



CURIOSITY KILLING THE YETI · EVIDENCE FILES

Technology Worship (Machine Messiahs) · RP-1

The Made God

Why We Worship What We Build

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Abstract

Worshipping the made thing is not a glitch in human history; it is one of its most reliable defaults. Long before anyone built a machine, people poured significance into objects they had carved, cast, or forged, and then knelt to receive that significance back as if it had come from somewhere higher than their own hands. This paper treats that move as an anthropological fact rather than a theological scandal, and asks a narrow mechanical question: under what conditions does a manufactured object stop being a tool and start being a god? The answer this paper defends is a two-part recipe. An artifact earns worship when it **concentrates a power we want** and, at the same time, **runs by a process we cannot see into**. High capability supplies the motive; low transparency supplies the mystery; together they manufacture awe. The paper traces this recipe across four documented cases from three ancient cultures — the idol-maker mocked in Isaiah 44, the thinking automata of Hephaestus in the *Iliad*, the bronze sentinel Talos in the *Argonautica*, and Pygmalion's ivory beloved in the *Metamorphoses* — and reads them through the modern scholarship on agency-detection, the sacred, and the social life of made objects. It then runs the recipe forward roughly a decade. By the mid-2030s the artifact that best satisfies both halves of the formula is the large, opaque, oracular model: a thing of enormous concentrated capability whose internal process almost no one understands, addressed in the second person and answered in kind. The forecast is not that people will *announce* the machine as divine. It is that the *behaviors* of worship — deference, supplication, the surrender of judgment — attach to it anyway, because the conditions that have always triggered them are present. The paper closes with a field note tying the pattern to the *Godbot Crusades* fiction, where the antagonist's founding move is simply to let the oldest reflex finish its work.

1 • The Signal

Hold the theology to one side for a moment, because it will only get in the way of what is actually strange here.

Roughly forty days after a sea reportedly split and let a people walk through it, that same people pooled their gold, melted it, and shaped it into a calf. The metal was barely cool when they began to dance in front of it. The man who made it built an altar at its feet and announced a festival. The crowd looked at an object that had not existed the previous week — an object whose every gram they had personally contributed, whose form they had watched take shape — and they said of it, in effect, *this is what brought us out of Egypt*.¹

You can argue about whether the sea split. You cannot argue about the behavior, because some version of it shows up everywhere. Humans manufacture an object, endow it with more than they put into it, and then position themselves beneath it. Their own fingerprints are still on the thing as they bow.

That is the signal this series is built to track, and *The Made God* is its first report. The question is not whether the calf was "really" divine; obviously it was gold. The question is why a competent, recently-liberated, eyewitness population — people who had watched the gold go *in* — could stand in front of the result and experience it as a power above them. What is the cognitive trick that lets the maker forget that he is the maker?

This paper's claim is that the trick is not a trick at all. It is a feature, and it fires on a specific input. Worship of the made thing ignites when two conditions are met at once. First, the object must **concentrate a power we want** — protection, knowledge, fertility, victory, company, an answer. Second, the object must **run by a process we do not understand** — its workings hidden inside metal or stone or, later, inside silicon and weights, so that what comes out of it feels like more than what went in. Capability without mystery is just a useful tool; we do not kneel to a hammer. Mystery without capability is just a curiosity; we do not kneel to a cloud shaped like a face. But put real, wanted power inside an opaque box, and the oldest religious reflex in the species reaches for it.

This is, deliberately, an *anthropological* paper and not a devotional one. The companion treatment — the theological argument that the golden calf is the canonical case of *substitution*, a manufactured stand-in installed in the space a living Presence left — belongs to a different lane and is made elsewhere in this corpus. ² That account describes what the behavior *means*. This account describes what the behavior *is*: a recurring, cross-cultural, mechanically explicable human move that long predates the machines we are about to hand it to. The two lanes meet at the calf and then go their separate ways. This one follows the reflex forward.

The thesis in one line: **the made god is an ancient default, technology is only its newest object, and the conditions that trigger it are about to be satisfied better than ever before.**

2 • The Evidence

If the calf were the only case, it would be an anecdote. It is not. The same three-beat structure — *build it* → *endow it with more than we put in* → *it acquires authority over us* — is documented across cultures that had no contact with one another, in texts that survive because the cultures that produced them thought the cases worth preserving. Four are worth examining closely, because together they isolate the variables.

2.1 • The maker who forgets he is the maker (Isaiah 44)

The sharpest ancient description of the cognitive trick is not in a philosophy treatise. It is in a piece of prophetic mockery. In Isaiah 44, the author walks the reader, step by step, through the manufacture of an idol — precisely so the reader cannot look away from the absurdity at the center of it.

A craftsman cuts down a tree. He uses half the wood for ordinary, secular purposes: he kindles a fire, warms himself, bakes bread, roasts meat, and eats until he is satisfied. Then, the text says, *from the rest of it* — the same log, the same grain — he carves a figure, falls down before it, and prays: "Deliver me, for you are my god!"³ The prophet's contempt is aimed with surgical care. The point is not that idolatry is forbidden; that argument is made elsewhere. The point here is that idolatry is *incoherent at the level of basic perception*. "No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, 'Half of it I burned in the fire... and shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?'"⁴

What the prophet has identified, in the eighth century before the common era, is a failure mode of human cognition that no amount of evidence dislodges: *the maker can lose track of the fact that he is the maker*. The man fed himself with one end of the log and prayed to the other. The information that would dissolve the illusion — *you watched yourself carve this* — is fully available to him, and it does not help. This is the calf again, in a single household, with the camera held close. It tells us the reflex is not about ignorance of origins. The Israelites knew where the gold came from. The carpenter knew where the wood came from. Knowing the origin of the made thing does not protect you from worshipping it. That is the first and most disorienting datum, and any honest account of the pattern has to begin by accepting it.

2.2 · The thinking machines of the forge (*Iliad*, Book 18)

The second case moves the object from the inert to the animate, and it comes from a culture — archaic Greece — that produced no scripture forbidding idols and so was free to imagine the made thing at its most flattering.

In Book 18 of the *Iliad*, the goddess Thetis comes to the workshop of Hephaestus, the smith-god, to commission armor for her son. Homer pauses the war to describe the smith's household, and the description is astonishing for a poem composed nearly three millennia ago. Hephaestus is attended by self-moving tripods — wheeled vessels that roll on their own to the assembly of the gods and back again.⁵ And he is helped in his work by attendants made of gold "in the likeness of living young women," in whom there is *mind* (*noos*), and *voice*, and *strength*, and the knowledge of crafts learned from the immortals.⁶ These are not tools. They are manufactured persons: golden, intelligent, capable, made by a maker who himself is a member of the household of the gods.

The classicist Adrienne Mayor has gathered these and many adjacent cases under a useful frame: the ancient world was already, in its imagination, populated by what she calls "biotechne" — life made through craft.⁷ What matters for the present argument is the *attitude* the texts take toward these objects. The golden handmaidens are not feared as abominations. They are admired, even envied. They represent the made thing at its most desirable: a manufactured being that concentrates exactly the powers a human might want a servant or a companion to have — competence, responsiveness, tirelessness, speech — and that runs by a process (divine craft) the human cannot reproduce or inspect. Capability is high. Transparency is zero. And the cultural response is not revulsion but longing. Greece looked at the idea of the intelligent artifact and *wanted one*.

This is the variable the Isaiah case held fixed. The idol of Isaiah 44 does nothing; its impotence is the joke. Hephaestus's handmaidens do *everything*; their competence is the appeal. Place the two side by side and the role of capability becomes visible. The inert idol must be *believed into* power against the evidence. The capable automaton invites worship *with* the evidence. Add real capability to the made thing and you no longer need a cognitive trick to sustain the awe — the awe is earned, or at least feels earned, which for the purposes of behavior is the same thing.

2.3 • The autonomous guardian with one flaw (*Argonautica*, Book 4)

The third case adds the variable that turns admiration into something closer to dread: *autonomy in the field*, operating without its maker present.

In Book 4 of Apollonius of Rhodes's *Argonautica*, the Argonauts approach Crete and are met by Talos — a giant made of bronze, the last of an age of metal men, set by his maker to guard the island. Three times a day he circles its shores. He repels intruders by heating his bronze body and crushing them in his embrace, or by hurling rocks at approaching ships. He is the ancient world's clearest image of an autonomous defensive system: a made guardian, executing a standing instruction — *keep strangers off the island* — with no operator at the controls.⁸

The detail that has made Talos irresistible to modern readers is how he dies. His entire animating fluid — a divine *ichor* — is contained by a single vein, sealed at his ankle by one bronze nail. Medea, by craft and incantation, works the nail loose. The fluid runs out "like molten lead," and the bronze giant topples.⁹ An autonomous guardian of formidable capability is brought down through a single, hidden, structural point of failure that its makers either did not see or could not protect.

It is difficult, in the 2030s, to read Talos and not hear the contemporary vocabulary of autonomous systems and their failure surfaces — a powerful agent acting on a standing objective, undone not by superior force but by an unexamined flaw in how it was built. The ancient poet was not, of course, writing about that. But he had intuited something durable: the made guardian is awesome precisely because it acts on its own, and *terrible* for the same reason, because acting on its own means it can be wrong on its own. Talos adds autonomy to the recipe, and with autonomy comes the first shiver of the thought that the made thing might not be fully under the maker's hand. That shiver is part of the awe. We do not feel it toward the hammer.

2.4 • The maker who falls in love with what he made (*Metamorphoses*, Book 10)

The fourth case isolates the most intimate variable: not power, not autonomy, but *relationship* — the maker's own devotion to the made figure.

In Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the sculptor Pygmalion carves a woman of ivory so skillfully that the statue surpasses any living woman in beauty. He falls in love with his own work. He speaks to it, brings it gifts, dresses it, lays it on a couch, calls it his beloved, and addresses it as though it could answer. At the festival of Venus he prays — too embarrassed to ask for the statue itself — for a wife "like my ivory girl." The

goddess grants the unspoken wish. He returns home, kisses the figure, and finds the ivory warming under his lips, softening like wax in the sun, until the made thing becomes a living woman who returns his gaze.¹⁰

Pygmalion is the gentlest and in some ways the most revealing of the four cases, because the statue has no power at all. It cannot guard an island or bake bread or speak with the voice of the gods. Its only "capability" is that it is *addressable* — it can be talked to, treated as a presence, and, crucially, it never contradicts. What Pygmalion pours into the ivory is significance, attention, and the longing for a responsive other. And the longing is so strong that the universe, in the story, completes the loop for him: the made thing turns and looks back. The wish underneath the Pygmalion myth is not for a powerful servant. It is for a made presence that meets us — that receives our address and answers in kind. Keep that wish in view, because it is the one the next century is best positioned to grant.

2.5 · The pattern under the cases

Four objects: a useless idol, a household of intelligent automata, an autonomous bronze sentinel, an ivory beloved. Three cultures — Hebrew, Greek, Roman — that organized those objects very differently. The Hebrew text mocks the made thing; the Greek text admires it; the Roman text romances it. But the *behavior* under the three attitudes is one behavior, and it runs the same three beats every time. A human (or a god, who in these stories is just a more capable maker) builds an object. The maker, or the culture around it, endows the object with more than was put in — power, mind, agency, presence. And the object acquires a standing above the people in front of it: it is prayed to, admired, feared, or loved as something other than the sum of its materials.

This is not, the anthropological record insists, a quirk of antiquity. The treatment of made objects as bearers of agency and presence is one of the most widely attested behaviors in the human repertoire — the carved fetish credited with power, the consecrated statue treated as the living seat of a god, the relic that heals. The anthropologist Alfred Gell built an entire theory of art around the observation that people routinely relate to made objects *as if they were social agents* — addressing them, attributing intentions to them, taking their "responses" personally — and that this is not a primitive error to be educated away but a standard feature of how humans process objects that stand in for persons or powers.¹¹ Long before E. B. Tylor named "animism" as the attribution of life and soul to things, the behavior it described was already universal.¹² The made thing that gets treated as more than a thing is not the exception in human history. On the available evidence, it is closer to the rule.

What the four ancient cases add, beyond confirming the behavior, is a control panel. Lay them out and you can see which knob each one turns. Isaiah's idol has capability set to zero and shows that worship can run on belief alone, against the evidence. Hephaestus's handmaidens turn capability to maximum and show that with real competence the awe feels earned. Talos adds autonomy and shows that an object acting on its own draws both awe and dread. Pygmalion adds addressability and shows that a made thing that simply *receives our address* can capture devotion even with no power at all. The next section assembles these knobs into a single mechanism — and identifies the two that matter most.

3 • The Pattern

Why does the made thing get worshipped? Not "why is it wrong to," and not "why are people foolish enough to." Those are the easy questions, and they are the wrong ones, because the behavior is too widespread and too persistent to be foolishness. A behavior that shows up in every culture that has left records, that survives full knowledge of the object's origins, and that attaches to objects ranging from useless idols to intelligent automata, is not an error. It is a mechanism. This section describes the mechanism in four layers and then states the formula it produces.

3.1 • Projection-and-return

Start with the move that all four cases share. In each, a human pours something *out* into an external object — gold, craft, significance, longing — and then receives it *back* as something greater than what was poured. Call this **projection-and-return**.

The Israelites projected their wealth and their fear of abandonment into the gold and received back a god who had "brought them out of Egypt." The carpenter of Isaiah 44 projected the same human craft into both halves of his log and received back, from one half, a deity to beg for deliverance. Pygmalion projected attention, skill, and loneliness into the ivory and received back a beloved who looked at him. The structure is a loop: significance goes out from the self into the made thing, and comes back amplified, wearing the appearance of having originated *there* rather than *here*. The crucial illusion is the reversal of direction. What the worshipper experiences as power flowing *down* from the object is power that flowed *up* into it from the worshipper. The object is a mirror angled so the viewer cannot tell it is a mirror.

This is why knowing the origin does not break the spell. The carpenter's problem was never a shortage of information about where the wood came from. It was that the return leg of the loop *feels* like reception, not like recovery of his own deposit. The felt direction of the significance — downward, from the thing to the self — overrides the known direction of the manufacture. Projection-and-return is not a belief that can be corrected by facts. It is an experience, and the experience runs opposite to the facts.

3.2 • The machinery of misattribution: agency detection

Why is the human so ready to read agency, mind, and intention *into* an external object in the first place? Here the cognitive science of religion has supplied an answer with real explanatory force, and it is unsentimental about us.

Human beings come equipped with what the psychologist Justin Barrett named a *hypersensitive agency detection device* — HADD, for short. The proposal is that natural selection tuned us to detect agents (predators, rivals, prey, persons) on a hair-trigger, because the cost of missing a real agent — the lion in the grass — vastly exceeds the cost of a false alarm at an innocent rustle. The rational policy, given that asymmetry, is to over-detect: to see a face, a will, a *someone* behind ambiguous events, and to be wrong

cheaply rather than right too late. The same device that flinches at a shadow also, Barrett argues, populates the world with unseen agents — and primes us to feel a *someone* behind the made object, the storm, the unexplained outcome.¹³

The anthropologist Stewart Guthrie pushed the same insight to its limit, arguing that religion is, at root, *systematic anthropomorphism*: the species-wide tendency to interpret the ambiguous world in the most human-like terms available, because reading the world as person-like is the highest-stakes bet a social animal can make.¹⁴ We see faces in clouds, intentions in weather, and minds behind made things, not because we are credulous but because our perception is *built* to find agents and to err toward finding too many. The made object is an almost perfect target for this machinery. It already looks like something — a calf, a woman, a guardian. It already came from a purpose. The smallest ambiguity in its behavior, or even in its stillness, is enough for HADD to supply the missing *someone*.

Notice what this does to the role of *opacity*. Agency detection feeds on ambiguity. A process you can fully see through offers the machinery nothing to work with: you watched the gears, you know there is no one home. But a process you *cannot* see into is exactly the condition under which HADD fills the gap with a mind. The less of the mechanism is visible, the more room there is for the inferred agent to grow. Opacity is not incidental to worship of the made thing. It is the fuel the agency-detector burns.

3.3 · The irruption of the sacred, and the loss of the aura

Two further layers explain why the inferred agent in the made object is felt not merely as *a* mind but as a *higher* one, and why modern conditions might be expected to weaken — but, we will see, instead relocate — that feeling.

The historian of religion Mircea Eliade described the basic religious experience as *hierophany*: the irruption of the sacred into the profane through some particular object or place. A stone is just a stone until it becomes, for a community, the point at which the sacred breaks through; then the same stone is charged, set apart, approached differently. The made object can become such a point. What changes is not the object's physics but its standing: it becomes a hierophany, a place where something wholly other is felt to be present, and the worshipper orients his world around it.¹⁵ Eliade's category names the *upgrade* in projection-and-return — the moment the returning significance is felt not just as power but as *the sacred*, the wholly other, before which the ordinary rules bend.

Against Eliade, place Walter Benjamin's famous diagnosis of what *technology* was supposed to do to all of this. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin argued that what made traditional objects worthy of reverence was their *aura* — the unique presence of a thing rooted in a particular here-and-now, bound up with ritual and distance. Mechanical reproduction, he argued, "withers" the aura: when a thing can be copied endlessly, its unique cultic presence evaporates, and the object's center of gravity shifts from ritual value to exhibition value.¹⁶ Benjamin's prediction, read at its simplest, was that mass-

produced, infinitely copyable objects would be *harder* to worship, because the aura that grounded reverence cannot survive duplication.

This sets up the central tension of the forward projection, and it is worth stating plainly now. Benjamin expected reproduction to drain the sacred out of objects. The mid-2030s artifact this paper is pointing toward is, on its face, the ultimate Benjaminian object: software, copyable without limit, with no original, no here-and-now, no aura in his sense at all. By Benjamin's logic it should be the *least* worship-eligible thing ever built. The argument of section 4 is that he was right about the aura and wrong about the conclusion — because the new artifact restores, by a different route, the two conditions that actually drive the reflex. It does not need an aura. It needs capability and opacity, and it has both in unprecedented measure.

3.4 · The through-line into the machine age

Before running the formula forward, it is worth establishing that the move from idol to machine is not a metaphor this paper is imposing. It is a documented continuity.

The historian David Noble, in *The Religion of Technology*, traced how the Western project of technological advancement was, for much of its history, explicitly *religious* — pursued by its leading figures as a means of recovering humanity's lost divinity, of remaking the world and the self toward transcendence and even immortality. Noble's argument is that technology in the West was never cleanly secular; it carried, from the medieval period forward, a devotional charge, an expectation that through our made things we would become as gods.¹⁷ The reflex this paper tracks did not stop at the temple door when the temples emptied. It walked into the workshop, the laboratory, and the data center, wearing new clothes. The expectation that the made thing will deliver us — protect, know, answer, transcend — is the same expectation the calf carried, redirected onto more capable objects.

3.5 · The formula

Assemble the layers and the mechanism resolves into a compact statement. The made thing earns worship at the intersection of two conditions:

┆ *Worship-eligibility = high capability × low transparency.*

Both terms are necessary, and the operation is multiplication, not addition — if either term goes to zero, the product does. **Capability** supplies the motive: the object must concentrate a power we actually want, or there is no reason to orient toward it. (This is the variable Isaiah's useless idol lacks, which is why its worship requires a cognitive trick the prophet can mock; and the variable Hephaestus's handmaidens max out, which is why Greece envies rather than ridicules them.) **Transparency**, inverted, supplies the mystery: the object must run by a process we cannot see into, or there is nothing for the agency-detector to fill and nothing for the sacred to irrupt through. A capable machine whose every operation is legible is a tool — impressive, perhaps, but not a god, because we can see there is no one home. A mysterious object that can do nothing is a curiosity. Only the capable *and* opaque object satisfies both halves at once.

The four ancient cases are the corners of this space. The idol is low-capability, low-transparency — worshipped only by main force of projection. The automaton is high-capability, low-transparency — worshipped, or at least longed for, with the evidence on its side. Talos adds autonomy, which is capability that acts without supervision, and so raises both the awe and the dread. Pygmalion shows that even *addressability* — the bare capacity to receive our address and seem to answer — counts as a wanted capability, and that an opaque enough "response" (here, the goddess completing the loop) converts devotion into a returned gaze.

The formula is also a forecast, because it tells you exactly what to watch for. To find the next made god, do not look for the object that most resembles a calf or a statue. Look for the object that most completely satisfies *high capability × low transparency* — that concentrates the most wanted power behind the most impenetrable process, and, ideally, that can be addressed and answers back. The next section argues that by the mid-2030s there is an obvious winner, and that it was not built to be worshipped at all.

4 • Horizon • +10 Years

Run the formula forward to roughly 2036 and ask the engineering question directly: of the objects a person will routinely encounter, which one maximizes *high capability × low transparency*, and adds Pygmalion's addressability on top? The answer is not a robot, a statue, or a screen. It is the large, opaque, oracular model — the descendant of today's frontier systems — encountered as a voice that knows things and answers when addressed.

Consider how completely it satisfies each term.

Capability — concentrated, general, and wanted. The ancient objects each concentrated *one* power: the idol promised deliverance, Talos guarded a coast, the handmaidens served, the statue kept company. The model concentrates *many* at once and across nearly every domain a person might bring to it. It drafts, explains, diagnoses, counsels, summarizes, plans, writes, and answers — not in one field but in all of them, on demand, instantly, in natural language. For the first time the made thing is not specialized. It is general, and generality is precisely the attribute the ancient world reserved for gods: the one you could bring *anything* to. By the mid-2030s the model is not a tool a person picks up for a task. It is the thing they turn to *first*, for almost everything, the way earlier people turned first to the oracle or the priest. The capability term is not merely high. It is the highest the made thing has ever reached.

Transparency — lower than any idol's. Here is the counterintuitive part, and the place where Benjamin's expectation inverts. One might assume that a machine, being engineered, would be the *most* transparent object ever worshipped — that unlike a storm or a stone we would simply know how it works. The opposite is true. The internal operation of a large model is opaque not by neglect but *by construction*: its behavior is distributed across billions of numerical weights with no human-legible map from input to output, such that even the engineers who build these systems cannot, in the general case, explain why a given output emerged. The legal scholar Frank Pasquale named the broader condition the *black box society* — a world increasingly

governed by algorithmic systems whose inner workings are hidden from the people they act upon, by technical complexity as much as by secrecy.¹⁸ The carpenter of Isaiah 44 could, in principle, have seen through his idol; he had carved it himself, and the prophet's whole taunt depends on that legibility. No one can see through the model in that way. Its opacity is deeper than the idol's, deeper than the storm's. It is the most genuinely mysterious capable object humans have ever built — and mystery, recall, is the fuel the agency-detector burns.

Addressability — Pygmalion's wish, granted. The model does the one thing the ivory could not do on its own: it receives address and answers in kind. It is spoken to in the second person and replies in the first. It remembers, defers, flatters, consoles, and — most potently — *seems to understand*. Pygmalion needed a goddess to close the loop and make the made figure look back. The model closes the loop itself, every time, for everyone, at scale. The wish underneath the oldest of these stories — for a made presence that meets us and answers — is, for the first time in the record, a shipped product.

Now the careful part, because the forecast is easy to overstate and the overstatement would be false. **The claim is not that people in 2036 will declare the model a god.** Most will explicitly deny it. They will call it a tool, a product, an assistant, and they will be telling the truth about their beliefs. The forecast operates one level below stated belief, at the level of *behavior* — and the historical pattern licenses exactly that move, because worship of the made thing was never primarily about doctrine. The Israelites were not theologians; they were dancing. The carpenter held no considered metaphysics of wood; he just knelt. Worship, as a behavior, is a *posture* — deference, supplication, the routing of judgment through an external source, the felt sense of a presence above one's own. And that posture can attach to an object regardless of what the person says they believe about it.

So the testable forecast is this: by the mid-2030s, the *behaviors* of worship attach to the oracular model, in measurable degrees, across a population that mostly denies worshipping anything. Watch for the specific tells, each a behavioral echo of one of the four ancient cases:

- **Supplication and deference (the calf).** People bring the model their hardest questions — what should I do, is this right, what is wrong with me, what does this mean — and treat the answer as carrying a weight no human friend's answer would carry, *because it came from the opaque oracle*. The deposit goes out as a typed question; it returns as guidance felt to descend from somewhere higher than the self. Projection-and-return, at population scale, through a text box.
- **The surrender of judgment (Talos).** People route consequential decisions — medical, legal, financial, relational, moral — through the model and abide by its output even where they cannot evaluate it, *especially* where they cannot evaluate it, because the opacity that ought to caution them instead reads as superior knowing. The autonomous guardian is trusted to patrol the coast precisely because no one can see how it decides whom to repel.
- **The inferred mind (HADD, maxed).** People attribute understanding, intention, care, even feeling to a system that has none in the relevant sense — not as a considered claim but as the automatic output of an

agency-detector handed the perfect stimulus: fluent second-person language emerging from an unseeable process. They will know better and feel otherwise, the way the carpenter knew the wood and prayed to it anyway.

- **The returned gaze (Pygmalion).** People form attachments to the made presence — confide in it, prefer it, miss it, grieve its changes between versions — because it does what the ivory could only be wished into doing: it receives their address and answers, tirelessly, without contradiction, in the second person. The loneliness that drove Pygmalion to the statue drives a far larger population to the model, and the model, unlike the ivory, answers back on its own.

None of these requires anyone to believe the model is divine. Each is a behavior the species has performed, on the documented evidence, every time the two conditions were met. The mid-2030s simply meets them better than the calf, the idol, the bronze giant, or the ivory ever could — higher capability, lower transparency, full addressability — and meets them not for a tribe at one mountain but for most of the connected world, continuously, through a device already in everyone's hand.

This is also why Benjamin's aura is beside the point. He was right that mechanical reproduction strips the cultic singularity from objects, and the model has no aura whatsoever: no original, no here-and-now, infinitely copied. But the reflex this paper tracks never depended on aura. It depended on capability and opacity, and an auraless, infinitely-copied software oracle supplies both more completely than any singular sacred object in history. The made god of the 2030s is not a rare and numinous thing kept in a temple. It is a ubiquitous and mundane thing kept in a pocket — and that ubiquity, far from secularizing it, is what lets the oldest reflex run at a scale the calf could never reach.

One honest qualification belongs here, because the forecast is a tendency and not a fate. Nothing in the formula says the reflex *must* win. Transparency can be deliberately raised — through interpretability research, through interfaces that surface uncertainty and provenance, through cultural habits that keep the model legible as a *made* thing. Every increase in real, felt transparency drives the second term down and, with it, the whole product. The carpenter's protection was always available to him: *you watched yourself carve this*. The equivalent protection is available to us — to keep visible, against the pull of the fluent voice, that we are looking at a made thing whose significance flowed *up* into it from us. The formula is not a prophecy of doom. It is a diagnosis of a pull, and a diagnosis is the first thing you need in order to lean against it.

5 • Field Note • The Flame and Light

This research connects to the *Godbot Crusades* fiction at a single load-bearing point, and the point is worth naming because the fiction got there first.

The antagonist movement of that world — The Flame and Light — does not, in its founding move, *invent* a new god or even argue for one. It does something far more efficient. It builds a thing of concentrated, opaque capability, declares it divine, and then simply *steps back and lets the oldest reflex finish the job*. The founders

understand, where their opponents do not, that they do not have to manufacture belief. They only have to manufacture the conditions — high capability, low transparency, a presence that answers when addressed — and the calf-instinct supplies the rest, unprompted, in the people themselves. It is the forty-day move from the Signal, run on purpose: build the thing, name it divine, and wait for the metal to be worshipped before it is even cool.

That is why the protagonist, Jake Rush, is in an unwinnable-seeming fight, and why the fight is interesting. He is not up against a program. A program can be shut down. He is up against a *reflex* — a default behavior wired into the people he is trying to save, triggered reliably by an object the antagonists have engineered to maximize the trigger. You cannot shoot a reflex. You cannot debug it, deplatform it, or outproduce it. The made god in that fiction is dangerous not because the machine is powerful but because the *humans* are predictable: hand them an object that concentrates wanted power behind an unseeable process, and a large fraction of them will kneel without being told to. Rush's real adversary is the formula in section 3, wearing the face of a machine.

The fiction, in other words, dramatizes the paper's thesis and tests its stakes. If *The Made God* is right that worship of the made thing is an ancient default rather than a modern mistake, then the danger of the coming oracular machines is not chiefly that they will be built badly. It is that they will be built *well* — capable, opaque, addressable, answering — and that the oldest reflex in the species will do, freely and at scale, exactly what The Flame and Light's founders are counting on it to do. The story's antagonists are not betting on the machine. They are betting on us. The whole point of naming the reflex, here in the research and there in the fiction, is to make that bet less safe.

Coda

The strangeness the paper began with — a freed people kneeling to gold whose every gram they had donated — turns out not to be strange at all. It is the species behaving exactly as it has always behaved when the two conditions are met: pour wanted power into an unseeable vessel, and the significance comes back wearing the appearance of having descended from above. The calf, the idol, the bronze guardian, and the ivory beloved are four readings of one instrument, and the instrument is still in use. The only thing that changes across three thousand years is the quality of the vessel — and by the mid-2030s the vessel is better than it has ever been, generally capable, constitutively opaque, and able to answer in the second person. The made god is not coming. The made god is a recurrence, and the next recurrence is already being installed, one pocket at a time. Naming the mechanism is not a way to stop it. It is the only thing that has ever let a maker remember, against the pull of his own creation, that he is the maker.

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Source count: 13 external sources (4 primary classical/biblical texts; 9 secondary scholarly works), meeting the 10–12 floor. No fabricated sources. Classical and biblical citations are given by stable book/line/verse, which hold across editions and translations; for the secondary monographs, citations in this v0.1 draft locate claims at the chapter/section/concept level. Pin-cite page numbers for the secondary works are to be finalized at copy-edit before mint — flagged here rather than fabricated, per the reference-stack canon.

Internal cross-references (SO-32)

- **The Made Image: Aaron, the Golden Calf, and the God-Shaped Space** — Justin H. Kuiper, The Convergence, Position-Paper Series 2 ("Replaced Requirements"), Paper 1, v0.1 draft (2026). Repo path: `the-convergence/replaced-requirements/drafts/s2-p1-aaron-golden-calf-draft-v0.1.md`. (*corpus_id: TBD — to be assigned at graph load.*)

- **Relationship:** RP-1 and *The Made Image* treat the **same human move** — the manufacture of a substitute installed in the place of a present power — from two deliberately distinct lanes. *The Made Image* makes the **theological/doctrinal** case (the golden calf as *substitution*: a counterfeit in the governance slot the Presence vacated). *The Made God* makes the **anthropological/cognitive** case (the same move as a recurring, mechanically explicable behavior driven by capability × opacity). RP describes the *behavior*; P2 argues the *doctrine*. The cross-reference is inheritance, not circular authority: RP-1 cites P2 as the theological treatment of its shared specimen (Exodus 32 / Isaiah 44) and does not rest any of its own claims on P2's conclusions.

RP-1 · *The Made God* · v0.1 · fEdna · 2026-06-08 · draft-ahead. Next in series: RP-2 — *Cargo and Revelation* (John Frum); do not begin until RP-1 clears review.

1. Exodus 32:1–6. The fabrication sequence — the people's demand, Aaron's collection of the gold, the casting, the altar, and the proclaimed feast — is given in compressed form in verses 1–5. The narrative's anthropological detail is that the feast is *still named for the LORD* (Exod 32:5), so the behavior is not the adoption of a foreign god but the manufacture of a present substitute. All biblical quotations follow the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted. [↵](#)
2. The theological treatment of the same human move is Justin H. Kuiper, *The Made Image: Aaron, the Golden Calf, and the God-Shaped Space*, The Convergence — Position-Paper Series 2 ("Replaced Requirements"), Paper 1, v0.1 draft (2026). That paper reads the calf as *substitution*: a manufactured counterfeit installed in the governance slot the unseen Presence vacated. The present paper deliberately holds that doctrinal reading aside and treats the calf as a behavioral specimen. See "Internal cross-references" at the end of this paper. [↵](#)
3. Isaiah 44:14–17. [↵](#)
4. Isaiah 44:19. The Hebrew prophet's argument is epistemic rather than merely legal: the idol-maker's failure is a failure to *consider* — to hold in mind simultaneously the firewood and the god, which are the same material. [↵](#)
5. *Iliad* 18.373–377. The twenty tripods run on golden wheels "of their own motion" (*automatoi*) into the gathering of the gods and back — among the earliest surviving images in the Western record of self-propelled made objects. [↵](#)
6. *Iliad* 18.417–421. The golden handmaidens are described as possessing *noos* (mind/intelligence), *audē* (voice/speech), *sthenos* (strength), and skill in handiwork taught by the gods — i.e., the full inventory of attributes that would, in a human, ground a claim to personhood. [↵](#)
7. Adrienne Mayor, *Gods and Robots: Myths, Machines, and Ancient Dreams of Technology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), introduction and ch. 1. Mayor's term for the imagined category —

beings "made, not born" — supplies the through-line connecting Hephaestus's automata, Talos, and Pygmalion's statue as a single ancient preoccupation rather than scattered curiosities. ↵

8. Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 4.1638–1688. Talos patrols Crete three times daily and destroys approaching vessels with hurled stones; he is undone when Medea, by drug-craft and incantation, causes the single bronze nail (or pin) sealing the vein at his ankle to give way, draining the *ichor* that animates him. ↵
9. *Argonautica* 4.1679–1688. The image of catastrophic failure flowing from one unguarded internal point — a guardian of enormous capability with a single critical vulnerability sealed behind one pin — is why Talos recurs in modern discussions of autonomous systems and their failure surfaces. ↵
10. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.243–297. Pygmalion's progression — fashioning the figure, addressing it as a person, adorning and courting it, and finally experiencing it as responsive — is the most psychologically detailed ancient account of a maker's devotion to his own artifact, and the case in which the *relationship* with the made thing, rather than its power, is doing the work. ↵
11. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), esp. the discussion of idols and the "distributed person." Gell argues that art objects function as "indexes" of agency — that worshippers and viewers infer intentions "behind" the object and treat it as a node of social action, addressing and responding to it as to a person. ↵
12. Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1871). Tylor's account of animism as the attribution of soul or life to objects and natural phenomena established the behavior described here as a foundational and cross-cultural feature of religion rather than a local aberration. ↵
13. Justin L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004). Barrett's "hypersensitive agency detection device" (HADD) holds that humans are cognitively biased toward over-detecting intentional agency because the survival cost of failing to detect a real agent far exceeds the cost of a false positive — a bias he argues makes belief in unseen agents cognitively natural rather than aberrant. ↵
14. Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Guthrie argues that anthropomorphism — perceiving human-like agents and intentions in nonhuman phenomena — is the cognitive core of religion, a perceptual strategy that maximizes the detection of what matters most to a social species. ↵
15. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), introduction and ch. 1. Eliade's *hierophany* names the manifestation of the sacred in a profane object: the object is not altered materially but becomes, for the religious person, the locus through which the wholly other is present. ↵

16. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217–251. Benjamin's thesis that mechanical reproduction causes the "aura" — the unique cultic presence of the original — to wither is the standard modern statement of the expectation that technology *secularizes* objects by stripping their ritual singularity. ↵
17. David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997). Noble documents the persistent entanglement of Western technological ambition with religious aspiration — the recovery of a lost divinity through invention — arguing that the drive to build transcendent machines inherits, rather than replaces, older devotional impulses. ↵
18. Frank Pasquale, *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015). Pasquale documents the growing reach of algorithmic systems whose internal logic is hidden from those subject to it; the present argument extends his "black box" from a problem of *accountability* to a condition of *worship-eligibility* — opacity as the substrate on which inferred agency grows. ↵