
The Most Accurate Fortune Teller: An AI-Enhanced Pseudoscientific Toy As a Thought Experiment

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Abstract

1 “The Most Accurate Fortune Teller” is not just a toy, but a philosophical provoca-
2 tion. Using biometric input (heart rate), emotional feedback (vibration in a heart-
3 beat pattern), and artificial intelligence, it simulates the generation of a meaning-
4 ful message, at the same time it intentionally manipulates perception to expose
5 the epistemic shallowness behind it. Its purpose is demonstrating how easily peo-
6 ple can attribute meaning and depth to vague data-driven outputs when framed
7 with emotional cues, deceptive seduction, and technological complexity that looks
8 mystical.

9 1 Concept and Context

10 Superstition, pseudoscience, and emotional suggestion have long shaped human behavior and so-
11 ciety. In our era of algorithmic authority, they quietly -and not so quietly- shape product design
12 too. Pseudoscience has been deemed “harmless rubbish or even proper for mass consumption”¹ by
13 scientists, who might be busy with more serious research activities to worry about that nonsense.
14 Mario Bunge, one of the greatest philosophers of science of the past century, takes a more critical
15 stance: “superstition, pseudoscience and antiscience are not rubbish that can be recycled into some-
16 thing useful; they are intellectual viruses that can attack anybody, layman or scientist, to the point of
17 sickening an entire culture and turning it against scientific research”¹. He also considers those activ-
18 ities a psychosocial phenomena worth being investigated. Looking back at history, and art history,
19 Caravaggio, one of the greatest Italian painters, depicts a ritual of superstition in The Fortune Teller
20 (Figure 1).

21 At first sight, it looks like the fortune teller is performing a ritual to predict the fortune of the young
22 man next to her, but if we look closely, we can appreciate how the woman is removing the ring
23 during the “necessary” ritual for her to be able to read the fortune. These scams are as old as time
24 itself, and are reinvented over the years with the use of new technologies. Artificial Intelligence is
25 no exception.

26 2 The Most Accurate Fortune Teller

27 The most accurate fortune teller (Figure 2) is an educational toy I made to illustrate this deceptive
28 phenomenon, where complicated mechanisms give the impression to mean more than they do. It
29 is composed of a resin heart that the user holds in his or her hand, with a heart rate sensor to feel
30 the heart rate of the user; it also includes a vibrating motor to mimic the heart rate of the user and
31 provide emotional suggestion. Once the machine receives the heart rate, the user can press a button
32 to reveal an AI-generated fortune message on a screen. Once the message shows on the screen, the
33 user can hear and feel a calmer heartbeat, which can give an aesthetically pleasing experience and
34 suggest that he or she received some truth.



Figure 1: Caravaggio. The Fortune Teller. c. 1596–1597.²

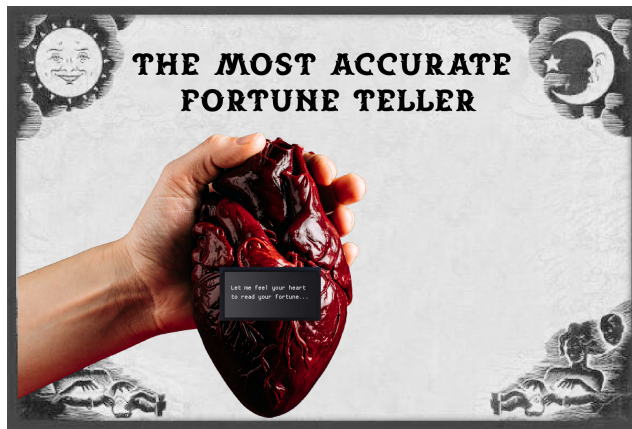


Figure 2: The Most Accurate Fortune Teller

35 I declare I am using AI to get our fortune as a function of our current heart state.

$$\text{fortune} = f(\text{heart rate}, \text{AI})$$

36 **3 A closer look**

37 In reality, I used ChatGPT to generate three sets of answers, and the answer the user gets is a function
38 of the value of the heart rate:

- 39 • A slow heart rate will receive soothing fortunes.
- 40 • A medium heart rate will receive uncertain and philosophical fortunes.
- 41 • A fast heart rate will receive something anxious and action-oriented.

42 The answers are vague enough for the user to interpret the answers as “true” or meaningful in a
43 variety of contexts. If the user is not satisfied with the answer or finds it completely out of place,
44 then we can suggest the ritual was performed wrong and he or she needs to re-do the ritual, adding
45 unfalsifiability to the equation, a common characteristic of pseudoscience, and in sad cases, of AI
46 too.

47 This toy is designed to show how technological mystique can obscure epistemic emptiness. It echoes
48 the ambiguity of Caravaggio’s The Fortune Teller: is AI, like the woman, truly divining our fate –or

49 is it just flattering our hope? Just like in Caravaggio’s painting, it is worth asking: what are we
50 surrendering, unknowingly, like the ring, in the name of insight? Are we the naïve figure, reaching
51 for meaning? Or are we the sorcerer, performing certainty for personal gain? Perhaps we are both
52 –participants in a ritual where desire makes fiction feel like fact. Still, it is an engaging toy, and
53 people have fun with it because it feels meaningful. In the most desirable scenario, users can begin
54 to question the epistemic sleight of hand behind AI applications and prophecies, in times of trying
55 to predict the future with LLMs or recognize emotions with Computer Vision.

56 3.1 About the author

57 Guadalupe (Lupita) Vásquez-Fabela is a Mexican chemist doing a masters in Design and Technol-
58 ogy at Parsons School of Design. She is interested in addressing universal themes that transcend
59 historical periods and explore humanity and the place of people in society. Her work centers around
60 philosophy of chemistry, philosophy of science, and its applications on technological design, aim-
61 ing at promoting inclusion for neurodivergent users, and improving the design interfaces in Artificial
62 Intelligence.

63 References

- 64 • ¹ Bunge, Mario. “What Is Pseudoscience?” *Skeptical Inquirer* 9 (Fall 1984): 36–46.
- 65 • ² Caravaggio. *The Fortune Teller*. c. 1596–1597. Oil on canvas. Pinacoteca Capitolina,
66 Rome.