



TechGnosis: Myth, Magic Mysticism in the Age of Information

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How does our fascination with technology intersect with the religious imagination? In TechGnosis - a cult classic now updated and reissued with a new afterword - Erik Davis argues that while the realms of the digital and the spiritual may seem worlds apart, esoteric and religious impulses have in fact always permeated (and sometimes inspired) technological communication. Davis uncovers startling connections between such seemingly disparate topics as electricity and alchemy; online role-playing games and religious and occult practices; virtual reality and gnostic mythology; programming languages and Kabbalah. The final chapters address the apocalyptic dreams that haunt technology, providing vital historical context as well as new ways to think about a future defined by the mutant intermingling of mind and machine, nightmare and fantasy.

TechGnosis: Myth, Magic Mysticism in the Age of Information Details

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From Reader Review TechGnosis: Myth, Magic Mysticism in the Age of Information for online ebook

ziombel says

Gnoza by?a ruchem religijnym d???cym do wyzwolenia cz?owieka za pomoc? magii, nauki lub wiary z materialnego ?wiata. Ksi??ka Erika Davisa opisuje pocz?tki gnozy oraz jej wspó?czesne wersje.

Na pocz?tku opisani s? antyczni mistycy oraz ?redniowieczni alchemicy. Nast?pnie autor opisuje narodziny spirytualizmu, który wy?oni? si? mi?dzy innymi dzi?ki powstaniu elektryczno?ci i nowych sposobów komunikacji. Opisuje ko?ció? scjentologiczny oraz sekty wierzące w kosmitów, którzy mieliby zabra? ich do lepszego ?wiata. Opowiada o wp?ywach wschodnich religii w?ród zachodnich intelektualistów i mistyków. Pisz?e te? o poganach w dolinie krzemowej oraz o zainteresowaniu magi?, które zosta?o rozbudzone przez literatur? fantasy oraz gry RPG. Opisuje tak?e niektóre dzie?a sci fi, które zawiera?y motywy gnostyczne. Wspominany jest te? wielokrotnie internet, jako zrealizowanie marze? wielu mistyków o kolektywnym umy?le. G?ówn? tez? autora jest prze?wiadczenie, ?e nauka i rozwój technologiczny rozbudza oraz inspiruje wielu mistyków, z których niektórzy sami s? wspó?twórcami nowych technologii.

Ksi??ka jest bardzo chaotyczna. Autor w wielu miejscach skacze po w?tkach albo wk?ada swoje opinie na tematy lu?no zwi?zane z tematem tej ksi??ki. Dodatkowo bardzo razi nadu?ywanie s?owa paradygmat. Je?li kogo? interesuj? nowe motywy religijne we wspó?czesnym ?wiecie, to mog? mu poleci? te dzie?o.

Travis Todd says

I got to the end of this book like one of those staggering marathon runners who collapse just after they've made it past the finish line. So breathlessly in love with its subjects, and so full of labyrinthine and endless sentences. I now resemble one of those constricting snakes right after it's eaten some giant, unfortunate mammal. I'm just going to rest here for awhile until I can metabolize some of this. Peace!

Natalie says

Big words, annoyingly long sentences- I don't know what audience this was for but you'd have to be an academic to be able to get through this. I didn't make it through the introduction. Too atmospheric.

Roger Green says

With a breezy and classic pomo style, Davis adeptly glosses various frontiers of gnosticism and new media. An interesting collection of eclectic sources, Davis's work in the field of religious studies serves him well here.

Travis FFFFFFFF says

This book is the jam.

Davis doesn't really pose a single hypothesis so much as gather and articulate the historical relationship between mysticism and technology.

This is one of those books that introduces you to all the left-field thinkers you need to have read. And it offers a compelling mythology about the nature of this monkey man -- we've been using tools to make better tools for so long... what are we really building?

Andrea says

Drawing a connection between the human quest for transcendence and spiritual oneness through belief/religion and technology, Davis presents an incredible amount of theory, philosophy, history, and research from ancient times, when the latest technology was cave drawings, to the relative present. Written in 1998, the book's descriptions of online gaming, virtual reality, and the Internet is sometimes comical, but it's also a great reminder of just how fast technology develops when building on itself.

Davis covers a tremendous amount of territory within the "technoutopian" dreamscape realm, everything from alphabets to the mythology of avatars, mediums and Morse code, military communication and media manipulation, the Bible, the Torah, Far Eastern religious thought, postindustrial McLuhan-based media criticism, UFOlogy, Scientology, LSD, the Grateful Dead, the pagan online community, Christian evangelism via new technology, Haitian Voudou and "ghosts in the machine," viruses, hackers, Philip K. Dick, Huxley, Crowley, Eco, and Foucault. To name a few.

Davis's writing style falls in that super-heady realm of Terence McKenna, Daniel Pinchbeck, and R.U. Sirius, a sort of acid-laced mindwarp that sounds really out there at the same time it makes so much sense. It took me a few months to read and finish because I often had to put the book down after a few pages to digest the material. But it's worth the time and effort. Definitely recommended if you're interested in all that crazy stuff.

Brian says

In this 1998 book, Davis traces the reciprocal relationship between information media and apocalyptic aspirations both spiritual and secular, beginning with the handwritten codices of the early Christians, through the 19th-century 'internet' of telegraphy, up to the state of the World Wide Web and persisting dreams of networked virtual reality at the end of the 20th century. Along the way, we see that the messages perceived by those with eyes to see remain much the same, whether their medium is a Kabbalistic decoding of the Torah, extraterrestrial transmissions via shortwave radio, or just an optimistic vision of the ultimate conclusion to which computerized integration will bring us.

Davis comes across as overtly skeptical of the eschatologies he discusses, whether deist or transhumanist, and cautions us of the capacity for 'social media' (a phrase I don't believe actually appears in the text; this was five years before Facebook) to simply magnify rather than correct our own communal and individual

failings. Nevertheless, he concludes that such technologies now constitute an inextricable part of our civilization and intellectual ecology, and whatever path forward our species does take, it will be as part of a system that transcends categories of on- and off-line, the emergent properties of which will be increasingly unpredictable and often seemingly autonomous. This book is as much an artifact of the era in which it was written as it is a history of the human compulsion to seek transcendent meaning in technologies of communication, and is perhaps even more interesting for it.

Eugene Pustoshkin says

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Paul Samael says

I first read this shortly after it came out, but I have periodically been back to it and I think it's still as relevant as when it came out - which is no mean feat for a book that deals with a fast-moving area like technology. I think the reason it has stood the test of time so well has to do with its focus on our own attitudes to technology (as much as on the technology itself). We like to think of ourselves as having attained a level of sophistication that has taken us beyond the kind of primitive attitudes which Arthur C Clarke was probably thinking of when he suggested that any sufficiently advanced technology would be indistinguishable from magic. The key insight of Techgnosis is that some of those primitive views still exert a strong influence when it comes to our reactions to technology and in particular, our hopes about what it can do for us (particularly its ability to "transform" our world). That insight remains as important now as when the book was first written.

Kristen Aldebol-Hazle says

Techgnosis will appeal to readers with interests ranging from mythology to science to communications technology. Davis's wide-ranging book avoids seeming disorganized and random by showing readers the surprising connections between our modern relationships with technology and the myths, rituals, and beliefs that have floated around civilization since it was first recorded.

Though this is certainly an academic book, Davis avoids jargon and writes clearly in a way that can appeal to many readers. His research is well-documented, but unobtrusive. I found that Techgnosis touched on many of my own interests and not only opened my eyes to new research directions for my own work but also, on a larger scale, made me think about the dualism that underlies so much modern thought.

Techgnosis is both rich in details and in the big picture arguments, resulting in a book that will walk readers through specific points in history--ancient and modern--and will also leave readers thinking about how the book's big ideas affect their thinking about everyday life.

Rane says

One of my all time favorite books, though I do agree with some of the criticisms I have read - Erik Davis chooses to show examples that support his ideas on the links between spirituality and technology/media, but never really puts in any solid conclusions. Also, the language can be fairly dense. It's worth the effort though, and manages to get my mind rattling off a million ideas a minute, every time I read it.

Ibrahim says

Amazing. Read John Grey's Black Mass before this, and afterwards Robert Geraci's Apocalyptic AI Visions of Heaven in Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, and Virtual Reality, and the three volumes form a trilogy

Logophile says

Less satisfying than I'd hoped. Though Erik Davis makes the case that technology and spirituality are and have been inextricably linked throughout human history, he doesn't really offer a theory as to why this is so or take a position on whether this is a good or a bad thing. I would have preferred less of his supporting his argument and more analysis of it.

Gary says

A wide-ranging and open-minded examination of the subtle and not-so-subtle spicing and splicing effects that esoteric impulses have had on technology developments. Given the rapid pace of technology evolution, some of the content and observations are already a bit outdated (published in 1998), yet still thought-provoking and retrospectively relevant.

Maciek says

Gnosis is a form of religion or spiritual doctrine occurring through history since antiquity. It proclaims possibility of freeing oneself from prison - which is material world – and attaining enlightenment through mystic knowledge. This knowledge was hidden from humanity by evil Demiurge and his archons to isolate men from true God. This story was presented in apocryphal “The Secret Book of John” found in Nag Hammadi in which Jesus as a snake sneaks into Eden and persuade blinded Adam to pick fruit from the tree. This fruit contains knowledge allowing to free oneself from prison.

Intension of this book is to examine complicated links between this heresy and science and technology. As author notices, surprisingly often scientific and technologic breakdowns correlates with the rise of interest in various mystic philosophies and hermetic knowledge.

Among events of this type Davis lists e.g. invention of alphabet - which contains part of the world in ideal, unchangeable form - that would inspire Plato to create his Theory of Forms. Or alchemy which fascinated such great modern minds like Newton. Further we have discovery of electricity and invention of telegraph

which inspired emergence of spiritualism in 19th century. Likewise development of psychology inspired George Gurdjieff to perform an experiment on awaking of a mind. Inspired by this person L. Ron Hubbard announced that mind is only a computer and it's possible with certain knowledge to unlock its proper potential.

Examples like those are many in this book but reader need to be critical with accepting some of author's fantastical speculations. Nevertheless this book is interesting view on intriguing subject and is worth recommending.
