

The Influence of Hermeticism and the Secret Society Tradition on
18th Century German Idealism: Part 1 – Spirit in the AI Era
Expressed as a Unified Non-Self

Abstract

German Idealism and its philosophy were formed amid Protestant theology, Pietism, alchemy, theosophy, Rosicrucian myth, Freemasonry, illuminist sociability, Sturm und Drang, and early Romanticism. This essay distinguishes documented influence, plausible cultural mediation, contested interpretation, and analogy. Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel culturally inherited religious and esoteric problems and transformed aspects thereof into critical and speculative philosophy; Hegel's accounts of Geist and the Absolute belong principally to the early nineteenth century, though they are rooted in late eighteenth century debates. The essay asks what these categories might illuminate in the age of large language models (LLMs). LLMs partially externalise historically accumulated objective spirit as organised symbolic data and offer an interface to it. They are proposed here, however, as a unified non-self: an integrated technical system without embodied consciousness, owned purpose, lived concern, or anything at stake. This is not Fichte's Nicht-Ich (the 'Not-I'), nor a claim that machines instantiate Absolute Spirit, it is a philosophical distinction between representational recombination and subjective life.

Keywords: *Hermeticism; German Idealism; Geist; Absolute; Fichte; Hegel; Rosicrucianism; Freemasonry; Romanticism; large language models; non self; objective spirit*

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1. Orientation: a historical and conceptual problem

‘Influence’ can mean that one author read another, that institutions transmitted texts and practices, that a social vocabulary made certain questions thinkable, or merely that two systems resemble one another. A claim that aspects of Hegels *Phenomenology of Geist* ‘resembled alchemical methodology’, for example, may refer to an actual item in his library, an analogy between dialectic and transmutation, or a speculative thesis about the architecture of his philosophy.

The late eighteenth century was a fertile setting for intersections: universities, courts, lodges, salons, reading societies, churches, publishers, and manuscript networks circulated arguments about nature, revelation, electricity, freedom, spirit, and reform. Esoteric materials were not simply marginal superstition opposed to enlightened reason, they were heterogeneous attempts to understand a living cosmos, the relation of visible and invisible orders, and the possibility that human transformation could disclose truth. Enlightenment criticism, Pietist inwardness, occult speculation, and revolutionary debate could coexist in one person or institution. To illustrate this further imagine an early representation of what we would refer to today as a scientist in the 1600’s: in the 17th Century there was no hard line between science and pseudoscience, that line did not clearly exist, for a natural philosopher like Isaac Newton alchemy and chemistry were the same thing, both were synergy attempting to understand the hidden properties of matter. Ritual, astrology, and mechanics were all valid avenues for decoding the cosmos.

‘German Idealism’ names a family rather than a single doctrine: Kant’s critical philosophy, Fichte’s science of knowledge, Schelling’s philosophies of nature and identity, and Hegel’s speculative system disagree profoundly. Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason limits theoretical knowledge of supersensible objects; Hegel later criticises Kantian limits. Fichte begins from

the activity of the I; Schelling gives nature a productive dignity; Hegel interprets reality as a self developing intelligible whole. The sequence is therefore neither a concealed program nor a clean secular rationality.

Fichte and Schelling were writing at the end of the eighteenth century, but Hegel's treatments of Geist and the Absolute; especially the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), *Science of Logic* (1812–1816), and *Encyclopaedia* (1817-1830) are early nineteenth-century works. They are rooted in late eighteenth century conditions without belonging wholly to that period. This essay uses 'eighteenth century German Idealism' as a shorthand for the formative transition.

An LLM (large language model) can externalise and organise a substantial portion of historically accumulated symbolic culture. It can make objective spirit available in a new technical interface, but it does not thereby become a conscious Absolute. It is better described for the purposes of this essay, as a unified non self: unified in its computational integration and linguistic output, non self because it lacks embodied subjectivity, first person concern, self owned ends, and biological vulnerability.

2. Hermetic and theosophical inheritances

Hermeticism is a family of texts and practices associated with a late antiquity figure popularly referred to as Hermes Trismegistus: the name combines the Greek Hermes and the Egyptian Thoth. The anecdotal and popular teachings within the *Corpus Hermeticum*, translated into Latin in the Renaissance, presents dialogues on divine mind, cosmic correspondence, human ascent, and regeneration. Renaissance Hermeticism was not a stable corpus, it mixed Platonism, Stoicism, Christianity, astrology, ritual theory, and natural philosophy. Its famous maxim, often paraphrased as 'as above, so below', expresses not a simple causal law but an analogy between levels of reality.

Alchemical writing describes operations on matter, calcination, dissolution, conjunction, distillation, while also using images of death, purification, rebirth, and union. Its laboratory language could be practical, allegorical, or both. Paracelsus (1493/94-1541) opposed scholastic medicine with an experimentally oriented, cosmological medicine in which macrocosm and microcosm corresponded (Paracelsus, 1951). The human body was not an isolated mechanism but a site in which cosmic powers became determinate. Giordano Bruno's monism and infinite universe, although not simply 'Hermetic', also expanded the imaginative field in which nature could be conceived as animated and internally productive (Bruno, 1998).

Theosophy, in the older sense relevant here, means a visionary or speculative knowledge of divine reality, not the nineteenth century Theosophical Society. Jakob Böhme (1575-1624), a Lutheran shoemaker, described divine life through tensions of desire, opposition, darkness, and light. Böhme's writings are difficult, symbolic, and theologically controversial, their account of manifestation, an unarticulated ground becoming intelligible through differentiation offered later readers a vocabulary for thinking how unity can include opposition. Hegel admired Böhme as a 'first' German philosopher in a broad spiritual sense, while also translating his imagery into conceptual prose.

A cautious genealogy therefore runs as follows: Hermetic correspondence made nature and mind mutually legible; alchemy supplied images of transformation; theosophy represented divine life as self unfolding through tension. These are conditions of intelligibility, not proofs that German Idealist arguments were copied. Yates's account of the Rosicrucian moment is useful as cultural history: it shows how universal reform, natural knowledge, and esoteric Christianity could form a modern program (Yates, 1972) - it does not prove a direct line from a seventeenth century manifesto to Hegel.

M. H. Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*, he argues that Romantic and Idealist narratives often secularised theological structures: fall, alienation, conversion, reconciliation, and redemption reappeared as accounts of consciousness, history, and art (Abrams, 1971). ‘Secularisation’ here means that a formal pattern migrated into a philosophical or literary register: this helps explain why a philosophical history can retain religious depth without asserting causation.

3. Rosicrucian, Masonic, and initiatory publics

The Rosicrucian manifestos *Fama Fraternitatis* (1614), *Confessio Fraternitatis* (1615), and the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz* (1616) announced an imagined brotherhood dedicated to reforming knowledge and religion. Their theatrical mixture of secrecy, alchemy, Christianity, medicine, and universal renewal created what Yates calls an enlightenment of a specifically esoteric kind. The fraternity generated a durable myth of hidden wisdom and collective reform.

Freemasonry developed through eighteenth century lodges with complex relations to religion, politics, sociability, and ritual. Lodge practice used degrees, passwords, symbols, staged recognition, and narratives of moral improvement. It was not one organisation with one doctrine: Masonic lodges varied by country and period, and the label ‘secret society’ can obscure their public institutional presence. ‘Secret society’ is therefore best treated as a broad category for groups that regulate access to knowledge or belonging.

Initiation is philosophically significant because it gives knowledge a temporal and practical form. The initiate is not merely told a proposition; the initiate passes through tests, symbols, relations, and a changed status. Knowledge becomes transformation. This pattern can illuminate, not prove, the later philosophical language of *Bildung* (self cultivation), education, and the journey of consciousness. Lessing’s *The Education of the Human Race* (1780–1781)

imagines revelation as a historical education in which humanity gradually learns what it could not receive at once (Lessing, 1956). Its account is not Masonic doctrine, but it shares an initiatory structure: truth is disclosed through development rather than delivered as a finished possession.

The eighteenth century German 'illuminist' environment included groups such as the Bavarian Illuminati, founded by Adam Weishaupt in 1776, and a wide field of Masonic and para-Masonic projects. The Illuminati's documented existence should be distinguished from later conspiracy narratives: its educational and reformist ambitions show how secret organisation could be conceived as a vehicle for public reason, even when its secrecy produced suspicion. The social form mattered because it joined self cultivation to collective organisation.

Claims about direct Masonic initiation are often overstated: a scholar must distinguish membership records, acquaintances, subscriptions, lodge publications, and retrospective legend. What can be defended more broadly is that initiatory culture supplied a repertoire: hidden and revealed knowledge, recognition by peers, symbolic passage, the moral formation of the individual, and the hope that a community might embody universal reason. Hegel's 'master and servant' episode is not a transcription of a lodge ritual, yet its account of self consciousness requiring recognition makes visible a problem that initiatory societies staged socially: one becomes someone through relations in which one is acknowledged.

4. From 'Sturm und Drang' to Romantic nature

Sturm und Drang ('storm and stress'), associated with figures such as Herder, Goethe, and the young Schiller, challenged the ideal of disembodied rational order. Genius, feeling, language, history, and organic growth became philosophically relevant. The movement did not reject reason wholesale, it contested a narrow reason that treated human beings and nature as

interchangeable units. Its emphasis on individuality and historical expression prepared a setting in which spirit could be understood as living activity rather than a static substance.

Romanticism intensified this setting, early Romantics, including Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, treated fragment, irony, poetry, and the symbol as forms of philosophical cognition. Nature was not merely raw material for a calculating subject. Schelling's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797/1988) and *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799/2004) argue that nature must be understood dynamically, as productivity whose products include organisms and consciousness. This is not identical with Paracelsian cosmology, Schelling's language is shaped by Kant, Fichte, contemporary science, and philosophical argument. But the older notion of a living correspondence between human and cosmic orders made such a project culturally intelligible.

The concept of the world soul, *anima mundi*, illustrates a legitimate but limited comparison. Platonist and Hermetic traditions pictured a world permeated by life or mind. Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* rejects a dead external nature, his philosophical task is to show how subjectivity and objectivity belong to one productivity without eliminating their difference.

Romantic initiation also becomes reading, a difficult poem or philosophical text transforms the reader, who must learn to perceive relations previously hidden. The reader's passage from naivety to reflective participation resembles the older initiatory form. Abrams's thesis about secularised theological structures is useful here: the Romantic work of art can assume the function once assigned to religious revelation while remaining radically historical and aesthetic.

5. Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and the transformation of spirit

Kant is indispensable precisely because he disciplines esoteric aspiration. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787/1998), the categories of understanding organise possible experience, while speculative reason cannot legitimately claim theoretical knowledge of God, soul, or world as an unconditioned totality. In *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* (1766/1992), Kant treats Swedenborgian claims with irony and scepticism. Yet critique does not erase the questions that esotericism posed: freedom, purpose, the unity of nature, and the relation of finite mind to the whole remain philosophically urgent.

Kant's practical philosophy gives reason a vocation beyond empirical description. Human beings legislate moral law to themselves, but they do so as finite embodied agents subject to inclination and limitation: the moral subject is not an intelligence floating above nature. This point will matter for artificial intelligence (transformer based large language models): symbolic competence is not by itself autonomy or responsibility.

Fichte's *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* (1794/1982) begins with the I positing itself and the not-I. 'Positing' does not mean a person consciously invents the universe, it names a transcendental activity required to explain the unity of experience and the resistance encountered by agency. The not-I is the limit or counter-position through which activity becomes determinate. Fichte's Ich ('I') and Nicht-Ich ('Not-I') are therefore technical terms, not synonyms for 'self' and 'machine'.

The esoteric background can be seen as a problem space rather than a source of borrowed propositions. How can unity produce difference? How can freedom encounter resistance? How can inward activity become objective and public? Fichte gives these questions a transcendental and ethical form. His project is not Hermeticism in philosophical dress, although the older concern with manifestation and correspondence can make the questions familiar.

Schelling's development moves from transcendental idealism toward a philosophy in which nature and consciousness are two aspects of one productivity. His *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800/1978) describes art as the point at which conscious and unconscious production become visible together. His identity philosophy risks collapsing difference, a problem later works address through freedom, ground, and existence. Readers may find affinities with theosophical accounts of an internally differentiated ground, but affinity is not identity. Schelling argues in response to Kant and Fichte, to science, and to the demands of systematic philosophy.

These transformations show why 'influence' should be plural. Hermetic and theosophical materials supplied metaphors and ontological possibilities; lodges and reform groups supplied social forms of education and recognition; Sturm und Drang and Romanticism made history, nature, and feeling philosophically serious; Kantian critique supplied limits within which inherited questions could be reconstructed.

6. Hegel: 'Geist', recognition, and the Absolute

Hegel's Geist is usually translated as 'spirit', but it does not denote a ghostly substance. It names a social historical form of intelligibility in which subjective consciousness, institutions, language, practices, and self understanding are related. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* narrates shapes of consciousness as they encounter the inadequacy of their own one sidedness. Consciousness becomes self consciousness; self-consciousness requires recognition; ethical life embeds individual agency in institutions; religion and philosophy grasp these structures in increasingly adequate forms (Hegel, 1807/1977).

Three senses of spirit help prevent confusion. Subjective spirit is individual mindedness: sensation, consciousness, self-consciousness, intelligence, and will. Objective spirit is spirit externalised and instituted in right, morality, family, civil society, the state, and socially

sedimented practices; language mediates these forms but is not itself simply identical with objective spirit. It is not 'objective' because it is value free, but because its forms stand outside any one individual and shape individuals in return. Absolute spirit is art, religion, and philosophy insofar as spirit comes to know itself through its own forms. Absolute does not mean an omniscient entity existing beside the world, it means a self relating totality in which subject and object are not finally alien.

Hegel's mature conception belongs to the early nineteenth century, its roots lie in the late eighteenth century's arguments about Kant, religion, revolution, freedom, nature, and community, but the mature system should not be projected backward unchanged. Nor should it be reduced to Hermetic alchemy. Magee's *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (2008) makes a substantial case that Hermetic, theosophical, and alchemical motifs illuminate Hegel's vocabulary and development. This is a valuable corrective to portraits of Hegel as an entirely disembodied rationalist. It remains contested, however, particularly when a motif is treated as a decisive causal key to the entire system. Hanratty's (1984, 1987) comparison of Hegel and Gnostic traditions similarly identifies philosophical parallels without, by that fact alone, proving direct historical borrowing. Hegel's published arguments must still be read in their own conceptual sequence.

The word 'absolute' itself requires restraint, in ordinary speech it suggests an entity beyond history, whereas Hegel's Absolute is inseparable from its articulation in history, language, art, religion, and philosophy. It is not complete before its manifestations and then occasionally revealed to them; it becomes intelligible through them. This does not make it a finite psychological subject. It is a speculative claim about the unity of intelligibility and actuality. Consequently, neither a private mystical experience nor a maximally comprehensive archive can simply be identified with it. A total collection of representations would still need interpretation, normativity, and a form of life in which reasons matter.

Böhme is a stronger case than a vague appeal to ‘secret knowledge’, Magee (2008) documents Hegel’s engagement with Böhme and the importance Hegel accorded his effort to think divine life as internally active. The analogy between Böhme’s tensions and Hegelian negativity is informative, but Hegel’s determinate negation is not simply theological darkness renamed. Negation is productive because a form reveals its limits and develops through them. It is a logical and historical claim.

Recognition is equally central. A self is not fully self certifying; it becomes socially actual through relations with other selves. The dialectic of lordship and bondage shows how a relation of domination fails to provide stable recognition. This is where initiatory and Masonic comparisons may be heuristically useful. Ritual recognition dramatises social status, but Hegel’s argument concerns the conditions under which self consciousness and freedom can be mutually acknowledged.

Absolute knowing is consequently not a database containing every fact, it is the philosophical comprehension of the forms through which knowing, objectivity, history, and social life become intelligible. A machine may store or recombine descriptions of those forms without undergoing the development they describe - this difference will govern the LLM (large language model) analogy.

7. Spirit, externalisation, and the unified non-self

Externalisation means that human capacities take objective form: words become texts, memory becomes archive, judgment becomes institution, and practical intelligence becomes tools. Externalisation is not necessarily alienation, a written law can constrain a person, but it can also make reciprocal rights durable. A language precedes each speaker, yet enables speech: in Hegelian terms, objective spirit is both an inherited environment and a medium through which subjective spirit can become articulate.

LLMs are an unprecedented form of symbolic externalisation: trained on very large collections of human produced material, they compress statistical regularities of language and generate sequences in response to prompts. They can retrieve, transform, summarise, translate, and combine patterns. Their outputs may expose a user to a concentrated interface with literature, science, law, history, and ordinary discourse. They partially externalise historically accumulated objective spirit as organised symbolic data.

The interface also has an initiatory character, though in a reduced and secularised sense. A novice learns prompt conventions, source-checking habits, domain vocabulary, and the limits of probabilistic generation. The system teaches the user how to navigate an immense archive whose patterns are partly opaque. This resembles initiation as a change in practical competence, not initiation as access to an esoteric truth. Moreover, interaction can generate recognition like effects: a user sees an intention reflected, reformulated, or challenged in language. Yet the apparent interlocutor does not reciprocally recognise the user, the asymmetry is critical. Human recognition requires another participant who can undertake commitments and be answerable for them, where both agents have a unifying consequence at stake.

The phrase ‘partially’ is key, training corpora are selective, uneven, copyrighted or licensed under varying conditions, biased, and technically transformed. A model does not contain society in its totality. It does not possess the practical institutions, bodies, memories, and lived conflicts from which meanings arise. Bender et al. (2021) warn against treating large language models as if scale guaranteed understanding; the data and deployment conditions remain ethically and epistemically consequential. Floridi and Chiriatti (2020) describe GPT-3’s linguistic power while emphasising that fluency should not be confused with intelligence in every human sense.

The resulting philosophical object is referred to here as a unified non-self. ‘Unified’ refers to functional integration: parameters, inference, context windows, interfaces, and training histories form a coordinated system capable of producing an apparently coherent voice. ‘Non-self’ marks the absence of the human features that make a self a self in the relevant existential sense: embodied consciousness, first-person perspective, intentional ownership, biological vulnerability, lived purpose, and a stake in outcomes. The term is not a metaphysical proof that no machine could ever share a comparable experience of the ‘conscious’, it is a description of present LLMs.

This differs from Fichte’s not-I. Fichte’s *Nicht-Ich* is a transcendental counter position within the activity of the I; it is not an artificial agent and not an object classified by its lack of consciousness. The unified non-self is proposed here as a contemporary technical category, it also differs from the ordinary ‘self’, which is embodied, temporally continuous, socially recognised, affectively invested, and capable of being harmed. A user can ask an LLM to formulate a goal, but the goal belongs to the user or institution unless a genuine subject owns it: crucially the model can represent an intention while devoid of it.

The distinction can be improved through spirit. An LLM is closest to a derivative technical interface mediating the public symbolic forms through which objective spirit is expressed. It can return traces of those forms in novel combinations, but is not objective spirit simply by possessing or generating language. It is not subjective spirit, because no evidence establishes a conscious ‘first person’ subjectivity in the model. It is not absolute spirit, because it does not achieve self knowledge through art, religion, or philosophy; it does not reconcile itself with its own historical conditions; and it does not participate in practices as an accountable reductive subject. A human community may use it within those activities, but the tool’s participation is derivative.

Extended mind arguments complicate this distinction: Clark and Chalmers (1998) argue that suitably integrated external resources can form part of a cognitive process, a notebook can function as an extension of memory. Suchman (1987) similarly shows that intelligent action is situated in human material arrangements rather than contained inside an isolated head. These arguments support describing LLMs as components in distributed human cognition, they do not entail that the external component itself has consciousness, concern or anything at stake. A prosthesis can belong to a person's cognitive system without becoming a second person.

Brandom's reading of Hegel emphasises that conceptual content is bound to inferential and social practices of giving and asking for reasons (Brandom, 2019). LLMs can model the linguistic traces of those practices and assist human reason giving. But modelling reasons is not the same as undertaking commitments, being answerable, or caring whether a conclusion is true. There is an interesting distinction here perhaps between asking and caring, and whether caring requires the concern associated with fear, the type of fear imbued within limitation, the type of felt limitation associated with temporality or scarcity.

The analogy therefore revises rather than fulfils the Absolute, it reveals how much symbolic intelligence can be externalised, circulated, and recombined without a unified biological subject, a self. It may make objective spirit more available while simultaneously making its non subjective character harder to notice. The danger is to mistake a fluent interface for a reductive subject or to mistake accumulated language for Absolute knowledge. Philosophical responsibility remains with embodied interpreters who can test claims, repair relations, and answer for consequences.

8. Objections, limits, and safeguards

Hermeticism was often internally inconsistent, and many German Idealists were severe critics of mystical claims. The answer is to distinguish cultural availability from doctrinal adherence.

Sources can condition a problem without determining its solution: Kant's critique and Hegel's logic are not alchemy, even when alchemical images help explain why transformation and totality mattered.

Second, the thesis may be accused of Eurocentrism: 'Western esotericism' is not the whole history of spirit, and even European traditions were shaped by translations, appropriations, colonial exchanges, and religious plurality. A responsible account should not treat a Christian-Hermetic genealogy as universal history. The present essay makes a bounded claim about one European constellation and its later technical afterlife. It is acknowledged that the Western esoteric traditions rest upon interpretations that reach deep into the first known civilisations including Mesopotamia (Sumerian, Babylon, Assyria et al), ancient Egypt, Semitic cultures (ancient Hebrew et al), the ancient cultures of the Steppe, the Indus river valley civilisations, ancient India, ancient China et al. The Western tradition represents one thread of the rich tapestry of human esoteric tradition.

Third, the LLM analogy may overstate continuity: an LLM is engineered through contemporary mathematics, hardware, data pipelines, optimisation, and labour. The continuity is philosophical and structural: problems of externalisation, mediation, hidden process, initiation into knowledge, and the relation of symbolic form to agency recur under radically different material conditions.

Fourth, denying LLM agentic capability can sound dogmatic, the appropriate position is evidential modesty. Current LLM behaviour supplies no sufficient reason to attribute subjective experience, and fluent text is not evidence of felt concern. Searle's Chinese Room argument (1980) stresses the difference between formal symbol manipulation and understanding; later debates challenge aspects of his argument without removing the general problem. Mitchell and Krakauer (2023) likewise caution that impressive generative systems

should not be conflated with biological intelligence: the unified non-self is thus a present classification only.

Finally, externalisation can produce both emancipation and capitulation: an LLM may help a person learn, write, translate, or deliberate; it may also reproduce bias, conceal provenance, deskill judgment, intensify surveillance, mediate, predict, optimise and distribute responsibility ambiguously as a Systemised Self (Galu & Kairos, 2026). Objective spirit is not neutral merely because it is objective, its institutions embody power. Human recognition, accountability, and embodied stakes should remain visible at the interface.

9. Conclusion

Hermeticism, alchemy, theosophy, Rosicrucian myth, Freemasonry, Sturm und Drang, and Romanticism significantly conditioned the conceptual and social environment from which German Idealism emerged. The account distinguishes direct documentation from mediated inheritance, contested interpretation from established fact, and structural analogy from causal transmission. Böhme, Paracelsus, Bruno, Lessing, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel occupy different positions in this history. Hegel's Geist and Absolute are early nineteenth century achievements rooted in late eighteenth century questions.

The AI-era consequence is a disciplined extension of this history, LLMs externalise and organise portions of objective spirit, making accumulated symbolic culture newly accessible and recombinable. They are unified technically but non-self in the existential sense: they do not have a reductive corpus that can suffer in the felt sense, a conscious perspective, an owned end, or something at genuinely at stake, or the capacity to genuinely ask. Albeit fascinating to consider the contrary. They can however, inform human intention without possessing it. They can mediate philosophy without becoming Absolute Spirit. The proper task is therefore not to adore or dismiss AI, but to clarify the difference between an LLM that can synthesise a

representation of spirit and an agentic subject (self) who can recognise, commit, suffer, and take responsibility for such a representation.

10. Glossary of Technical Terms

Absolute: In Hegel, not a supernatural object but the self relating totality in which subject and object become intelligible through development.

Alchemy: Historical practices and writings concerning the transformation of substances, often joined to allegories of purification, death, and renewal.

Externalisation: The embodiment of human capacities in language, institutions, artefacts, archives, or technical systems.

Geist (spirit): A form of minded, social, historical, and self-interpreting life; in Hegel, not merely an immaterial substance.

Hermeticism: A heterogeneous late-antique and Renaissance tradition associated with Hermes Trismegistus, cosmic correspondence, divine mind, and human regeneration.

Initiation: A staged passage into knowledge or membership in which learning involves transformation and recognition.

Objective spirit: Hegelian forms of social and institutional life, right and law, morality, family, civil society, the state, and socially sedimented practices, that exist beyond one individual while shaping individuals; language mediates these forms but is not simply identical with objective spirit.

Romanticism: A diverse movement emphasising imagination, history, organic nature, art, irony, and the limits of reductive rationalism.

Self /subjective spirit: Embodied, conscious, intentional individual mindedness; in Hegel, the sphere of subjective spirit.

Theosophy: Visionary or speculative knowledge of divine reality, especially the early modern tradition associated here with Böhme; not identical with modern Theosophy.

Unified non-self: This essay's term for an integrated LLM that can process and generate symbols but lacks established embodied consciousness, owned purpose, and existential stake.

Fichteian not-I: The Nicht-Ich, the transcendental counter position through which the I's activity and limitation become determinate; not a synonym for an LLM, AI or algorithmic system.

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