a definitive account of their story still remains to be written.

**THE SPRINGBOARD IN THE POND: AN INTIMATE HISTORY OF THE SWIMMING POOL**


Reviewed by Roy R. Behrens,
Ballast Quarterly Review, 2022 X Avenue, Dysart, IA 52224-9767 U.S.A. E-mail: <ballast@netins.net>.

This book, by Dutch historian Thomas A.P. van Leeuwen, is the second in an anticipated series of four unorthodox books on architecture in relation to the four classical elements: air, water, fire and earth. The first volume, about the metaphysics of the American skyscraper, was published in 1988, while the third, which will focus on buildings destroyed by fire, is in preparation. This second volume, which is illustrated by more than 200 drawings, plans and vintage photographs, is a wonderful visual and verbal review of the origin and evolution of the domestic swimming pool, which, as the author describes it, “the architectural outcome of man’s desire to become one with the element of water, privately and free of danger.” To swim in a hole in the backyard, he continues, “is a complex and curious activity, one that oscillates between joy and fear, between domination and submission, for the swimmer delivers himself with controlled abandonment to the forces of gravity, resulting in sensations of weightlessness.” This is a history of architecture, as exemplified by a single building type, while, at the same time, it is a rich, multi-faceted social history in which the author shows the behavior of humans toward water in relation to religion, sex, art, psychology, engineering and architecture.

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**TECHGNOSIS: MYTH, MAGIC + MYSTICISM IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION**


Reviewed by Kevin Murray, 6 Blyth Street, Brunswick, VIC 3056, Australia. E-mail: <kmurray@mira.net>.

Erik Davis writes about the mystical dimension of technology, or “technomysticism.” In Techgnosis, he draws from a broad range of textual sources including Buddhist tracts, Neal Stephenson’s science fiction, neo-Paganism and post-modern philosophy. His principle focus is the “techgnostic drive”—the enduring need to add spiritual value to the world. Techgnosis has some of the catchy writing one might you find in comic-book style “Beginner’s Guides” to highbrow philosophy—the paragraphs are easy to digest and the content is informative—but the popularist writing does grate at times, particularly when it comes to intellectual “tweaking.” A classic instance is Davis’ one-paragraph summary of Christianity religion, which refers to a “second age, kick-started by Jesus.” He seems to be pitching his text at a “screen readership”—people who seek the ballast of a heavy book, but like to cut to the action.

For Leonardo readers, the principle limitation with Techgnosis is the limit of its scope. Davis’s attention is directed towards the exclusively expressive manifestation of technology, that is, what goes beyond practical use. By framing the symbolic expressions of technology within a “therapeutic” context, Davis overlooks the more productive nature of technological expression as an aesthetic act. Davis is resolutely humanist, stating that, for all its bankrupt absurdities, “technomysticism” arises because humans remain, in some mercurial sense, spiritual beings, and this curious twist of human nature will express itself wherever it can. This reading of human nature offers a reductive explanation that denies the creative uses of technology. Take the case of the “hive mind”; within the framework of “techgnosis,” this transcendence of individual consciousness may seem an atavistic expression of primitive mysticism. To root it solely in the spiritual drive, however, ignores the way in which artists are now employing the network to further develop their medium. Web art, such as Heath Bunting’s work, is not technologically determined, but neither is it a therapeutic attempt to seek meaning. Quite often, the purpose of web art is to actually dispel meaning.

It is a pity Davis does not discuss Roy Ascott’s approach. In Ascott’s case, it is more difficult to tease the spiritual con-solution out from the aesthetic project. Ideally, Davis will follow Techgnosis with a study of the kind of technological art that attempts to evolve our consciousness into more abstract forms. To do so, however, he will have to re-consider his reduction of “technomysticism” to psychological drives.

For a generous taste of Techgnosis and other writings by Erik Davis, see his web site at: <http://www.levity.com/techgnosis/techgnosis.html>.

**EVENTS**

**INVENÇÃO 99**

São Paulo, Brazil, 24–29 August 1999.

Reviewed by Sonya Rapoport, 6 Hillcrest Court, Berkeley, CA 94705, U.S.A. E-mail: <rapo@soocrates.berkeley.edu>.

At breakfast at Invenção, we poured from hermetic pitchers filled with colorful juices—mango, pineapple, orange mixed with eggplant (my favorite), and a gorgeous purple liquid. Wired homunculi rose from their watery vessels and hit the wet rainbow of connectivity. Plenary speaker Roy Ascott ejected us into a post-biological home of cyberspace and moistmedia with promises of a technoetic-based art, enhanced with new kinds of interfaces and a decelerated digital determinism. Christiane Paul aptly stated that digital media lend themselves best to topographies that transcend the physical world. Lurking in the shadows, the unbottled genetic genie was simultaneously treating diseases and threatening dehumanizing goals. Sara Diamond’s farcical presentation, “Hello, Dolly,” questioned and condemned biotech applications that are used to boost food production, particularly Monsanto’s “Roundup Ready” seeds, which are engineered to withstand its herbicide “Roundup.”

Getting connected for the cyborg of tomorrow showed its “hypercortex” head as a popular theme. Melinda Rackam, in her particularly moving and beautifully composed web artwork, Carrier, repositioned the hepatiti C viral infection as a positive biological merging with the flesh. She presented this merger as a love story between the invading virus and herself, its host. Carrier couples with Jamie