

James E. Katz

Magic in the Air: Spiritual and Transcendental Aspects of Mobiles

Spiritual pursuits have always been an important part of human life, even as far back as the cave dwellers. Yet with today's emphasis on rationality and productivity, critics say that the world is losing its moral depth and meaning, and religion is becoming irrelevant. They often pin the blame for this loss on technology, and find ready targets in TV, video games and computers. Others observers do not see the loss of a spiritual home for mankind as a problem, and hope that technology can be used to eliminate superstition or even religion. In this talk, the author assesses these competing views and reviews theories about technology and spiritual beliefs. He then identifies some of the many ways that mobile communication technology is used to foster spiritual and religious beliefs. In contrast to most communication technologies, a number of people make a spiritual investment in their mobile phones and begin to feel that these devices have some transcendental powers. They also use the mobile phones to receive spiritual guidance and prayers, as well as to send messages into the great beyond. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these observations for society as technology leads people to become increasingly mobile and dis-embodied.

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