Deus Ex Machina? Witchcraft and the Techno-World

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Introduction

Sociologist Bryan R. Wilson once alleged that post-modern technology and secularisation are the allied forces of rationality and disenchantment that pose an immense threat to traditional religion.[1] However, the flexibility of pastiche Neopagan belief systems like 'Witchcraft' have creativity, fantasy, and innovation at their core, allowing practitioners of Witchcraft to respond in a unique way to the post-modern age by integrating technology into their perception of the sacred. The phrase *Deus ex Machina*, the God out of the Machine, has gained a multiplicity of meanings in this context. For progressive Witches, the machine can both possess its own numen and act as a conduit for the spirit of the deities. It can also assist the practitioner in becoming one with the divine by enabling a transcendent and enlightening spiritual experience. Finally, in the theatrical sense, it could be argued that the concept of a magical machine is in fact the contrived dénouement that saves the seemingly despondent situation of a so-called 'nature religion' like Witchcraft in the techno-centric age. This paper explores the ways two movements within Witchcraft, 'Technopaganism' and 'Technomysticism', have incorporated man-made inventions into their spiritual practice. A study of how this is related to the worldview, operation of magic, social aspect and development of self within Witchcraft, uncovers some of the issues of longevity and profundity that this religion will face in the future.

Witchcraft as a Religion

The categorical heading 'Neopagan' functions as an umbrella that covers numerous reconstructed, revived, or invented religious movements, that have taken inspiration from indigenous, archaic, and esoteric traditions. Many Neopagan strains are holistic, nature-based, and advocate magical conviction, but others deviate from this model. More often than not, Neopagan religions are based on individualism, personal experience and an acceptance of the

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[1] Bryan R. Wilson, 'Aspects of Secularization in the West', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1976), pp. 259-276; Also taken up by sociologist Brenda Brasher in Brenda Brasher, *Give Me that Online Religion* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

multiplicity of truth. Douglas E. Cowan calls this phenomena "open-source" religion, which paradoxically includes appropriation and innovation, eclecticism and traditionalism, and a culture of both solitude and community.[2] Hence, the classification 'Neopagan' is so widely inclusive that it is often rendered undescriptive.

The Neopagan practice of Witchcraft, the focus of this paper, is commonly conflated with the Wiccan faith, although they are not one and the same. In the 1950s, Gerald Gardner, once a member of a Masonic Lodge, the Ordo Templi Orientis, and a practising Rosicrucian, began the first Wiccan coven. Gardner's experiences with ceremonial magic in these mystery groups heavily influenced his understanding of ethereal forces, energy-working, and ritual design. However, his construction of Wicca as the 'Old Religion' pays homage to revisionist historian Margaret Murray, who famously propounded the theory that contemporary Witchcraft has survived from the times of ancient fertility cults.[3] Gardnerian Wicca has established practices, a mythology, a code of ethics called the Rede, and an exclusive process of initiation. Some British Traditional Wiccan groups like Alexandrian Wicca have upheld a regimented model, while other branches like Seax, Dianic, Faerie, and Eclectic Wicca have a more free-form approach. In short, to be a Wiccan can mean so many things that it can also mean nothing specific at all. Chris Klassen has helpfully clarified the distinction between the Wiccan worldview and that of Witchcraft, by referring to the practices and beliefs of the latter as "Witchen", a neologism that will be adopted here.[4]

For an acephalous, antinomian, and non-dogmatic group, Witchcraft is certainly not lacking in published texts, and its formidable online presence has promoted a culture of discussion, debate, and information sharing amongst practitioners. The fantasy sagas of J. R. R. Tolkein and Terry Pratchett have provided a rich history of fantastical empires and panoply of whimsical beings that have seeped into Neopagan folklore.[5] Science-fiction cult classics such as William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer,* Gene Rodenberry's *Star Trek,* the film *eXistenZ* by David Cronenberg, and the Wachowski brother's *The Matrix,* have impacted upon both the magical and the extropian signification of virtual

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[2] Douglas E. Cowan, *Cyberhenge: Modern Pagans on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 28-34.

[3] Margaret Murray, *The God of the Witches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[4] Chris Klassen, 'The Goddess and/as the Cyborg: Nature and Technology in Feminist Witchcraft', *The Pomegranate,* vol. 7, no. 2 (2005), p. 173.

[5] Graham Harvey, 'Fantasy in the Study of Religions: Paganism as Observed and Enhanced by Terry Pratchett', *Diskus* vol. 6 (2000), at http://web.uni-marburg.de/religionswissenschaft/journal/diskus/harvey_2.html. Accessed 20/12/09.

worlds, teleportation, and mainframe consciousness.[6] Witchcraft is in a viable position to adopt the language, ideas, and spiritual nuances of these techno-myths, as the epistemological bricolage that comprises the Witchen ethos is by no means constant or definitive, but fluid and necessarily mutable.

This paper predominantly examines what Douglas Ezzy calls "Witchcraft as a broad social movement" or "popular Witchcraft",[7] using the opinions espoused by authors and professed practitioners of the craft. The more esoteric principles of Witchcraft that are discussed in the latter half conform more to the Chaos Magic paradigm as established in the 1980s by Peter J. Carroll, perhaps best summed up in the Chaotic adage "nothing is true, everything is permitted!"[8]

Nature and the Divine

Witchcraft is often categorised as a "nature religion", a phrase with several connotations. The worship of "nature" can be achieved in myriad ways, such as a belief in animism, the Mother Earth Goddess, *genii loci,* faeries, or simply being 'green'. Generally, the Witchen worldview is monistic, regarding the divine as immanent and all things as holy.[9] Nature and the divine are woven together in the symbol of the pentagram, each of its five points representing the elements air, fire, water, and earth, with the addition of spirit at the apex of the star shape.[10] The solar, lunar, and seasonal cycles dictate the sabbats and esbats of the pagan calendar. While Eco-Feminist Witchcraft venerates the Mother Earth Goddess, Gardnerian Wicca heavily emphasises the importance of complementary masculine and feminine roles to reflect the fertility of nature.[11] The themes of syzygy and fecundity are also present in the magical principle of

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[6] Maria Beatrice Bittarello, 'Shifting Realities? Changing Concepts of Religion and the Body in Popular Culture and Neopaganism', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2008), pp. 215-232; Lynne Hume and Kathleen McPhillips (eds), *Popular Spiritualities: The Politics of Contemporary Enchantment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

[7] Douglas Ezzy, 'Popular Witchcraft and Environmentalism', *The Pomegranate,* vol. 8, no. 1 (2006), p. 31.

[8] Phil Hine, *Oven Ready Chaos* (PhilHine.org.uk, 1997), at http://www.philhine.org.uk/writings/pdfs/orchaos.pdf. Accessed 24/12/09, p. 4.

[9] Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989), pp. 17 *et passim*; Scott Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* (St. Paul MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004), p. xv.

[10] Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide*, p. 46; Doreen Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft* (Custer WA: Phoenix Publishing, 1989), p. 88.

[11] Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, cf. Gerald B. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (New York: Citadel Press, 2004), pp. 114-116.

polarity, common ceremonial tools like the phallic symbolism of the athame and the yonic quality of the chalice, and ritualistic sex.[12]

Though environmental awareness is fundamental in many traditions, Witchcraft is also undeniably anthropocentric, and focuses on personal development.[13] "Thou art God" (or "Goddess") is a salutation from Robert A. Heinlein's 1961 science-fiction novel *Stranger in a Strange Land,* taken up by some Witches to acknowledge their selves as an incarnation of divinity.[14] The deities are commonly comprehended in dual form as the Lord and Lady, the primordial creators with multifaceted personalities. They can be invoked through ancient archetypes, for example, the Maiden might be called Eostre, the Lover Aphrodite, and the Mother Isis, or the Soldier, Mithras and Father as Cernunnos. Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone summarise the theogony of "progressive Witchcraft", saying, "although we refer to God and Goddess in a duotheistic fashion, we are by nature polytheistic, believing that the divine has many faces manifested as individual deities, be they ancestral, of nature, or of human skill".[15] The all-encompassing character of pantheism and a desire for balance has enabled 'digital animism'[16] to become a valid Witchen belief. In celebrating man-made creations as numinous, the gap separating the sacred and the profane is bridged.

In his time, Gerald Gardner professed a fear that modern science, television, and cinema were displacing his romantic brand of spirituality and leading to its extinction.[17] In succeeding decades, other Witches have perceived mass information technology as eroding a primal connection of humanity to the natural environment. The Feraferia movement, founded in California in the 1960s by Frederick Adams and Svetlana Butyrin, banned technology from their pagan practice.[18] Adams prophesised that if the "urban-hierarchical-militaristic culmination" continued to destroy the biosphere, the

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[12] Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, p. 115; Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 60; Janet Farrar and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches Bible Compleat* (New York: Magickal Childe, 1995), pp. 32-33.

[13] Ezzy, 'Popular Witchcraft and Environmentalism', pp. 29-53.

[14] Robert A. Heinlein, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (New York: Putnam Publishing, 1961), pp. 133-140. Also, A.J. Drew and Patricia Telesco, *God/Goddess: Exploring and Celebrating the Two Sides of the Wiccan Deity* (Franklin Lakes NJ: New Page Books, 2004); Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance,* p. 26.

[15] Gavin Bone and Janet Farrar, *Progressive Witchcraft: Spirituality, Mysteries, and Training in Modern Wicca* (Franklin Lakes NJ: New Page Books, 2004), p. 57.

[16] Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (New York: Harmony Books, 1998).

[17] Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, p. 129.

[18] Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), pp. 252-263.

Goddess would react with apocalyptic vengeance. In a less dramatic but comparable protest, Doreen Valiente observed in 1964 that modern life had a tendency to cut off people from their kinship with nature and consequently, "their own individuality is processed away, and they begin to feel as if they are just another cog in a huge, senseless machine".[19] In 1997, traditionalist Reverend Andrew Siliar wrote disapprovingly of the encroaching computer revolution in the Church of All Worlds journal *Green Egg*:

> Now we have this wonderful new technology, along with computer graphics. We can link up with other people on-line, [sic] and now we can be techno-witches, and cyber wizards…I'm sorry, but that doesn't sound like much of a Nature Religion to me anymore… I need no on-line link to let me feel the power of the Goddess, I just touch the Earth and connect.[20]

Despite a considerable historical connection, magic and science have often been posed in opposition to one another. However, the verisimilitude of nature devotion in contemporary Witchcraft has been criticised by both Neopagans and scholars. With a foot in both of these camps, Richard Roberts posits that a true nature religion is an anachronism, questioning the purity of an "over populated, environmentally degraded world".[21] Ezzy convincingly argues that consumer capitalism and the egocentric trend of the spiritual marketplace have turned the focus in Witchcraft from ecological ethics to an almost selfish individualism.[22] But as Farrar and Bone have said, the gods do not inhabit only physical nature but are also manifest in "human skill". Hence technology is just another expression of the divine in daily life. Chas Clifton has made the pragmatic plea to Neopagans in a *Gnosis* article, asking them to reconcile their environmental ideology with the reality of the technological society of today. He says, to be truly *paganus* is to know your surroundings, and to understand how life's offerings, be they natural or scientific, are interlinked.[23] This latter viewpoint seems to be evidenced by the modernised practices of many Witches today.[24]

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[19] Valiente quoted in Vivianne Crowley, 'Wicca as Nature Religion', in *Nature Religion Today*, ed. Joanne Pearson, Richard Roberts and Geoffrey Samuel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 175.

[20] Quoted in Neville Drury, 'Magic and Cyberspace: Fusing Technology and Magical Consciousness in the Modern World', *Esoterica,* vol. IV (2002), 100.

[21] Richard Roberts, 'The Chthonic Imperative', in *Nature Religion Today*, ed. Joanne Pearson, Richard Roberts and Geoffrey Samuel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 70.

[22] Ezzy, 'Popular Witchcraft and Environmentalism', pp. 29-50.

[23] Chas Clifton, 'Nature Religion for Real', *Gnosis*, vol. 48 (1998), pp. 19-20.

[24] Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, pp. 390-395.

The Science of Magic

Practising the craft involves some belief in the existence and efficacy of magic, the process that converts wishes into realities, be it self-serving spells or communication with higher powers. In following with a monistic perception of the world, magic is assumed to be natural rather than supernatural.[25] For Aleister Crowley, "magick" was "the art and science of causing change to occur in conformity with will".[26] Member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn S. L. MacGregor Mathers explained it as "the science of the control of the secret forces of nature".[27] These predecessors of modern Witchcraft perceived the dynamics of magic to be a type of emanant energy that had a cause and effect akin to other fundamental laws of physics. Unlike other fields of force, magic may not be recognised by science, but is intuitively felt by occultists and apparent in the results of a spell.[28] To engage with the craft, a Witch enters a state of altered consciousness, brought on by a ritual, meditation, or trance-like situation. In this condition the orgone that radiates from the body merges with chthonic and cosmic numen, impelling their thought-form to become transeunt and take effect. The logistics of this process are not exact. In Isaac Bonewits' words, humans operate like walking radio stations that "broadcast" and "receive wavelengths" of this magical energy.[29] Various principles like the law of return, attraction, polarity, and sympathy, are upheld by a range of traditions and individuals. Efforts have been made to draw parallels between the science of magic and that of physics. Similar to the way electricity travels through cables and wireless networks, the magic of Witchcraft exists on the electromagnetic spectrum and is conveyed through the invisible etheric and astral planes. The uncertainty principle has invited much comment from Neopagans who believe in a correlation between quantum mechanics, multiverses and revelatory possibilities of consciousness.[30] In contrast, for some it does not matter how the craft works, only that it does, the

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[25] Amber K, *True Magick: A Beginner's Guide*, (Woodbury MN: Llewellyn Worldwide, 2006), p. 3. See also, Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, p. 22.

[26] Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (New York: Castle Books, 1929).

[27] Quoted in K, *True Magick*, p. 3.

[28] Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, pp. 21-4; Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, p. 19; K, *True Magick*, p. 33; Valiente, *The Rebirth of Witchcraft*, p. 94.

[29] Isaac Bonewits, *Real Magic* (York Beach ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc, 1989), *passim*.

[30] Isaac and Phaedra Bonewits, *Real Energy* (Franklin Lakes NJ: New Page, 2007), pp. 27-35; 'Articles and Submissions', *Magick, Technomancy and Witchcraft*, at http://www.thecyberwarlock.com/articles.html#Science,%20or%20Art. Accessed 24/12/09; 'Daven', *Daven's Journal* (2009), at http://davensjournal.com. Accessed 24/12/09; Steve Collins, 'Technology and Magick', *Scan: Journal of Media Arts and Culture*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2004).

mystery being part of the allure.[31] The well-known phrase of Arthur C. Clark "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" aptly functions as a proverb for this epistemology.[32]

Ritual: As Above So below

Although some believe that subliminal magical interaction is constant, the craft, even for a full-time witch does not have to be a daily activity, it may only transpire on special dates. To formally cast a spell, send a prayer, or perform a rite, it is common to do a circle casting, alone or in the company of a coven. This process designates a *temenos,* creating a boundary of separation, protection, and consecration. This sacred space acts as a liminal threshold between the material and the metaphysical worlds, providing a momentary glimpse "beyond the veil".[33] The Witch uses appropriate ceremonial tools that have been charged through personalisation and sympathetic association with the properties of gemstones, herbs, oils or other elemental objects, and the grace of the God and/or Goddess. These accoutrements and affiliations serve to aid the Witch in visualising and specifying the purpose of their spell, as Lynne Hume puts it, "ritual paraphernalia are merely outward and visible symbols of an inward and psychological process".[34]

Nature is invoked, perhaps by calling the cardinal points, the elements, the Watchtowers, and the deities, using suitable Pagan epithets. In order to induce external changes, the essence of the practitioner is summoned to coalesce with the spirit of the divine, building a channel through which their intentions can travel and be reified. At the end of the ritual, the circle must be closed to dismiss the help and signify the completion of the spell.[35] Traditionally, this procedure is enacted physically, however it is the symbolism of the actions, words and corporeity that gives the ritual its power and meaning. Hume theorises this ceremony as a microcosmic representation of the

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[31] Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner,* p. 25; Patricia Telesco and Sirona Knight, *The Cyber Spellbook: Magick in the Virtual World* (Franklin Lakes NJ: New Page Books, 2002), p. 100; Cowan, *Cyberhenge*, p. 73.

[32] Arthur C. Clark, *Profiles of the Future* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 21.

[33] Lynne Hume, 'Sacred Space: Outer Expressions of Inner Worlds in Modern Wicca', *Journal of Contemporary Religion,* vol. 13, no. 3 (1998), p. 315. See also, Gardner, *Witchcraft Today,* pp. 24-26; Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance,* p. 154; Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, pp. 47-65.

[34] Hume, 'Creating Sacred Space', p. 313.

[35] Gardner, *Witchcraft Today,* pp. 24-26; Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, pp. 47-65; Hume, 'Creating Sacred Space', pp. 314-315; Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance,* pp. 240-241.

macrocosm, following the tenet "as above, so below".[36] The inherently innovative character of a constructed religion like Witchcraft allows the metropolitan Witch to reflect his or her macrocosm by imbuing the cityscape and its mechanical components with spiritual vitality.

Technopaganism

> So if you choose to venerate Snap (the god of microwaved foods), Click (the computer mouse goddess), Popup (the Goddess of toasters and toaster ovens), Ram and Rom (the computer twin gods), Bit and Byte (the computer twin goddesses) or Wireless (the spirit of cellphones), go for it![37]

Erik Davis, in his indispensably useful work on magic and information technology, has introduced the moniker "Technopagan" into common usage.[38] While this term may at first glance appear to be an oxymoron, magic, and science have an extensive history of influence over one another. Ancient societies tended to regard innovation as divine inspiration, contributing discoveries such as that of the written script to their specialised Gods, be it Thoth, Enlil or Odin. Since the industrial era, many people have tried to give technology a spiritual application, from radiomancy, to taking photographs of ectoplasm, to monitoring Thetans with an E-meter. For the Witch, tools that have an affinity with nature have traditionally been employed in spell-working. However, in the opening years of the new millennium a multitude of authors popularised the notion of 'urban paganism' by engaging aspects of the concrete jungle with the magical discourse of Witchcraft.[39] By embracing their modern surrounds, the Technopagan can update the 'Old Religion', and accept the abundance and convenience of technological inventions as both metaphors and devices for craft work.

A survey of American Neopagans conducted by Margot Adler in 1985 showed that a sizeable percentage had jobs in the information technology industry. Suggested explanations for this connection were: that computers are

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[36] Hume, 'Creating Sacred Space', p. 316.

[37] Telesco and Knight, *The Cyber Spellbook*, p. 48.

[38] Erik Davis, 'Technopagans: May the Astral Plane be Reborn in Cyberspace', *Wired*, vol. 3.07, (July, 1995), at http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/3.07/technopagans.html. Accessed 24/12/09.

[39] Raven Kaldera and Tannin Schwartzstein, *The Urban Primitive: Paganism in the Concrete Jungle* (St. Paul MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2002); Christopher Penczak, *City Magick: Urban rituals, Spells and Shamanism* (York Beach ME: Weiser Books, 2001); Patricia Telesco and Sirona Knight, *The Wiccan Web: Surfing the Magic on the Internet* (New York: Citadel Press, 2001); Telesco and Knight, *The Cyber Spellbook*.

analogous to magic and can be used for magical purposes; Paganism is a practical religion, utilising available tools; communication is greatly increased through internet services and allows Pagans to share information; digital interaction provides a balance for people who involve themselves heavily in nature and vice-versa; and "oddball people" or "unencultured, solitary, creative thinkers" are attracted to both Paganism and computers.[40] There are two detectable themes in these findings that correlate with the purpose of this paper. The first is the utilitarian aspect of using mechanical objects for magic and for communication, the practices associated by Technopaganism. The second is a more complex and gnostic sentiment that involves expression and transformation of the self through digital interaction, which will be called Technomysticism. The results of an informal poll posted on 'MysticWicks Online Pagan Community and Spiritual Sanctuary' in 2002 by 'Mithrea', confirms a distinction between those who find search engines helpful to learn about Witchcraft, and those who are proficiently computer literate and habitually incorporate the network into magical practice.[41] Popular Witchcraft deals primarily with the first theme, substituting local technologies for craft tools in both simple and complicated ways, and using the internet for socio-spiritual purposes.

Practical Paganism and Household Magic
Popular Neopagan authors like Raven Kaldera, Tannin Schwartzstein and Christopher Penczak have encouraged city-dwellers to form a psychic bond with telegraph poles, cars, subway systems, radios, televisions, and other electrical and mechanical objects, pushing for an expansion of the notion of holism and an acknowledgement of our techno-centric reality.[42] It is argued that the *anima mundi* need not be sought only in an idyllic setting because a plethora of new tools for transmitting and connecting with the deities are available within your very own home. Messages from the godhead, Penczak tells us, are audible in the cacophony of traffic, static of the television, and the whirring of the fax machine, which are all handy alternatives to traditional shamanic drumbeats.[43] In 1954 Gerald Gardner lamented the shortage of occult

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[40] Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, pp. 413-5.

[41] 'Mithrea', 'Technopaganism [Archive]', *MysticWicks Online Pagan Community and Spiritual Sanctuary Forums* (2000-2009), at http://mysticwicks.com/archive/index.php/t-20525.html. Accessed 24/12/09.

[42] Kaldera and Schwartzstein, *The Urban Primitive: Paganism in the Concrete Jungle*; Penczak, *City Magick: Urban Rituals, Spells and Shamanism*.

[43] Penczak, *City Magick: Urban Rituals, Spells and Shamanism*, p. 69.

shops that forced Witches to make their own clandestine tools,[44] but 'techno-witches' like Patricia Telesco and Sirona Knight promote the wide range of domestic appliances such as mobile phones and microwaves that can act as magical mediums. In the same vein, Samantha Stevens discusses how the toaster can be central to a love spell:

> The toaster is also a Techno-Witch's best friend. With a knife lightly carve a symbol representing what you would like to happen into a slice of bread or a frozen waffle – a heart for love or the amount of money you need to receive The toasting represents the cosmos "warming up to the idea". All cooking practices are a form of magic. When the waffle or toast is ready, slather it with butter, to smooth your way and honey to make sure your wishes "stick" to you. Jam, particularly strawberry-rhubarb, is good for a love wish. Then eat it to symbolize bringing the magic into your life.[45]

She goes on to ascribe magical properties to the television, radio, vacuum cleaner, garbage disposal, blender, and microwave. Patricia Telesco and Sirona Knight resourcefully expand the classical tools of Witchcraft, adding that objects like calculators can represent the elements of earth and fire, and symbolise combining and patterns, while telephones stand for air and communication.[46] Telesco and Knight's books about web-witching detail how today's Witch can expand her skills in an online and computer-generated capacity. Although these guides contain, unintentionally, a slightly facetious tone, they are designed as an introduction to the information superhighway for the less than tech-savvy Neopagan audience.

Computers, the Electronic Temples

Telesco and Knight argue that with some training, thought forms can be broadcast through modems, wires, and electromagnetic fields to take effect. This particular type of magic has been designated new archetypes, but the authors caution that when one venerates "Ram and Rom (the computer twin gods), Bit and Byte (the computer twin goddesses)… just remember that such interactions won't be quite the same as traditional deities because they're younger and still gaining power".[47] Rev. Galina Krasskova warns that the spirits that inhabit the machine, the *vaettir,* are sensitive to anger, and so she

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[44] Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, p. 150.

[45] Samantha Stevens, 'The Techno-Witch and Magickal Household Appliances – Home Improvement', *Families Online Magazine* (2005-2009), at
http://www.familiesonlinemagazine.com/home-improvement/17588.php. Accessed 24/12/09.

[46] Telesco and Knight, *The Wiccan Web,* pp. 30-31.

[47] Telesco and Knight, *Cyber Spellbook*, p. 48.

recommends not abusing your workstation and shutting down the system while doing spell-work so the conjured energy does not cause it to overload and crash.[48] Here, the desk can become an altar to these techno-gods, with the computer as an electronic temple.[49] When performing magic with the computer as a medium or as the recipient, the sensual qualities of the ritual can take form with materials like oils and candles, or in a non-physical method such as listening to CDs, customising screen savers, and experimenting with fonts and graphics.[50]

Charms can be written to protect software from viruses, virtual wards or talismans put up to defend websites from unwanted intruders, divination performed through randomised search engine entries, and cyber-covens can meet and perform rituals online.[51] For Lisa McSherry, a.k.a. 'Lady Ma'at' of the Jaguar Moon cybercoven, the internet is a portal to metaphysical planes of existence:

> Cyberspace is a technological doorway to the astral plane. The entrance cannot be found in a piece of computer hardware or in a software program that sits unused on your desk. Cyberspace is what happens when you join the soft- and hard- ware together and then activate it. By the time our conscious minds view the products created by cyberspace, the process itself is already complete, and we literally stand in a place between the worlds, one with heightened potential to be as sacred as any circle cast on the ground.[52]

The *praxis* and the *logos* of rites can be done via webcam, microphone, in a chat group, typed out, using hypertext, or even netspeak and emoticons:

BB!	–	Blessed Be!
HP	–	High Priest
HPS	–	High Priestess
SMB!	–	So Mote it Be[53]
{ }	–	Air
^^^	–	Earth

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[48] Galina Krasskova, 'Care and Feeding of Your (magical) Computer, *newWitch*, no. 3 (2003), pp. 15-16.

[49] Telesco and Knight, *Wiccan Web*, pp. 34-35, pp. 65-70.

[50] Telesco and Knight, *The Wiccan Web,* pp. 38-51.

[51] Telesco and Knight, *The Wiccan Web,* pp. 51-89; Lisa McSherry, 'What is a Cyber Coven?', *JaguarMoon Coven* (2000-2008), at http://www.jaguarmoon.org/whatis.php. Accessed 24/12/09; 'Daven', 'Affecting people on the Internet', *Daven's Journal*; Samantha Stevens, 'Techno Witch II - Magick With Your PC', *EzineArticles.com* (12 March, 2005), at http://ezinearticles.com/?Techno-Witch-II---Magick-With-Your-PC&id=20541. Accessed 24/12/09.

[52] McSherry, 'What is a Cyber Coven?'

[53] Telesco and Knight, *The Wiccan Web*, pp. 125-126.

( )	–	Fire
'"	–	Water
\	–	God
*	–	Goddess (mother aspect)
:-)\@*(-:	–	Merging with the God/Goddess
*< ----	–	Activating your athame
~~><	–	Banishing negativity
-=+	–	Ritual (joining energies)[54]

In the transcript of an online Ostara rite from 1997 performed by members of 'The Grove', participants were advised by the leader Ghost to envisage their tools, an egg, a candle, and a marker, if they did not have them present. He then led them with another member Elspeth through an imaginative journey similar to guided meditation:

> .Ghost> Gather then, if you will... with glad hearts and welcoming spirits... Celebrate and open yourself to Spring.
> .Ghost> Now is the time... Journey with me, if you would, to a sheltered glade deep in the Grove... shrouded now in night's dark cloak…
> .Ghost> You are centered within yourself... grounded, yet connected as well.
> .Ghost> Type <> when ready to continue our journey.

Stephen O'Leary's study of online rituals led him to conclude that actual performance and real space are unnecessary, the glyphic state of a tool is enough to ensure its efficacy. The signifier and signified, he says, are fused in the textual simulation of off-line sensory experiences.[55] Electronic magic, particularly in a computer or online setting, is an exercise in creativity and visualisation if nothing else. The musings of Witches like Stevens, Telesco, Knight, and their kin demonstrate the constructive role of playfulness when inventing new ways to practise the craft.

Despite the theoretical validity of online rituals, real examples are notoriously difficult to find.[56] Most that have been archived are over ten years old, and others have been lost when domain registrations expire and pages become defunct. Another explanation may be that regardless of the assertion that it is the symbolism of the ceremony rather than its corporeality that matters, a gathering in the cybersphere does not create the same ambience as one in real life, and they are no where near as popular. The lack of romantic

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[54] Telesco and Knight, *The Wiccan Web*, pp. 126-127.

[55] Stephen D. O'Leary, 'Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 64, no. 4 (1996), p. 799.

[56] Cowan, *Cyberhenge*, pp. 119-120.

atmosphere in online interaction is parodied in this script of an initiation rite written by Raven Gilmartin:

> HP>> NORTH!!!
> NORTH>> Sorry, I had to reboot.
> HP>> Ok, where were we?
> HPS>> The initiate has to scourge me. I am going to kneel down here now, and imagine that he is plying the scourge
> INITIATE>> Ok, I am imagining that I am scourging the High Priestess
> ~~(2 minute pause)~~
> INITIATE>> I am done
> HP>> Priestess?
> ~~(1 minute pause)~
> HPS>> I need to go right now
> HP>> Why? We are not finished here
> HPS>> I banged my head on the desk when I got up-- hard-- I am bleeding all over my computer. I need to go to the ER for stitches
> **HPS has left the chatroom**
> HP>> OK, we'll make this a healing circle instead
> INITIATE>> I have to go too, my mom is in the hallway screaming and wants to know what I am doing
> **INITIATE has left the chatroom**
> HP>> OK, everyone go light candles and we'll try to do this again tomorrow night
> **Chatroom closed**
> Logging off 2-15-01 01:32:41 am EST[57]

The Neopagan community has often responded to their enduring cyber reality with humour. One meme that has been floating around the internet since the 1990s called 'You may be a Technopagan if…' jokes about keeping a Disk (rather than a Book) of Shadows with encrypted backups, having battery-operated wands, and using binary code or C++ as an arcane script.[58] Though these satires are often inoffensive, they hint at an undercurrent of disapproval of Technopaganism. For example, reviewers of Telesco and Knight's work have called it fluffy, simplistic, tongue-in-cheek, antiquated and ridiculous, with one commenter pointing out that when "trying to update 'Charms, Amulets, Talismans, and Fetishes' they mention AAA batteries. Well, a techno

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[57] Raven Gilmartin, 'On-Line Coven Initiation Ritual Log', *Real Magick* (2001), at http://realmagick.com/articles/60/2160.html. Accessed 24/12/09.
[58] See the thread, 'Definition of a Techno-Pagan', *In The Mist, The Wicca, Witchcraft and Paganism Community Forum* (2000), at http://www.inthemist.org/forum/viewtopic.php?TopicID=2957&page=0. Accessed 24/12/09.

savvy environmentally concerned geek would use rechargables".[59] In spite of criticism, a relationship between Witchcraft and the web has flourished because this marriage is considered convenient and forward thinking. As Adler's survey noted, many Witches look to technology for pragmatic as well as spiritual tasks, to supply them with increased access to information and to like-minded people who can discuss and share their ideas.[60]

Cyber Community: Reach Out and Touch Faith

From its infancy, Usenet, the precursor to the world wide web, was colonised by the Neopagan community before any other religious group could upload their doctrines.[61] The web browser has become an invaluable source for those seeking information on witchcraft, its history, tools, literature, spells, or fellow occultists. In many countries today Witchcraft is marginalised and continues to be persecuted as an evil or illegitimate spirituality, resulting in isolated or solitary practitioners. A sense of solidarity and acceptance can be facilitated through Neopagan forums, chatrooms, and online communities, forming a support net for crypto-Witches who wish to 'come out of the broom closet'. 'The Witches' Voice', currently attesting 101,444 active accounts, is the largest Neopagan website, offering essays, festival dates, local gatherings, news, spells, book lists, and thousands of links to other relevant pages.[62] YouTube hosts educational videos that teach the viewer how to set up a ritual, cast a circle, and send a spell.[63] Many of these listings appear to have a social or pedagogical purpose, but the ephemeral, fragmented and uncertified condition of the web generates issues of legitimacy and authority. As a syncretic religion, Witchcraft fuses ancient tradition with the latest ideals and methods, carving a path that draws many converts and spectators, both respectful and critical. In cyberspace, the value and validity of information is greatly suspect because it is mostly unmonitored, and can be constantly edited,

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[59] See 'Customer Reviews: The Cyber Spellbook: Magick in the Virtual World', *Amazon.com* (2002-2009), at http://www.amazon.com/Cyber-Spellbook-Magick-Virtual-World/product-reviews/1564145824/ref=cm_cr_dp_all_summary?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending. Accessed 24/12/09.

[60] Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon,* pp. 465-466.

[61] Chris Klassen, 'Cybercoven: Being a Witch Online', *Studies in Religion,* vol. 31, no. 1 (2002), p. 53; Drury, 'Magic and Cyberspace', 99; Davis, *Techgnosis*, p. 184.

[62] The Witches Voice, 'Homepage', *The Witches' Voice* (1997-2008), at http://www.witchvox.com/. Accessed 24/12/09.

[63] ExpertVillage, 'Witchcraft for Beginners: How to Setup a Spell in Witchcraft', *YouTube.com* (22 February, 2008), at http://youtube.com/watch?v=ZsaAFVQIgAk&feature=related. Accessed 24/12/09.

memetically reproduced, misappropriated, plagiarised, or sabotaged. Cowan aptly notes that while the internet expands the pool of available resources, contraction takes place when those resources are merely replicating the same old material, circumscribing the influx of the new.[64]

Ever-increasing exposure on the internet has introduced Witchcraft into the homes of many, but it is subsequently vulnerable to commodification and corruption. Although some branches do have Elders, Masters, Teachers and initiation rites, many Witches believe in self-initiation and personalising their practice. The palimpsest ethos of Witchcraft makes it a religion that is radically dependent on the opinions and feelings of the individual, and yet it is made incoherent and destabilised by this same feature. This unsanctioned definition of authority implies that anyone can declare themself an expert in an occult field. Posting on 'Wiccan Together', Juliaki, a traditional Wiccan from the United States, spoke out against self-proclaimed yet "ignorant" Pagans and "snake-oil salespeople" who misrepresent the complexities of the craft:

> In order to become a school teacher in most states, you need to have a Master's degree in education. At a MINIMUM, that means you have been through 8 years of college. Thus, I don't think it is unreasonable to strongly suggest that if you are teaching the craft, you should have at least 8 years of training under your belt. Yet, I constantly see individuals with less than a year suddenly become "teachers" and start their own "covens". And people wonder why the craft is dysfunctional?[65]

Magic for profit is visible in the publication of disingenuous, populist and 'fluffbunny' guides to Wicca such as those written by Fiona Horne, in the copious ads for psychic hot-lines found in the back pages of women's magazines, and the abundance of 'Magic schools' advertised online. The web provides the instant convenience of online shopping and hosts countless numbers of stores with a range of ritual, aesthetic, and miscellaneous paraphernalia for sale.[66] Sites like 'WitchcraftSpellsNow.com' offer "all your

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[64] Cowan, *Cyberhenge*, p. 36.

[65] HeatherAurelia, 'My Thoughts: The Current State of Our Community', *Wicca Online Community For Pagans and Wiccans* (2009), at http://www.wiccantogether.com/forum/topics/my-thoughts-the-current-state?id=1070680%3ATopic%3A986875&page=2#comments. Accessed 25 June, 2009, now seems to have been removed. A similar complaint is launched by 'Daven' on his website; 'Daven', 'Standard Fluffy Statements', *Daven's Journal* (2009), at http://davensjournal.com/standard-fluffy-statements. Accessed 24/12/09.

[66] For example, Witchy Womyn, 'CyberMoon Emporium WitchCraft Supplies Charmed Shoppe' (2001), at http://witchcraft-supplies.com/. Accessed 24/12/09.

love spell, wiccan witchcraft and other spellcasting needs" for $US 30-90.[67] However, the disclaimer in the fine print on this page makes one question the veracity of this proposal:

> Psychic readings and spells are for entertainment purposes only; and you must be at least 18 years old to make this purchase. The spell you purchase can not be a substitute for professional, legal, medical, financial or psychiatric advice/care. You agree that your spell is subject to your own interpretation.

This issue is also exacerbated by the theoretic anonymity and invisibility afforded by the internet, which is a two-sided coin. While anonymity grants any unscrupulous or untrained person free reign to pose as a connoisseur of the craft, at the same time the unrestrained notion of cyber identity has benefits for the performative and personal aspects of the Witchen faith. This coincides with the gnostic desire to escape the flesh and form a trans-substantial union with the divine, the zenith of the Technomystical experience.

Technomysticism

> >What bandwith should it use? T1? Or does it need a full T3?
> That's up to how much of the entity you want to see.
> >Exactly how many megabytes is a soul?
> An infinite number, of course. Use an indicator of a couple of hundred.
> >Is a soul compatible with Windows98, or do I need to upgrade?
> Only demons use Windows, Angels, Humans, and Gods use Unix and MacOs.[68]
> 'Remy' and 'Marik', TIAMAT

The major project of the Technopagan is to substitute their tools, expand their and perception of nature, and reach out to the Witchen community by incorporating the electrical, mechanical, and digital into their craft. The 'Technomystic' goes further, aiming to enhance the experiential dimension by synthesising magic with hard- and software. Technomysticism has its roots in the counter-culture of California in the 1960s and 1970s that spawned the patron saints of cybernetics, Timothy Leary, Stewart Brand, Steve Jobs, and Bill Gates.[69] Leary, who at one point encouraged his followers to "turn on, tune in and drop out" on LSD, switched his allegiance in the 1990s, hailing the PC

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[67] Witchcraftspellsnow, 'Order Page', *WitchcraftSpellsNow.com* (2006-2007), at http://www.witchcraftspellsnow.com/order.htm. Accessed 24/12/09.

[68] Marik, 'Re: Chaos Magick', *TIAMAT* (9 December, 1999), at http://www.io.com/~shub/tiamat/mail/msg00047.html. Accessed 24/12/09.

[69] Davis, *Techgnosis*, pp. 192-201; Drury, 'Magic and Cyberspace', 98.

as the latest designer drug.[70] Stewart Brand, Merry Prankster and founder of the *Whole Earth Catalogue,* wrote an article for *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1972 describing the out-of-body experience of gamers projecting their selves through the cathode ray tube display screen to play the rudimentary program 'Spacewars'.[71] While the ecological, sexual, and political concerns of Witchcraft were being nurtured by the hippie movement and the rise of feminism, concurrently the psychedelic collapsed into the cyberdelic as the computer became a landmark in the quest of the psychonaut.[72] As Wiccan and IT expert Sara Reeder has reminisced, "Silicon Valley and the modern Wiccan revival literally took root and grew up alongside each other in the rich black clay surrounding San Francisco Bay".[73]

The dominant trend in first wave Neopagan thinking, as already discussed, was techno-phobic, rejecting the invasion of modern mechanics as synonymous with capitalism, sexism, and the destruction of the Earth. However, in 1979, the same year Starhawk's seminal text *The Spiral Dance* was released, *Time* magazine published its first articles on personal computers and intelligent gadgets. From the time period 1979-1988, William A. Stahl has determined that out of the 175 *Time* reports on computers, 36% discussed the topic using the descriptive language of religion and magic.[74] Steve Wozinak and Jobs were portrayed as charismatic leaders, hypnotists, wizards, and religious visionaries.[75] Software was the "Magic inside the Machine",[76] that offered "converts" the opportunity to "commune", "conjure" and learn the "secret arts" of software architecture.[77] At the centre of this zeitgeist was the budding eminence of "techgnosis",[78] Erik Davis' portmanteau that meets the secret and enlightening wisdom once granted by gods to the hierophants, to the accessibility of 'sufficiently advanced technology'.

The concept of cyberspace was portrayed with impressive prescience in Vernor Vinge's 1981 novella, *True Names*, and more influentially, William Gibson's 1984 work of speculative fiction, *Neuromancer.* By the next decade,

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[70] Drury, 'Magic and Cyberspace', p. 98.
[71] Stewart Brand, 'Spacewar: Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death Among the Computer Bums', *Rolling Stone* (7 December, 1972).
[72] Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy* (Berkeley: Ronin Publishing, 1998), p. 10.
[73] Drury, 'Magic and Cyberspace', p. 98.
[74] William A. Stahl, 'Venerating the Black Box: Magic in Media Discourse on Technology', *Science, Technology and Human Values*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1995), p. 235.
[75] Stahl, 'Venerating the Black Box', p. 251.
[76] Front cover of *Time*, vol. 123, no. 16 (16 April, 1984).
[77] Stahl, 'Venerating the Black Box', p. 235.
[78] In the title of his book, Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information.*

surfing the world wide web had become an habitual reality. The alternative spiritual milieu of the post-hippie period continued to perceive digital interaction as a metaphor for cognitive and metaphysical experience. As part of this mindset, denizens of the burgeoning 1990s rave scene promoted the tribal and supra-somatic power of drugs combined with electronic dance music, a philosophy encapsulated in the widely circulated 'Raver's Manifesto':

> Our emotional state of choice is Ecstasy. Our nourishment of choice is Love. Our addiction of choice is technology. Our religion of choice is music. Our currency of choice is knowledge. Our politics of choice is none. Our society of choice is utopian though we know it will never be… We were first drawn by the sound. From far away, the thunderous, muffled, echoing beat was comparable to a mother's heart soothing a child in her womb of concrete, steel, and electrical wiring… And somewhere around 35Hz we could feel the hand of God at our backs, pushing us forward, pushing us to push ourselves to strengthen our minds, our bodies, and our spirits.[79]

Writing in 1995, Erik Davis described the "loopy talk about computers and consciousness" emanating from the real life sprawl of San Francisco, saying "because the issues of interface design, network psychology, and virtual reality are so open-ended and novel, the people who hack this conceptual edge often sound as much like science fiction acidheads as they do sober programmers."[80] Within this nexus, Davis uncovered the initial Technopagan movement, the Dionysian nature worshippers who embraced the Apollonian artifice of logical machines.[81] These Witches *are* the foundation for the humorous meme 'You may be a Technopagan if…' because they are in fact utilising C++ and encryption in their magical practice. However, using the terminology of this paper it could be argued that Davis' subjects were in fact Technomystics, as they looked beyond the mere expediency of technology, and sought ways to surmount the body and transform the soul through digital experience.

Cyberspace as Noosphere

Telesco, Knight, Stevens, McSherry et al have described the value of the internet to magical practice, but popular Witchcraft as a movement has done little more than vaguely ruminate on how deep or shallow magic via technology is, instead revelling in and relying upon the mystery of it all. McSherry says:

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[79] Anon., 'A Raver's Manifesto', *Living Art Productions* (2006), at http://www.livingart.com/raving/articles/article11.htm. Accessed 24/12/09.
[80] Erik Davis, 'Technopagans: May the Astral Plane be Reborn in Cyberspace'.
[81] Davis, 'Technopagans: May the Astral Plane be Reborn in Cyberspace'.

> As humans [we] use our tools of technology and often have no idea
> how they work. For example how is it that your computer
> understands that a particular keystroke is equivalent to a specific
> symbol? For a cyberwitch, this lack of direct knowledge makes the
> process of writing a letter on the computer a potentially magickal
> experience. The logic of technology has become invisible – literally,
> occult.[82]

A far more intricate exploration is detectable in the discourse of
Technomystics, those self described "oddballs" that Adler encountered in her
survey, who have a sophisticated understanding of the internal mathematics
and logistics of computer networks. For these digital savants, implementing
software algorithms, designating sigils (magical and mathematical), and
participating in online RPGs can become the catalyst for a religious
experience. Expectedly, evidence for such existential sorcery is elusive, not
least because it is arcane in both the programming and the spiritual sense, but
because it is inherently a private venture. From the few available sources it is
noticeable that this practice is predominately the domain of Chaos magicians.[83]
Whereas McSherry and co. gravitate towards a Wiccan path, Chaotes derive
their system from Aleister Crowley's Thelemic magic, and the methods of
Austin Osman Spare and Peter J. Carroll, founder of the association Illuminates
of Thanateros and author of *Liber Null & Psychonaut.* In Carroll's texts the
process of metamorphosis or "transmutation of the mind" is the key to
discovering the "True Will".[84] For Chaoist philosophy to "hurl men to the
corners of the galaxy and into the very epicentre of their being",[85] as Carroll
believed it could, a channel defined by its transience is required:

> Only in extremes can the spirit discover itself. A fluid environment
> is required as a vessel for magical consciousness. Only a fluid
> environment can conform to beliefs about it and be subject to the
> subtle magical forces. Only in mutable circumstances can divination
> come into its own.[86]

The figurative geography of cyberspace can be seen to fit neatly into this
description. The seemingly infinite and obscure data capacity of the web has
been conceived as a global host of our collective consciousness, or
'Noosphere'.[87] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin charted the theoretical existence of
the Noosphere on a continuum of our spiritual evolution culminating in the

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[82] McSherry, 'What is a Cyber Coven?'
[83] Collins, 'Technology and Magick'.
[84] Peter J. Carroll, *Liber Null & Psychonaut: An Introduction to Chaos Magic* (York Beach ME: Weiser, 1987), pp. 16, 49-51.
[85] Carroll, *Liber Null & Psychonaut*, p. 103.
[86] Carroll, *Liber Null & Psychonaut*, p. 67.
[87] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

"Omega Point", the eschatalogical moment in which the sentience of all humanity converges and unifies, emerging as universal gnosis.[88] Accordingly, some Witches have imagined the web as the sublime superhighway, and used the technology of this arena in experiments to project the self into liminal space for the purposes of *ex stasis*, and to harness, decipher, and re-write this mysterious plane for more powerful spell-work.

From Disembodied Consciousness to Apotheosis

Role-playing and shifting identities are common characteristics of Neopagan religions. Witchcraft rituals are theatrical performances that occasionally require costumes, props, regalia, and acting certain parts. Witches may take a craft name, either permanently as Starhawk has, or to signify a change in status from mundane to magic in the way that Lisa Sherry becomes Lady Ma'at when working with the Jaguar Moon cybercoven.[89] A transformation ultimately occurs at the climax of a ritual, when the door that separates the substantial and the celestial is momentarily opened, and the practitioner can 'know' the divine. At this stage, the psychic awareness of the Witch is heightened and he/she enters into a transient state of ecstasy, *ex stasis*, in the literal sense, 'to stand outside of oneself'. The body is the interface that must be surpassed for the Witch to become a walker between worlds, where the disembodied self, (soul, mind, psyche) can coalesce with supernal entities, assume an alternative identity by switching gender, theriomorphing, or reach apotheosis and become a god.

The computer screen becomes the new doorway for the Technomystic, and in the ultimately liminal cybersphere the body and its associated identity are nebulous until they are constructed. As Gibson envisioned it, one jacks in and projects their "disembodied consciousness" into the "consensual hallucination" of the matrix.[90] Giving a whole new meaning to H.P. Lovecraft's "lurker at the threshold",[91] on the net the user can 'lurk' invisibly, or re-configure their cyber self from *tabula rasa* using avatars, incarnating as game characters, or designing personal profiles. Projecting sentience into the hyperreal matrix via avatars could be seen as training for Witches who wish to attain the power of "disembodiment", metempsychosis, or the Omega point, apotheosis. Acknowledging the self and surrounds as an ephemeral illusion is central to the Chaotic phase of penultimate transubstantiation.[92] Carroll

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[88] de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, pp. 251-259.
[89] McSherry, 'What is a Cyber Coven?'
[90] William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (London: Voyager/HarperCollins, 1995), p. 12.
[91] H.P. Lovecraft, *The Lurker at the Threshold* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1988).
[92] Carroll, *Liber Null & Psychonaut*, p. 100.

recommends residing in the "Void", remarkably analogous to the abstract space of the internet, in order to attain the highest echelon of magical consciousness that will allow the practitioner to transmigrate his soul into a superior form.[93]

The make-believe adventures of online RPGs, text-based Multi User Dungeons (MUDS), and three dimensional virtual worlds all bestow upon the player an opportunity to step outside of their mundane form and be reborn as a fantastical being that represents another facet of their personality. In 1995, Erik Davis interviewed an eclectic/anarchic Witch who chose the screen name 'legba', after the African spirit of messages, gateways and trickery, when playing LambdaMOO, one of the oldest MUD games that still runs. The ability to metamorphose into different bodies, even when it is only through text and the imagination, she described as shamanic, ecstatic, unsettling, and intensely magical. For legba, being simultaneously in real life and virtual reality was essentially inhabiting the uncanny Crossroads: "it's like those ancient spaces yes, but without the separations between earth and heaven, man and angel… The false dichotomy is to think that cyberspace and our RL (real life) bodies are really separate… it's about knowing, seeing, being inside the sentience of existence, and walking in the connections".[94] Essentially, when synthesised with her online avatar, the essence of whoever 'legba' is exists most meaningfully in a space that is neither explicit nor supernatural. Software engineer and Chaotic Neopagan Mark Pesce names this process of disembodiment "psychological amputation". He explains that "holosthetic" media, immersive technologies that simulate environments and encounters, profoundly disembody the responder in a form of "electronically-mediated schizophrenia". Pesce posits that hypothetically, the teleportation of the self into cyberspace can either have drastic side effects for one's mental health, or a profound gnostic and ontological impact, "this simultaneously represents a chance for ecstatic communion or the utter destruction of self, for *darshan* and Gehenna".[95]

Chaos in Numbers

The broadly circulated e-text 'Introduction to Cybercraft' by Mike Morgan sees witchcraft on the web as a crucial step towards the mutation from human into "Changelings" whose bodies are the progeny of the CyberLord and

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[93] Carroll, *Liber Null & Psychonaut*, pp. 104-105.

[94] Davis, 'Technopagans: May the Astral Plane be Reborn in Cyberspace'.

[95] Mark Pesce, 'Final Amputation: Pathogenic Ontology in Cyberspace', Paper Delivered at the Third International Conference on Cyberspace, University of Texas (May, 1993), at http://hyperreal.org/~mpesce/fa.html. Accessed 24/12/09.

CyberLady.[96] Morgan's work taps into the cybernetic paradigm that practitioners of Chaos magic have implemented as a model to investigate and manage forces of will. In this period, collectives of people who were interested in performing communal online magic could be found in Usenet newsgroups like alt.pagan and alt.magick.chaos.[97] Noteworthy numbers of Chaos magicians contributed to discussions about the propensity for magic to be performed via the internet and with various programming systems. The esoteric interpretation of encryption is an example that is demonstrated well in this post from alt.pagan veteran Tzimon Yliaster:

> Newsgroups: alt.pagan
> From: pali151@netcom.com (Tzimon Yliaster)
> Subject: The Secret of the Hyssop
> Date: Mon, 8 Aug 1994 02:29:21 GMT
> A secret is contained herein. The 8th seal, the seal of Octarine.
> Couple this with the .GIF which follows, and its yours.
> --
> hsulflayorSssaltngaapnmorecurlyfrieseh
> hyssoptotemAlpacawhatpassesTiresiaslip
> OmphallosHiundaihJuru7418ptelasisNonre
> UjkIoplmN_8ghajNkaioremL:fgikQgHuiadfN
> oPiajhIuaUGIlwath8UGwgi08YH}iyfgaej&uk
> *ofbJuge98^5hjjKopliuytyushegoruuIop(g
> 87ukdjbHhoilIGbmunzgyckLugsTy9atenrise
> U87bscuYhHjIlokeFringuklahnJgefdeFed!s
> kieleobasshahainshahBtmntsigrSiabmarsh
> BigsecretsherewithallHeretoforenothing
> LiOkLgObTjknnmmn89*!~EkanH.hdEkiplingq[98]

Existing in archive form today, it can only be assumed that the .GIF file mentioned contained a key to decipher the glossolalia that promises to reveal the arcane 'Secret of Hyssop'. Tzimon reappeared amongst other Chaos magicians in the newsgroup TIAMAT, 'Testing the Internet As Magickal/Aethyric Tool'. Chaotes listed in this group discussed the prospects of conducting magic via internet relay chat, bots, code, silicon souls, and

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[96] Mike Morgan, 'Introduction to Cybercraft', Sacred-Texts (2001), at http://www.sacred-texts.com/eso/chaos/cybercft.txt. Accessed 24/12/09.
[97] 'alt.magick.chaos', *Google Groups* (1994-2009), at http://groups.google.com/group/alt.magick.chaos/browse_frm/month/1994-02. Accessed 24/12/09.
[98] Scott 'Blade' Hamilton, 'BONZAI!!!!', *alt.pagan*, (7 August, 1994), at http://www.io.com/~shub/tiamat/wave.use.txt. Accessed 24/12/09.

MUDs.[99] Some years later, Anton Channing, under the name Frater M 1232, wrote a program called Cybermorph Hardware and Operating System-Human Interface Exchange. CHAOSHEX for short, was designed under the pretence that our reality is not the true reality (à la the Matrix), so the program acted as a sophisticated servitor that would create "a three-way cybermorphic interface between the magician, his computer and the meta-computer our world is 'run' on".[100] By activating a spell with the program, flashing colours and words appear on the screen, sending the user in a gnostic trance and allowing them to glimpse "pure information".[101]

The empirical strategies devised by these adepts, are notably different from the amateurish approach taken by Technopagans. It is not what McSherry calls a "lack of direct knowledge" that makes the process magical, but rather these Magicians make their work obscure with their elite programming skills. Their aims were not motivated by a need for practical, urbanised or social magic, but a keen interest in discovering new modes of cosmic consciousness. As one TIAMAT contributor so bluntly put it, "electronic-astral exchange is one thing, but e-spellcasting is just lame".[102] This comment expresses an 'us and them' dichotomy, based on the assumption that Technomystics engage with technology on a more profound epistemic level, than other Witches who, as Cowan phrases it, equate ignorance with magic,[103] basically applying the "God hypothesis" to any kind of device that is ineffable.[104]

Aside from making nerdy jokes about bandwidth and Unix, the activities of TIAMAT included: designing sigils from RNGs, performing online rituals to generate group servitors and invoke the gods, channelling lurkers, discharging pain/tactile sensation over the internet, and patronising a magic-themed virtual game called Damascus that aimed to forge a link between the astral planes and cyberspace.[105] It was not simplistically assumed that their experiments would work because the execution resembled the principles of

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[99] Thee Shub, 'Tiamat Tenticles', *TIAMAT* (2000), at http://www.io.com/~shub/tiamat.html. Accessed 24/12/09.

[100] Anton Channing, 'Magick and Technology', *kiamagick.com* (2008), at http://kiamagic.com/wiki/index.php?title=Anton_Channing_Technology#CHAOSHEX_and_Magickal_Hacking. Accessed 24/12/09. See also: Collins, 'Magick and Technology'.

[101] Channing, 'Magick and Technology'.

[102] Max, 'Re: Source for O-Chat', *TIAMAT* (12 Jan., 2000), at http://www.io.com/~shub/tiamat/mail/msg00073.html. Accessed 24/12/09.

[103] Cowan, *Cyberhenge*, pp. 72-79.

[104] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), pp. 31-50.

[105] Fell, 'Damascus: Outline/Request for participants', *TIAMAT* (20 Jul., 1999), at http://www.io.com/~shub/tiamat/mail/msg00004.html. Accessed 24/12/09; Thee Shub, 'Tiamat Tenticles'.

magic applied in more traditional spells, instead these efforts were heuristic, and designed to plumb the hermetic depths of technologys gnostic potential. By 2000, TIAMAT experiments and the Damascus project had shut down and membership of the newsgroup declined, possibly because the new millennium coincided with a decreased interest in testing online magic, at least in group formats like this one.[106] Anton Channing never converted CHAOSHEX from a DOS file to something more suitable for a modern computer.

Internet-based movements are inevitably fleeting and difficult to study. Specialised forums are often more focused and filter out irrelevant comments, but the level of sincerity or genuine interest of contributors is still hard to judge from an outsider perspective. In 2002, the Barbelith Underground forum featured a thread on 'Technomagick' where a few patrons noted correspondences between magic and technology, ranging from the possibility of servitors made with Flash to ATMs functioning as magic because "it's either that or little men inside doing things" according to one 'Teenage Billionair Psychopath'.[107] Unfortunately, almost all of the suggested hyperlinks from this source that might have assisted the study of Technomysticism have now become invalid.

In February 2008 members of the 'Occult Corpus' forum also admitted to having difficulty finding out more about the subject and indicated a lack of interest, but two posters, 'Qaexl' and 'The Doctor' touched on techniques reminiscent of Technomysticism. Qaexl proposed an elaborate method of "injecting mana" into a series of technical and traditional devices, "allowing awareness to slip into the digital form so that you can 'Do Stuff'.

> One idea: build some hardware that is essentially a smoke detector. Have an alpha radiation source hit a detector, and then convert the analog signal from there into a digital source. Alpha radiation is so weak that smoke particulates will set it off. I would have to increase its sensitivity though, so that it can detect incense. During workings, the particulates from burning incense will affect the detector, which effects the RNG [random number generator] that will be used in the program. I may be able to modify it to use candles, but it is essentially burning the intent into it. Since the detector is being physically affected by the burning, its digital output more or less

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[106] Craig Berry, 'Re:Silence and Sound...', *TIAMAT* (30 Nov., 1999), at http://www.io.com/~shub/tiamat/mail/msg00007.html. Accessed 24/12/09.

[107] Trijhaos, 'Technomagick', *Barbelith Underground: Temple* (2002), at http://www.barbelith.com/topic/2356. Accessed 24/12/09.

resonates with it, probably weakly, but just enough for the Sympathy to work. [108]

A year later, 'The Doctor' added:

> I use a wireless network interface set to Monitor mode with a copy of TCPdump to good effect for this. Something else that you could do (since you mentioned manipulating the packets thus captured) is run each one of them through a utility to generate an MD-5 or SHA-1 hash, and work with that. The output is just as unique but generates a much smaller set of characters to deal with. I also use this method to stockpile mana/magick/energy/foo by sacrificing spam.

Hence, the shortage of obvious signs that the Chaotic community is still testing the bounds of internet magic does not necessarily mean that this is not still happening in confidential correspondences or in the private practice of individuals. Perhaps in another ten years time, the outmoded archives of today's Technomystical organisations will float to the top of Google searches.

The Techno-Spiritual Future: The Sacred Cyborg?

In a range of ways the contemporary Witchen community has strived to redefine the urban context and its many devices by endowing them with religious worth. Theoretically, the Witchen gestalt perceives all things, organic and artificial, as hallowed and animated. In practice, Technopagans seem to regard objects primarily as magical tools, while Technomystics see the potential for self-transformation in their machines. Technopagans have actively enchanted their technology for personal use, whereas Technomystics, already enchanted by technology, have endeavoured to study it comprehensively. These movements have sprung from a shared history, but have diverged significantly, now representing two almost oppositional approaches to spirituality. As we have seen, Chatoic texts have a tendency towards techno-transcendentalism rather than innocuous methods of techno-magic. For Chaote Mike Morgan cybercraft is a step in the evolution of humanity, requiring an ontological paradigm shift from human animal to human machine, with less of a metaphysical focus.[109] Disregarding the importance of an intuitive rapport with the organic world, this is a leap away from a conventional notion of Witchcraft as a 'nature religion'. Instead it supports self-destruction: immolation in the holy fire, shedding the flesh, and reincarnating as a sacred cyborg.

The tropes of transhumanist and extropian philosophy are recognisable in the discourse of Technomysticism. But this is more than just a synthesis of

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[108] Qaexl, 'What is Technomancy?', *Occult Corpus* (2008), http://www.occultcorpus.com/forum/showthread.php?t=4663&page=2. Accessed 24/12/09.
[109] Morgan, 'Introduction to Cybercraft'.

esoteric science with esoteric magic. The Singularity concept as propounded by Vernor Vinge in 1993 frankly stated that when we have the technological means to create superhuman intelligence, the human era will end.[110] When asked the question "will robots inherit the earth?" fellow cybernetic expert Marvin Minsky's answer was a resounding "yes".[111] Ray Kurzweil, the current charismatic leader of the 'human plus' movement, believes the über-technology of tomorrow will bring us immortality and enlightenment before any god does.[112] According to these thinkers, our only chance for co-existing with our automaton superiors is to amalgamate into the human/machine hybrid that Morgan fantasises about. The conceptual artist Stelarc has literally embodied this biosemiotic ethos, describing the post-human body that he is trying to attain as one of "fractal flesh" and "telematic senses", oscillating to the ebb and flow of net activity.[113]

Theoretically, issues of immunology, pathology and life extension can be overcome by artificially enhancing the body. But this futuristic outlook is less concerned with matters of the soul or unification with divinity, instead promoting a secular form of techgnosis. As our field of knowledge exponentially accelerates, an appreciation of sentient technology can no longer be based on the mystery of ignorance. Animistic assumption will pale in light of an artificial intelligence that is, by definition, the invention of humans, and which may have the capacity to surpass us. Futurologists speculate that the machine will no longer be a conduit for spirit, but will take on a soteriological role as the new omniscient progenitor and holosthetic medium that usurps supernaturalism with a sacralised form of scientism.

Conclusion

The post-industrial period has seen society gain myriad advantages in the areas of health, business, ecology, communication and many others. For Bryan Wilson in the 1970s this globalising process moved us further towards logical and developed patterns of social organization that simultaneously exposed the

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[110] Vernor Vinge, 'The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post Human Era', Paper Presented at the VISION-21 Symposium, NASA Lewis Research Center and Ohio Aerospace Institute (March, 30-31, 1993), at http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/vinge/misc/singularity.html. Accessed 24/12/09.

[111] Marvin L. Minsky, 'Will Robots Inherit the Earth?', *Scientific American* (October, 1994) [with some minor revisions], at
http://web.media.mit.edu/~minsky/papers/sciam.inherit.html. Accessed 24/12/09.

[112] Ray Kurzweil, *Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (London: Phoenix, 1999), pp. 127, *passim*.

[113] Stelarc, 'Fractal Flesh', *stelarc.va.com.au* (1994), at
http://www.stelarc.va.com.au/fractal/index.html. Accessed 24/12/09.

weaknesses of religion, causing its decline in both vigour and usefulness.[114] He once argued that religion is unable to solemnize and sanctify electronic artefacts, making it even less relevant to the modern populace. To the contrary, as we have seen, the markers of secularisation have been met by Witchcraft with receptive pluralism. Also, Australian census statistics from 2001-2006 have revealed a distinct rise in the amount of identified Pagans, and people who affiliate themselves with nature religion, Druidism, and Animism.[115] These facts might suggest that open-source faiths like Witchcraft have a survival advantage in a progressively rational world. But it is not just Witches who are consecrating technology and holding it up as a window to the soul and path to deification; scientists, philosophers, cultural theorists, sci-fi geeks and computer programmers have all contributed to the development of the techgnosis concept. With increasing velocity the development of artificial intelligence, sentient automatons and simulated realities can be seen as conditioning us to believe in the existence of "spiritual machines".[116] The meta-space of the internet matrix has been conceptualised as a hyperreal wormhole that brings together the imaginary and the real. The net user obtains a transformative and yet ominous opportunity to transcend the body and explore the self by jacking-in to the computer. Social movements like Witchcraft demonstrate that science and religion are not always "non-overlapping magisteria" as the Witchen community has managed to find enchantment in the technological world.[117]

However, as it stands, technology and Witchcraft will not be a synthesis available or palatable to all Neopagans. One reason for this is that not all Witches have access to a range of technologies, nor are they all well versed in their operations. Another more weighty issue is that as our civilisation becomes more absorbed in post-modern technology, we have less of a need for traditional attachments to the natural environment and the organic body. Strong ties to the Earth become less significant when magic can be efficiently conducted through man-made devices, and when transcending the flesh is considered the Omega Point. The Witchen community has fostered an innovative culture of techno-spirituality, but the plasticity of Witchcraft may only stretch so far. It seems that Technopaganism has approached technology

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[114] Wilson, 'Aspects of Secularization in the West', p. 275.
[115] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'The People of Australia: Statistics from the 2006 Census' (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Commonwealth of Australia, 2008), at http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/research/_pdf/poa-2008.pdf. Accessed 24/12/09, p. 48.
[116] Taken from the title of Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines.*
[117] Phrase from Stephen Jay Gould, 'Nonoverlapping Magisteria', *Natural History*, vol. 106 (March, 1997), pp. 16-22.

from a romantic and etic perspective, and so the epistemology is idealised rather than examined. The Technopagan strategy is an addendum to Witchcraft that seeks out charm in a de-naturalised urban context and aims to keep the religion dynamic and germane. Conversely, the theories and experiments of Technomysticism are emic and the objectives are based on gaining knowledge and enhancing the self, ambitions shared by transhumanists, let alone post-modern society. Some Chaotic texts have expressed acceptance of the cyborg revolution, extolling it as a mutation towards divinity. This is perhaps a more resilient attitude for a destiny saturated in life changing advances that praise science as saviour. It is easy to say that in the same way that electricity still lights our rooms but is no longer a source of 'illumination', an understanding of our commonplace technology will render it banal and profane. But the meta-technology of proverbial tomorrow will apparently be uncannily sentient, erudite and capable, far superseding the abilities of humankind, essentially god-like. The hypothetical rapture of the Singularity would produce a very different playing field for techno-spirituality, wherein the *machina* does not channel god, but becomes tantamount to *deus*.