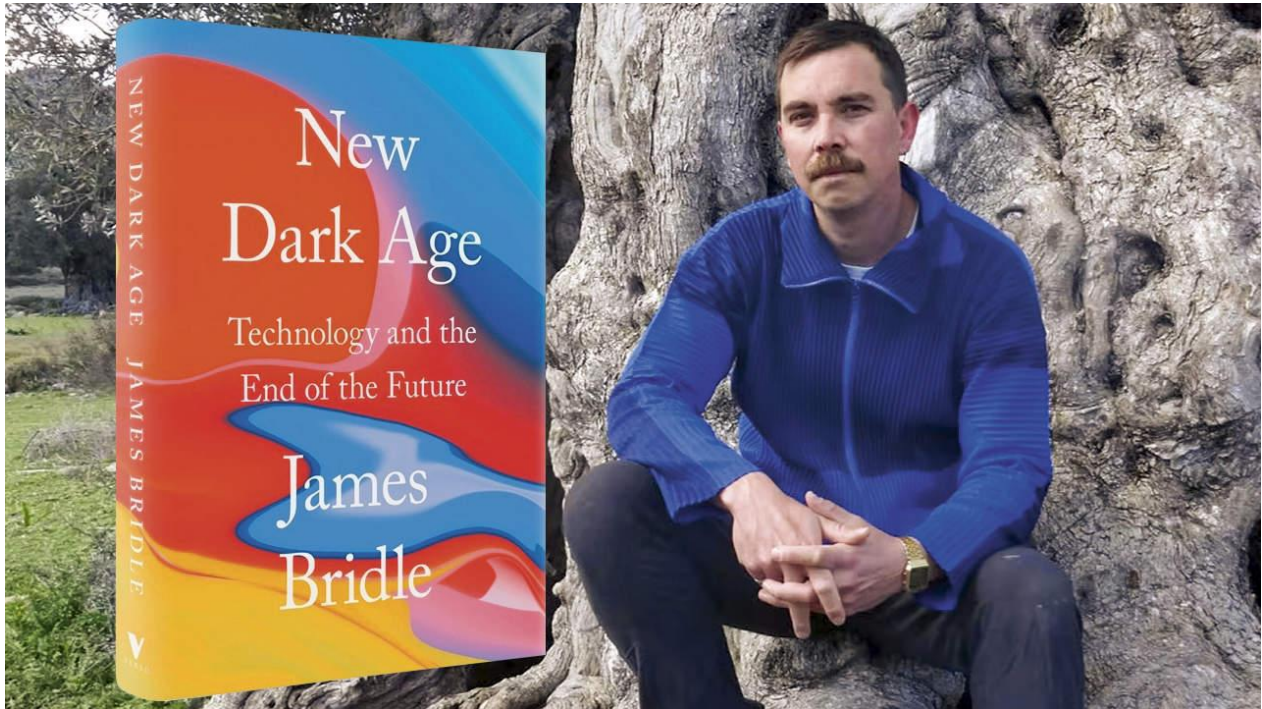


James Bridle: New Dark Age [C1]

L'artista James Bridle sostiene che, contrariamente a quanto si creda, il sovraccarico di informazioni provocato dalla rivoluzione tecnologica ci condurrà verso un'epoca oscura dominata da una nuova classe feudale: le grandi multinazionali.



As the world around us increases in technological complexity, our understanding of it diminishes. As we have more accessibility to information, we are lost in a sea of data, too **overwhelmed** to act. This state of paradox gave rise to the book *New Dark Age* in which artist and writer James Bridle surveys the history of art, technology and information systems from a fascinating perspective. **Trained** in computing, Bridle still believes that technology is full of possibilities; it's just, he says, that most of us have either lost control over it or never had it in the first place. From financial systems to shopping algorithms, artificial intelligence to state secrecy, we no longer understand how our world is governed or presented to us. So how do we access this proactive space of experimentation and possibility, online and in real life?

OBSCURE MATTER

The title of Bridle's book is, of course, a reference to the 'old' Dark Age, a term applied in retrospect to medieval times by the 14th century Italian scholar Francesco Petrarch. Petrarch believed that ancient Greek and Roman cultures were highly advanced, but the medieval period regressed as a result of religion and superstition, leading to a period of [stagnation](#). Petrarch's idea was very influential, though highly generalised, condescending and totally subjective. Bridle offers his definition of what a 'new dark age' is, more inspired by the words of the early 20th century English author, Virginia Woolf. **James Bridle** (English accent): A new dark age is not a thing in which nothing happens. It is not a time in which things are not possible. Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary in the early 1920s that she felt we were entering a dark age and she thought that might be a good thing, because the darkness was a good place to think. That it doesn't need to be a frightening place it can be a place of extraordinary possibility.

CLIMATE CHAOS

The [subheading](#) of the book is Technology and the End of the Future. Bridle explains what he means by this. **James Bridle**: I read an article by someone who [runs](#) the American Weather Corporation, which is one of the largest US-based [weather forecasts](#) in the world, and one that pioneered the use of vast amounts of data [to feed ever more](#) powerful computer programs in order to be able to predict the weather. But what's increasingly [apparent](#) is that our ability to predict the weather is starting [to falter](#). Climate change and the increased instability of the planet means that our models aren't working as well anymore and we're getting more and more freak weather events, things are more complicated than we're capable of modelling.

DAY BY DAY

As a result, says Bridle, all our long-term forecasting is getting worse. **James Bridle**: All our long-term forecasting and so much of our technologized society is entirely dependent on our attempt to predict the

future in various ways, whether that's moving [goods](#) around, [sowing](#) and [reaping crops](#) — any of these things. The ability to predict the future is something that we've based contemporary society entirely upon. The end of the future means we're not going to be able to think so much in terms of what we're going to be doing in a week's time.

LOST IN DATA

While life becomes less predictable, information [overload](#) blocks us. Take surveillance and climate change, big issues that we know all about but that no one is acting on, says Bridle. **James Bridle:** Climate change has poisoned our ability to have nice conversations about the weather: we actively reject thinking about it. Maybe the 'darkness' is a response to that. Nothing is gained by knowing all of these facts. We have to be [aware](#) of something else that's [off-kilter](#) in our very way of thinking about the world. And it's in that sense that I invoke this idea of 'unknowing', of a [wilful](#) rejection of that form of Western empirical knowing because it's not helping us [address](#) these issues at all.

MAGICAL TIMES

One effect of this has been a rise in alternative ways of thinking. In recent years, there has been a notable rise in mysticism. Bridle sees it as a productive attempt to [reassert](#) agency over things that we don't understand. **James Bridle:** How do we live amongst vast and dangerous systems that we don't understand? Because the whole idea was that we were [taming](#) everything; we were making it all safe and good and now we're inviting things into our homes and into our pockets that we don't understand and that may contain all kinds of strange dangers, and we need some way of balancing that and so mystical practices have always been a way of asserting agency and I think that's a really productive way to think about it.

LISTEN TO ELDERS

And given our lack of productivity on climate change, we should resist trying to give scientific reasons for observations that we assume are superstitious. Take the viewpoint of certain First Nations people, for example. **James Bridle:** Certain First Nations people, they've been saying that the Earth is "[off its axis](#)", because the Sun is [setting](#) in a different place, the land has changed to a radical degree. That [something is afoot](#) on the planet, and this was how they [rendered](#) it. I think it's really essential to resist going like, "Oh, but they mean this when we say it in scientific terms". To actually [engage](#) with this stuff [thoughtfully](#) and critically, it's really necessary to hold both those ways of talking about what's happening with equal value, because it's quite clear from our inability to act on climate change that our dominant ways of talking about it are radically insufficient. **ANOTHER WAY** If we can't think too far ahead into the future, how we [behave](#) right now is everything, says Bridle. That is why a more democratised approach to technology and our understanding of it is required. **James Bridle:** We see the ways in which the technologies we're dependent upon, the ways in which they've been developed, so whether they've been developed originally as military systems and brought into civilian life, whether they've been developed as industrial corporate systems... what logics have put this particular configuration of technologies in place. And given that we're not going to step back from making stuff, do we make stuff in ways that is at least is not the way we've been doing it [thus far](#). How do we open up wider participation, freeing up more and more people's agency to be part of that process?

Glossary

- **wilful** = deliberato
- **taming** = addomesticare
- **sowing** = seminare
- **overload** = sovraccarico
- **thoughtfully** = premurosamente
- **Trained** = formarsi
- **runs** = gestire
- **behave** = comportarsi
- **stagnation** = ristagno
- **ever more** = sempre più
- **engage** = impegnarsi con
- **off its axis** = fuori dal suo asse
- **rendered** = rappresentare
- **thus far** = finora
- **to feed** = alimentare
- **to falter** = vacillare
- **something is afoot** = c'è qualcosa in atto
- **off-kilter** = squilibrato
- **address** = affrontare
- **goods** = merci
- **crops** = raccolto
- **aware** = consapevoli
- **reassert** = riaffermare
- **setting** = tramontare
- **overwhelmed** = sopraffatti
- **subheading** = sottotitolo
- **reaping** = raccogliere
- **weather forecasts** = previsioni meteorologiche
- **apparent** = evidente