

Book Review

The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace, by Vincent Mosco
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Myth, Power, and Cyberspace: When faced with these three words, what image comes to mind? Could the world conceived in the popular science-fiction movie 'The Matrix' be a likely illustration? The enormous potential of the Internet is, to some extent, predicted in this movie by its subtle integration of Myth, Power, and Cyberspace. Such potential can also be seen from the all-around penetration of the Internet into our daily lives. People are especially enthusiastic nowadays about Information Technology – as reflected by the sustained zeal in investing in dotcom companies even after the Internet crash of 2000. Within this background, Vincent Mosco's new book 'The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace' attempts to offer a different approach by interpreting these three elements in light of the background of the digital era.

The book shows us a fabulous picture of cyberspace when compared to other literature related to the Internet. Mosco's unique insight starts from the outset of the book where the meaning of "Myth" is redefined. In his world, myths matter and mean more than falsehoods or cons since they offer an entrance to another reality. In order to show a clear image regarding the role of "Myth" in comprehending cyberspace, Mosco tells his version of an old Norse myth. Inspired by this, the author clarifies that: "*Cyberspace is mutually constituted out of culture and political economy, out of the interconnected realities of myth and social institution.*"

The whole book is organized on the basis of this principle. To illustrate, the writer asks the reader to revisit their understanding of cyberspace by situating it within what they know about culture, about the history of communication media, and about the political economy of computer communications. Six chapters emerge as a result of the creative thoughts of the author. In my opinion, these six chapters could be regarded as three parts.

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 deal with the fundamental issues in understanding the context of this book. Chapter 1 gives the reason for selecting myth as representative in comprehending the cyberspace culture. By analyzing the application of myth to computer communication, the author tries to build a mutually constitutive relationship between the cultural perspective and the political economy perspective. This relationship is further discussed in the final chapter.

Following the discussion of the relationship between myth and cyberspace, Chapter 2 expands the reader's vision through a study of cyberspace-related contemporary culture. This is achieved through a cultural analysis of myth and cyberspace initiated by a case study relevant to the impact of the Internet. The section discusses the great transformation caused by the Internet and then defines myth in the context of the literature. The standpoint of the author in this chapter is that one can only fully understand the place of computer communication technology when taking into account some of the central myths related to these technologies. Based on this, Mosco introduces and explicitly explains the myths stemming from cyberspace. Taking into

account the crucial role myths play in understanding cyberspace, the next chapters attempt to address some of the more powerful and pervasive myths resulting from the Internet.

Hence, part two, comprising Chapters 3, 4, and 5, emerges to state the myths of cyberspace in detail. Three central and relevant myths are addressed in turn, known as “the end of history”, “the end of geography” and “the end of politics”. Chapter 3 solely discusses cyberspace and “the end of history”. Computerized communication technologies lay the groundwork for mythmaking about time, distance, and power. Because of this, the author analyzes the idea of ‘the end of history’ by taking into account the prominent role of time in modern societies. Mosco then introduces and connects several different views by various authors, and in doing so, a clear structure of the myth of ‘the end of history’ appears. This chapter enables the reader to survey the framework of literature relevant to this myth not only in terms of cyberspace, but also in terms of the entire topic of the book.

Chapter 4 illustrates the other two elementary issues in the analysis of cyberspace myths: ‘the end of geography’ and ‘the end of politics’. The ‘end of geography’ seems to be the familiar story about the fundamental changes to space and place, as the Internet makes territorial barriers and obstacles set by different sovereign entities less effective than they ever were in the past several centuries. The arrival of cyberspace also gives rise to the end of politics—the author indicates the unique advantages brought by cyberspace when compared to other communication technologies. Several events are given as examples to convince the reader of the crucial role that is played by cyberspace relevant to the end-of-politics myth. In general, Mosco’s precise grasp of the distinctive features of cyberspace and abundant references supporting these statements make this chapter an interesting read.

Shifting from the intellectual sources of these myths, the author suggests that a useful way to understand myths about cyberspace is to revisit the tales accompanying the rise of previous “history-ending” technologies. As a result, Chapter 5 demonstrates a different picture of cyberspace by reviewing some of the great technologies of the past. Changes brought by the telegraph, electricity, telephones, radio, and television are reviewed to look for some common features with what is happening now to cyberspace. By doing so, Mosco states that both geographical and political changes took place with the development of these former technologies and that the same outcomes may also be found in the contemporary world with the development of the Internet. On the basis of the study of past influential technologies, the author generalizes some eternal common principles with regard to the development of communication technologies, including cyberspace.

Chapter 6 makes up the final part of the suggested three sections and concludes the book. The other chapters up to this point have explained the nature of myth, described its value for understanding cyberspace, connected cyberspace myths to wider myths, and provided some historical context. A cultural perspective in understanding the power of cyberspace is thus established. For a more complete understanding, Chapter 6 addresses the political, economic and social significance of cyberspace. Since myth is the keyword of this book, the Mosco starts this chapter with the myths surrounding “Ground Zero”, which is the site of the attack on the World Trade Center, since the myth of a post-industrial society is born here. From this point, the author leads the reader to experience the development process of cyberspace myths influenced by the political and economic forces, which is mirrored by the historical development cycle

of the World Trade Center. However, when referring to other texts that state that the termination of the cyber age is an exact copy of the historical cycle of the World Trade Center, the author argues that such judgments are, to some extent, premature and shortsighted. Mosco suggests that what will happen to “Ground Zero” is what will likely be done about the future of cyberspace.

To sum up, this newly published book by Vincent Mosco brings some creative and fruitful thoughts concerning cyberspace – from the cover photo of downtown Manhattan representing the birth of cyberspace myths, to the selective literature resources which supports the discussion in both cultural and political economic perspectives. However, due to the abundant literature resources cited, readers may, in some circumstances, need to do some background reading for a better understanding of the relevant American culture. On the question of whether or not the scenario conceived by ‘The Matrix’ will come true, after the digestion of this book, readers might have their own answers. In addition, £18.95 is an affordable price for a book with such an exquisitely organized structure and easy to understand content.

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