Technopaganism and Technoshamanism

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Technopaganism - The Unification of Mysteries

Deep inside all of us, we feel a spirituality. Some of us are forced into a belief system which allows us to deal with our spirituality, but hinders our expression of real humanity. Christianity plays crazy games with sexuality. Atheism locks us away from our very need for spirituality.

Many have found Wicca, the modern worship of the nature goddess in her many robes, based upon old european religions. Wicca does a very good job of accepting what is means to be human, to be social, to be sexual, to be a woman, or to be a man. Wicca makes few dogmatic claims, indeed, it is a free-flow religion, with most formalities, if any, worked out by local covens.

But there is a strong spirituality within many of us we cannot hide from any more. It is as new as computers, but the force behind it is as old as humanity itself. We, as humans, are tool-makers. Magic has long been associated with the making of precision tools, axes, swords, goblets, fire.

But the new techno-magic is different... it no longer is simple, serving us in the fields or in battle. It allows us to study the very nature, the goddess, we come from. It has become meta-magic, a meta-mystery.

The force is great, and especially the programmers, laser jocks, scientists, and silicon architects can feel it. The technology has a spirit of its own, as valid as the spirit of any creature of the goddess. This is the spiritual force we, those who are called technopagan, feel and must express. Not surprisingly, we find ways of bringing technology into our worship.

Our grand challenge, though, is to balance our exploding technology with the forces of nature. We must do as we will, but harm none.

Many of us already have our ceremonies... our Raves, our HamFests. But we must seek further balance with the goddess... the Field Days, the Winnebiko, and more worship which mixes the tech with the nature.

Technoshamanism - An Introduction

The shamanic worldview usually involves a belief in supernatural forces that can be accessed to cause alterations in "external reality". These supernatural forces are usually accessed through appeals to various "spirits", which live in a "spirit world" that can be accessed through dreams or other consciousness alteration methods (sweat lodges, psychoactives, chanting, ecstatic dancing, etc.). These spirits are amenable to interaction in the same way humans can be interacted with - threats, bribes, appeals, etc.

The shaman employs a mode of operation known as "bricolage" (from the French "*bricoleur*", "handyman").

Unlike the engineer, who has some idea of "theoritical principles" which underly a given "practical implementation", the bricoleur has a set of techniques from which they pick and choose the appropriate "tool" to be used in the situation at hand. It is not necessary to understand *why* something works, only that it *does* work. The shaman's set of tools include a set of symbolic associations to help determine how to affect certain spirits. For example, eagle feathers would be useful in contacting the archetypal Eagle.

Also important : shamans traditionally are associated with a community, and serve as the community's healer/psychiatrist/miracle-worker. When the community has a problem that "mundane" means cannot solve, they go to the shaman for supernatural assistance. The shaman also orchestrates the rituals which bind the community together.

The techno-shamanic worldview is an extension of this. It involves a belief that humanity's technological infrastructure has become so complex and vast that it cannot be entirely understood through use of an engineering-type theoretical construct. However, this technological infrastructure obviously has a direct impact on how we live our lives. Thus, the techno-shaman serves the community by accessing the technological infrastructure, not as a tool-user ordering their machine to do something, but as one sentient being negotiating with another for the performance of a service.

Drug use, ecstatic dancing, and trance music are well-established in today's techno-shamanic subculture, as is their use in ritualistic events to bind communities together. One can easily see a mapping between computer networks and the spirit world, and between computers and the powerful entities the traditional shaman interacts with.

An excellent example of techno-shamanism is seen in the AI-oriented "**voodoo**" in Gibson's *Count Zero*. Something similar shows up in Shepard's *Life During Wartime*, and in a more sophisticated form in Vinge's *A Fire Upon The Deep*.

A Technoshaman is one who :

- Believes that the essential core of the universe is an Algorithm.
- Holds that there is a morality that can be derived from this Algorithm, which can be briefly stated as : IF NEED, THEN HELP.
- Acts to help others by applying the derivatives of the Algorithm to everyday human existence.
- Develops the spirit of technology to serve as the means of carrying out the Algorithm.

Okay. When I hear the word, "shamanism", I think of the Native American/Mongolian traditions. The shaman, or spiritual leader, would let the spirit of an animal or natural force to "enter his being", as it were. This spirit would then guide him or grant him certain supernatural powers. Now, when we consider this and assume that "techno-" refers to technology. We get someone who lets *technology* enter his/her being and guide him or her, or grant powers. Sound kind of cyberpunk ? Taking it a step further and adding in some modern cultual ideas about shamanism, we get someone who works "magic & miracles" through the use of technology. Perhaps another word to work with here would be "technomancer". It has the same supernatural connotations, with different spiritual ones. So, there's my thoughts (for now). Here's mud in your eye.