The unconscious technology

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EURON Atelier on Roboethics 2006

What emerges from the deepest layers of the psyche are... technological devices, magnetic energies, mechanical pieces, artificial colours, gears, things that break down and are repaired, things that do not work.





The hominid discovers the "technical" use of the bone, the conquest of the territory by means of this instrument is immediate.

The technological destiny is marked







From here to the spaceship, there is still a gap of millions of years, but it is just a moment. As if to say that only the size changes, but it is always a matter of "space conquest".

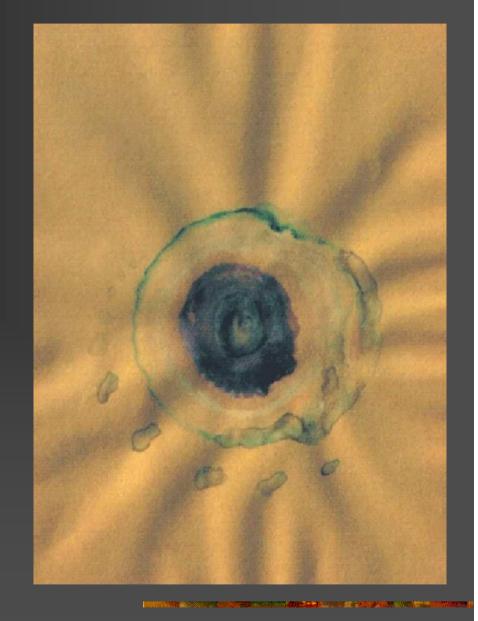
The bone of the hominid in 2001: A Space Odyssey not only starts off the "technological destiny", so that from here to the spaceship it is only a matter of a split second, but it also marks the beginning of the "psychological destiny", of the Ego starting from its unconscious premises. From that moment to the artificial intelligence of the HAL-9000 computer ... it is only a matter of a split second!



The technical "event" produces two realities at the same time: the instrument (from the bone to the spaceship) from the material surroundings; the Ego (from the hominid to the artificial intelligence) from the unconscious. The relationship between the Ego and technology is one of co-dependence; they are the two sides of the same coin.



Almost all observations on technology speak with that "portion" of our psyche called the "Ego"



The Ego is the container to which we refer our actions and our thoughts; these, however, are formed in other areas of the psyche, external to the Ego, called the "unconscious", exactly because the Ego knows almost nothing about this psychical territory.



Let us imagine that we are confined with a certain number of animals of different species, under the same roof, 24 hours a day and for ever. To protect ourselves against possible threats we will try to get to know our fellow tenants in order to establish with them the best possible relationship.



At this point, we feel that we have the best possible knowledge of our animals, we feel that we have the maximum control over all the variables and have established a correct and complete functional relationship ... but, surprisingly, we realize that we are allergic to them!

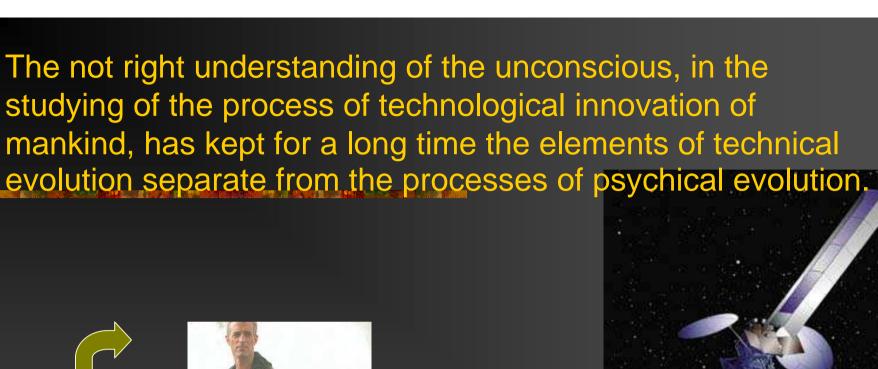




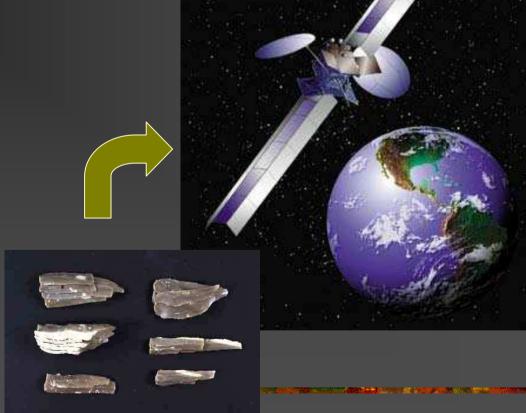
We know fairly well what our instincts as human beings are, however, we know little or nothing of their functioning and of the various ways of fulfilling them. For example, we know little or nothing of how a technology manages to satisfy an unconscious need.

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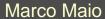


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"As usual happens, the symbol, the imagine, the ritual, anticipate and sometimes we can even say, that they make possible the utilitarian exploitation of a discovery. Even before its construction as a means of transport, the chariot was a vehicle in ritual processions: it used to carry the symbol of the Sun or the image of the Sun god" (Mircea Eliade)



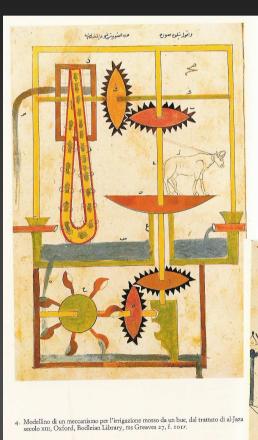


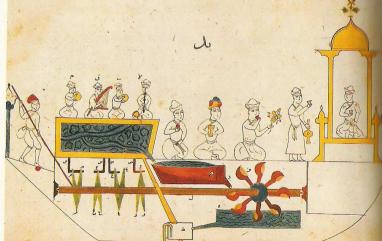


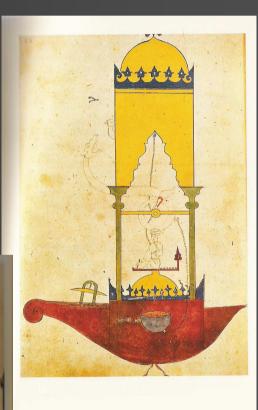


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This secularization of technology, from the symbolic, ritual, sacred image, to the utilitarian application, is not automatic. The knowledge of complex mechanisms did not induce the Arabs to achieve a technology similar to the Western one.





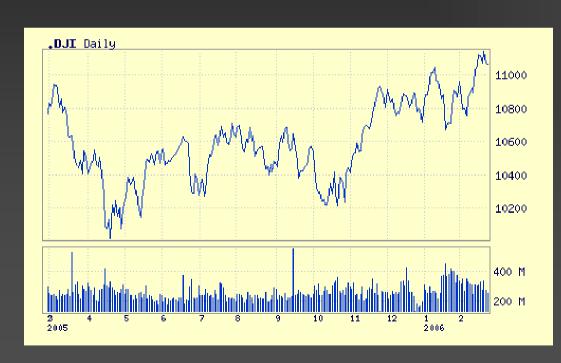


 Orologio ad acqua, dal trattato di al-Jazari, secolo XIII. Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms Greaves 27, f. 26r.

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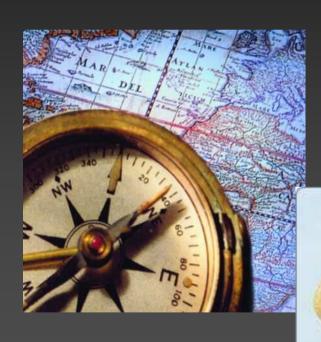
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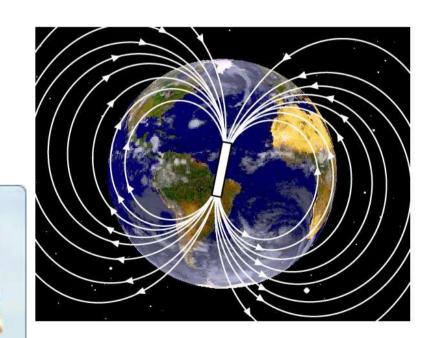
The Market is the new mythology, and it is more of an empty word, a modern rite, rather than an explanation of things.





It is still possible to find some connections between "material technology" and "unconscious technology" in dreams. A patient dreams of a magnetic field emanated by another person, which is literally blocking her. In her dream the dreamer is facing the same task that man faced millions of years ago: to expel the instrument in order to free one's own individual parts, one's own Ego.



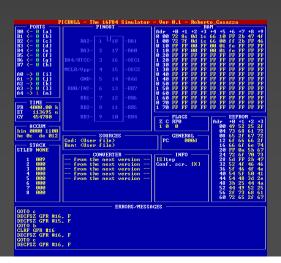


This takes place in a dream. However, how many times do these unconscious identifications take place in real life? We can say that in man's destiny to expel from himself technological tools, the human mind sometimes seems to envy the stability of its objects, their perfect functionality, to the point of wishing to resemble them, if not even of clinging to them and follow their destiny.



In my opinion, "unconscious technology", with its own rules, must be considered an essential and supporting element of "technology", just as the calculations carried out by the Ego to build it. Technology is partly fed and shaped by the "calculations" and by the technical project in a strict sense (a task of the Ego) and partly by the projections of an "under construction" psyche.











Roboethics, as a new scientific discipline, will be able to pick up this new research direction. For this purpose, the language of the unconscious needs to be studied and understood in the same way as the logical rational language of the Ego.

