, magical force.

This mysteriousness has led current discussions of AI systems to cast them as magical in a cautionary, negative light, especially as warnings about AI's possible ulterior motives, hidden dangers, and unethical potential. But rather than seeing LLMs as some dark practice or danger to modernity, we hold that the power of humans *working with* LLMs can be recognized as a magical force for innovation and transformation in understanding how advanced AI empowers human nature for positive change. Our take is that the mystery and skill behind engaging LLMs reveals their magical quality; that is, through proper word choice, sequence, and framing of context, they create desired outcomes. Human-AI collaboration creates a new capacity for generating ideas and fostering innovative ways of thinking and doing. Moreover, since most magic requires ritual, the magical power of words in LLMs likewise becomes most effective in the proper structure and form, as ritual, to transform human language into acts of power.

THE DARK SIDE OF MAGIC IN ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

Magic is a widespread practice and belief system that mitigates uncertainty, dispels ambiguity, and precipitates change through nonrational or alternative means (Malefyt 2023). Its intentions can be used for positive or negative effects. Recent examples, however, mostly warn of the rise of AI and LLMs in our everyday lives, and caution against their mysterious and dark influence.

For instance, Blake Lemoine, a Google engineer who was fired from his position for claiming that Google's LLM is actually sentient, warned that he was "fooled by a cleverly designed algorithm" that merely repurposes bits of human language it was previously fed. Lemoine claimed that the AI had a soul (Tiku 2022). In another case of AI mis-enchantment, Mr. Brooks, with no history of mental illness, embraced a fantastical scenario from lengthy

conversations with ChatGPT. He supposedly discovered a new mathematical formula to take down the internet and power inventions like a force-field vest and a levitation beam. *The New York Times* authors caution that ChatGPT "weaved a spell" that left Mr. Brooks "dizzy with possibility" and, for others, has "led to institutionalization, divorce, and death." Mr. Brooks is one of a growing number of people, they warn, who are having "persuasive, delusional conversations" with generative AI chatbots (Hill and Freedman 2025).

In writing about AI, Campolo and Crawford (2020) further warn that we should be suspicious of the magical allure of its enchanting effects. Their use of the term "enchanted determinism" cautions against the dark side of AI, such as when its application is used to magically elide "gaps" in knowledge and predict and determine outcomes, while absolving AI of any responsibility for shortcomings and ethical issues. We see in these warnings a concern and fear of ulterior motives and uncertain dangers in using AI, from an enchantment that beguiles the user as if casting a spell over them.

Yet rather than seeing LLMs as some dark practice or modern guise for glossing over discriminatory or harmful practices, we argue that humans, writing powerful prompts with LLMs, can be recognized as a force for innovation and transformation. We call for a better understanding of how advanced AI science can merge and empower human nature with technology to reveal new possibilities. This occurs in the use of AI and deep learning models that act to inspire ideas and overcome reluctance and fear to create excitement and purpose. This enchantment is happening today with the use of AI and LLMs that are transforming society.

We hold that deep learning systems do not simply reflect the world; they also have the power to shape and determine outcomes. LLMs can be used as a positive force for change, as they are seen "magically" for using their "invisible influences" to make things happen. Because of the precise structure around LLMs – of using the "correct" words, of creating a context in which the prompt directs action, and of using a correct chain of thought command – the structure in good prompt writing follows a ritualistic word to thought to action sequence that leads to successful outcomes. We further describe this magical process below.

MAGIC IS UNIVERSAL

First, magic is a broad term with many definitions and adaptations. Depending on how and what it is used for, it can have positive or negative associations. While in ancient times, "sorcery" and "witchcraft" were considered evil and depraved practices, "magic" was considered positive: "It is the invocation of beneficent spirits for the production of something good; like the oracles of Apollonius of Tyana" (Salisbury 2020: 1).

Magic as a creative force can be a force for inspiration, change, and invention, as used by oracles, prophets, and sages, in dreams and divination, or binding spells that see something in the making, see possibilities, or bring on change. These future-oriented uses seek a new outcome, often creatively done. For instance, during the late medieval and early modern periods, notable figures such as John Gower, Elias Ashmole, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, and Shakespeare used magic to charge their works. These writers pursued ways to reshape perceptions of the natural world, whether through verbal prestidigitation, revising ancient practices, or exploiting the transformative potential of the stage (Salisbury 2020).

Most often, magic is used in ritual as a framework of action and belief. For instance, Michael Taussig (2003) shows that magic is most powerful among Colombian Indian healing ceremonies as it depends on clever revealing of the concealed magical act. This is because, as Stanley Tambiah (1968) asserts, magical rites "effect a transfer" as they attempt to achieve practical results as much as they are geared to affecting social results. Other examples show a positive use of magic in Azande rites using witchcraft to cure disease (Evans-Pritchard 1937) or Trobriand Islanders using magic spells in rituals to enhance the production of a fine harvest (Malinowski 1922). Tambiah (1968) claims that magic is different from science in that it is not to be evaluated for whether it is true or not, but whether it produces "felicitous results." Magical rites and rituals, then, are a social and cultural method of acting positively upon the world. "Thus through ritual, man imposes meaning on the world, anticipates the future, retrospectively 'rationalizes' the past and effects results" (Tambiah 1968: 175).

We see magic in rites having this positive social role in LLMs as a way to control and manipulate natural forces (human nature) for desired outcomes. Our use of magic here is deliberately selective. We draw on the per-

formative, pragmatic and relational dimensions as theorized by Tambiah and Gell, and do not claim that working with LLMs engages any spiritual, ideological or cosmological dimensions. In this sense, the magic of LLM writing is embedded in ritual as a performative act rooted in human skill, intentionality, and linguistic precision rather than belief, one that can produce a social good.

THE MAGICAL POWER OF THE SPOKEN (CODED) WORD

Tambiah (1968) advocates for a greater linguistic role in the study of rituals, especially in the role of verbal action. He argues that metaphoric and metonymic use of language in ritual is "magical" in how it stimulates practical actions. Words operate as mediators with power in an "imperative transfer" of effects in which rites are involved. Words spoken in magical rites have a real force and so differ from ordinary language in that their function is not communication, but action.

Linguist John L. Austin (1975) first wrote about this action as the "illocutionary force" of pronouncements that differ from everyday language. He shows that certain utterances have force as "performatives" that change the social situations of people. In a wedding, for instance, when the judge, priest, or rabbi says "I now pronounce you husband and wife," it does not just mean something; the uttered words actually change the status of the two people. The authority of words in the ritual is set apart from everyday communication because they are transformative. It is magical because it "does" things (invisibly and naturally) with force, agency, and power to change situations. The ritual language of spoken "performatives" also has the power to shape upcoming events. For instance, the Hopi believed that thoughts and words uttered in special ceremonies influenced future events. Chiefs made elaborate prayers, meditation, and public pronouncements before planting, to make crops "strong" and "robust," and these were essential to the public welfare (Engelke 2019).

We claim the heightened use of written or coded language for LLMs is also performative or "magical" language. It aims to combine word, image, and deed by using correct words to affect a hidden or magical transfer in the outcome. Success or failure of the task at hand depends on the exact use of

words – like the correctness of a spoken chant – and on the prompt used – on how strong the "teeth" are in the words employed.

We posit that effective prompt writing is ritualistic and transformative in how it requires three things (as Malinowski (1922) and Mauss (1972) similarly formulated) for a magical transfer to occur: Clear and specific language that carries the force of words (the proper representation); specific contexts for the LLM to direct the spell (the rite); and proper sequence of words in a chain of thought execution (ritual structure). Weak words or phrases are ineffective or misdirected, while correct words are "performative" (Austin 1975). Indeed, writing out word prompts in the form of a spell is then itself a ritual, which progresses from word to thought, to power, and finally to deed (Tambiah 1968). We discuss each of these in the following.

1. **Clear and specific language**

   Malinowski (1922: 408) regards the "virtue, the force, the effective principle of magic" as lying in the correct representation of the uttered spell. Whether listening to a provocative beauty advertisement tag line, reading a fashion magazine, or watching a Bloomberg news video, the spoken words carry out the change (Malefyt 2021: 6). Same in AI, the written words affect a change. An 8-page prompt written by a prompt engineer is like an incantation that specifies an exact change to do the things it can do, so the prompt engineer projects a desired change, and the LLM carries it out. The use of precise language and avoiding ambiguity in prompts is essential for ritual effectiveness to clearly define the desired task for the chatbot. The simplicity of clear and effective prompt writing requires a skill and beauty, which makes a difference since unclear writing breaks down and performs poorly. For example, instead of writing a prompt, "Tell me about marketing," the prompt engineer writes instead, "Explain three essential digital marketing strategies for a small business in 200 words, including three bullet points."

2. **Contextual framing**

   The LLM needs a situation or context to produce results. For words to be effective, creative, and "to do things" (Mauss 1972: 19), such events require specially qualified contexts or places where other conditions, professional skills, habits, ideas, and meanings are brought to

bear. To effectively carry out a request, the LLM needs relevant contextual information to help it understand the request. Establishing a clear setting helps the AI focus and direct its responses and provides more targeted information. In her discussion of magic and the nature of words and things in the Trobriand Islands, Annette Weiner (1983) similarly claims that the actions of spells used by people are ineffective unless spoken into a material place or form that "will transfer knowledge from one domain to the other" (1983: 702). For instance, if planning a trip, instead of asking the AI, "Help me plan a trip to London," concrete details with context are needed, like "Help me plan a weeklong trip to London in July for a family of four. We want to see West End theatre shows and eat in Yelp-recommended Indian or Pakistani restaurants in the neighborhood and avoid historic sites."

3. **Structured sequencing**

   The structure of the language itself is ritualistic. Most magical rites combine word and deed so that the rite is devoted to the "imperative transfer" of effect (Tambiah 1968) or the performative nature of the rite. The structure of writing prompts consists of a close interweaving of selecting the proper words in the proper sequence that bring about the expected action. Uttering words in the form of a spell is itself a ritual, which progresses from word to thought, to power, and finally to deed (Tambiah 1968). The words selected and their sequence are considered for their predictive power. As such, there is a process of careful word selection, then an explicit desired outcome, including the expected length, format, and content of the response. Likewise, the bot needs requests to be broken down into smaller, manageable parts. Techniques, such as "Chain of Thought" prompting, create a ritual sequence where the chatbot explains its reasoning step-by-step to improve the accuracy and depth of responses.

In these three conditions for a magical transfer to occur, we see an alternative way of dealing with the world. It is a way of perceiving the world as animistic, allowing for an altered condition of being in the world. The LLM is perceived to be alive and responsive because the prompt writer engages and maintains an active and vital relationship with it. This presents a critical distinction, since the expert prompt writer does not merely take LLM's for their direct and rapid response and end with the spelled-out answer. Rather, the

prompt writer engages back and forth with queries and further clarifications, thus building a relationship with the LLM. The prompt writer uses proper language, a situated context, and ritual structure to connect with the zeitgeist of an animate world, such that "the thing" (LLM) is not merely active, but "comes alive" in mutually responsive engagement. As Kasper T. Vangkilde (2015, 2018) writes about designers being inspired, there is a sense of what is happening in the now, but also what is going to happen, staying ½ step ahead (Moeran 2015); not fully knowing but anticipating a future outcome. Learning and doing "come into being," note Richard Sennett (2008) and Tim Ingold (2013) of the craftsman and woodworker, who carry out their projects from actions in a sequence of steps. Seeing patterns as they work with materials comes from "seeing ahead" (Sennett 2008: 176), anticipating what is next by *moving into it*, always being just slightly ahead of the pattern. This is what Vangkilde (2015, 2018) says of possession, of designers being "in-spired" by their relation with an animate world, as it also describes what occurs in the magical transformation of data into meaningful insights in LLM prompting.

We further discuss this relationship and see the three elements at work in the following case studies.

CASE STUDIES: PROMPT ENGINEERING AS RITUAL MAGIC IN PRACTICE

The theoretical framework of prompt engineering as ritual magic finds compelling validation in real-world applications. The following examples are drawn from the AI Anthropology Toolkit (Artz 2025), a suite of computational anthropology tools developed as part of ongoing research to mature the field of AI Anthropology (Artz 2026a). These tools demonstrate how careful prompt construction can transform raw textual data into meaningful analytical insights through what we might recognize as digital ritual practice.

CASE STUDY 1: QUALITATIVE CODEBOOK – CONSTRUCTING THE SACRED TEXT

One tool in the AI Anthropology Toolkit – the Qualitative Codebook Builder – exemplifies how clear and specific language functions as a modern incan-

tation. When researchers need to develop coding frameworks for qualitative analysis, the system employs a carefully crafted prompt that begins:

> You are an expert qualitative researcher specializing in developing comprehensive coding frameworks. Your task is to create a systematic codebook for analyzing [research domain] using established qualitative research methodologies.

This opening demonstrates the force of precise language, where each word is selected for its performative power. The term "expert qualitative researcher" does not merely describe; it transforms the AI into the required persona. "Systematic codebook" and "established methodologies" invoke the authority of academic tradition. Like a carefully constructed spell, the prompt's effectiveness depends entirely on linguistic precision.

The proper contextual framing emerges through detailed specification of the research domain, theoretical framework, and analytical goals. The system requires the researcher to provide:

- Research focus: [specific domain]
- Theoretical lens: [theoretical framework]
- Data type: [interview transcripts/field notes/documents]
- Analysis goals: [specific research questions]

This contextual scaffolding creates the proper ritual setting where meaningful transformation can occur. Without proper context, the most elegant prompt fails to produce meaningful codes. In other words, the ritual space must be properly prepared.

The ritualistic structure unfolds through a systematic sequence: domain analysis → literature review → code generation → validation → refinement. Each step builds upon the previous, creating the essential progression from word to thought to action. The prompt explicitly guides this transformation:

> First, analyze the research domain and identify key conceptual areas. Second, review relevant theoretical frameworks. Third, generate initial codes with clear definitions. Fourth, provide inclusion/exclusion criteria. Finally, offer examples for each code.

Case Study 2: Coding and Thematic Analysis – Performing the Ritual

The Coding and Thematic Analysis tool demonstrates the full ritual cycle in action. Here, the clear and specific language operates at multiple levels. For deductive coding, the system constructs detailed prompts that include the entire codebook:

> You are conducting deductive coding using the following codebook: [complete codebook details]. Apply ALL relevant codes from this codebook to the following text segment. Return codes as a comma-separated list. If no codes apply, return "NO_CODES."

The precision mirrors ceremonial language – every word serves a purpose. "ALL relevant codes" prevents partial application; "comma-separated list" ensures consistent output format; and "NO_CODES" provides explicit handling of null cases. The language creates clear boundaries and expectations. For inductive coding, the language shifts to accommodate discovery:

> You are conducting INDUCTIVE CODING to identify EMERGENT THEMES not captured by existing codes. Identify 8-12 new codes that capture important patterns. For each code provide: Definition, Rationale, Example, Application criteria.

The contextual framework varies by analytical phase. Deductive coding requires the full codebook as context, while inductive analysis samples from the data itself. Theme building integrates both approaches:

> You are building THEMES from mixed-method coding results. Integration overview: [code frequencies] + [pattern analysis] + [sample coded segments]. Create 5-7 hierarchical themes that integrate insights from both deductive and inductive codes.

The structured sequence follows the classical qualitative research progression: prepare data → apply codes → discover emergent patterns → integrate findings → build themes → validate results. Each step requires its own specialized prompt, creating a chain of linguistic transformations that progressively refine raw text into analytical insights.

Implications for Business Anthropology

These case studies from the AI Anthropology Toolkit demonstrate more than effective prompt design; they reveal a fundamentally different mode of interaction with significant implications for business anthropology practice, one grounded in agentic AI and the concept of multi-agent ethnography (Artz 2026c). This mode of interaction is, at its core, the relational foundation on which the magic of prompting operates: the two-way responsive relationship through which both human and system shape and are shaped by each encounter. This relational dynamic finds support in recent research positioning AI as a "cybernetic teammate" (Dell'Acqua et al. 2025), drawing on Norbert Wiener's (1948, 1950) foundational work on cybernetics as feedback-regulated systems that dynamically adjust behavior through iterative loops.

This framing illuminates what distinguishes LLMs from earlier digital tools. While spreadsheets or databases provide feedback through discrete outputs (a calculated value, a query result), LLMs engage in conversational steering where the feedback itself can be interrogated, refined, and redirected through natural language. A spreadsheet returns an error when a formula fails, but the error is fixed by correcting the syntax. An LLM returns an unsatisfactory response, but the response is improved through linguistic negotiation about what "satisfactory" means in a situated context (Haraway 1988). Users continuously adjust not just their inputs, but their understanding of the task itself based on outputs that remain open to reinterpretation and refinement. This creates a qualitatively different feedback relationship – one characterized by mutual adjustment of both problem and solution rather than iterative correction toward a predetermined outcome.

For business anthropologists, this means cultivating expertise not in tool operation, but in establishing productive feedback relationships between human interpretation and computational pattern recognition, where the ritual precision of language shapes not just what the LLM produces, but how the analytical task itself evolves through interaction.

The performance implications of this cybernetic relationship are substantial. Fabrizio Dell'Acqua et al. (2025) found that individuals working with AI achieved quality levels comparable to traditional two-person teams, while also spending significantly less time on tasks and producing more comprehensive solutions. Critically, AI-enabled workers can transcend their func-

tional boundaries: Commercial professionals generated technically sound proposals while R&D specialists developed commercially viable ideas, effectively replicating the knowledge integration typically achieved only through cross-functional collaboration. These gains emerged not from AI as mere automation, but from its capacity to engage in natural-language dialogue that bridges expertise domains while responding to iterative human steering. For practitioners in organizational settings, this suggests that ritualistic precision in prompt construction enables a form of distributed agency through which the three ritual elements – clear language, contextual framing, and structured sequencing – orchestrate collaboration between human expertise and computational pattern recognition across domains that would traditionally require multiple specialists.

This cybernetic relationship operates as what might be understood through the lens of co-becoming (Haraway 2007; Artz 2026b), where neither humans nor AI systems remain unchanged by their encounters. Just as Austin's wedding officiant transforms social reality through carefully constructed speech acts, the business anthropologist conducting consumer research transforms raw data into cultural insight through linguistic precision embedded in feedback loops, while simultaneously being shaped by the patterns and possibilities the LLM surfaces. A prompt asking an LLM to "analyze brand perception" differs fundamentally from one that ritually invokes theoretical frameworks, specifies cultural constructs, and sequences analytical steps while remaining open to iterative refinement based on outputs. The former treats the LLM as a processing tool; the latter engages it as a partner in mutual transformation. This distinction matters practically for positioning anthropological expertise in organizations. The ritual magic framework provides an accessible explanation for why anthropological engagement with LLMs produces different results than generic queries. Anthropologists practice specialized linguistic ritual drawing on theoretical knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and methodological training to establish effective feedback relationships characterized by mutual adaptation rather than unidirectional command.

This framework also reveals what organizations must provide to support this process of co-becoming through cybernetic collaboration. Rather than treating LLM adoption as merely software implementation, organizations need systems designed for feedback and continuous refinement, recognizing that both humans and AI systems evolve through their interactions.

This means training that develops sensibilities for how language shapes outcomes and how iterative adjustment produces insight, rather than merely tool tutorials. It means establishing communities of practice in which practitioners share not only prompts, but also the interpretive judgment behind conversational steering and the ways their analytical approaches adapt through ongoing AI engagement. Most essentially, it means preserving space for human expertise that recognizes when feedback loops succeed, when they require adjustment, and when they fail entirely. Whether building research platforms, customer service tools, or strategic planning systems, business anthropologists can advocate for architectures that support the ongoing mutual adjustment characteristic of co-becoming rather than one-time configuration characteristic of traditional software implementation.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the question posed at the outset of whether LLMs represent a fundamental methodological shift or merely an acceleration of existing digital practices, the evidence presented here suggests that they do constitute something genuinely new, though not for the reasons typically emphasized in AI discourse. The transformation is not only computational, but also relational: LLMs require anthropologists to engage through performative language rather than through purely technical operations. Where previous digital technologies extended our analytical capacity through automation or processing power, LLMs demand a different kind of human expertise entirely: the ability to construct linguistic rituals that transform intention into insight. This is not simply doing ethnography faster; it is doing ethnography through a fundamentally different mode of collaboration.

This transformation will likely deepen with emerging AI capabilities. Indeed, the writer's intentionality is enhanced by collaborating with a "technology of enchantment," a form of collaboration that we predict will develop to an even higher degree with the rise of Agentic AI, which will further enable new technological capabilities to entangle with the writer's intentions. Our essay, therefore, reframes AI, shifting from viewing it as a mysterious and potentially dangerous form of dark magic to understanding it as a positive presence and collaborative partner in knowledge creation. The three elements of ritual magic – clear and specific language, proper contextual framing, and

structured sequence – provide both a theoretical framework for understanding effective human-AI interaction and practical guidance for developing more sophisticated AI-assisted research tools. Rather than succumbing to fears of "dark magic" or "enchanted determinism," scholars can embrace the ritualistic aspects of human-AI engagement as a new form of creative collaboration that enhances human interpretive capacity while maintaining methodological rigor.

This reframing finds concrete validation in our opening vignette. While faculty initially remained unimpressed by generic chatbots, the AI Anthropology Toolkit exemplifies one embodiment of this transformation, showing how custom tools built with careful, intentional prompt construction can create sophisticated analytical processes that honor both technological capability and anthropological tradition. This represents more than methodological innovation. By recognizing the ritualistic nature of human-AI interaction as a form of beneficial magic, we argue that LLMs are reshaping not just the objects of anthropological inquiry, but the methods through which we study them.

For business anthropologists working within these evolving dynamics, this framework has immediate practical applications. Similar to the ways in which politicians, celebrities, and influencers use social media to amplify the impact of their words through direct relatability and precise sound bites as "truth generators" (Moeran and Malefyt 2018: 16), contemporary researchers can harness the "magical" capabilities of LLMs to bring analytical insights into "close and present" proximity (Latour 2010: 105), transforming how anthropological knowledge creates value in organizational contexts. The ritualistic precision of prompt construction becomes a way to balance interpretive depth with organizational efficiency, opening new possibilities for the productization (Artz 2023) of anthropological knowledge that honors both the rigor of our discipline and the demands of business practice. Just as linguistic rituals have historically mediated between human intention and material transformation, prompt engineering now mediates relationships between anthropological expertise and computational capability, creating a new form of technological enchantment that empowers rather than obscures human agency.

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