

Mysticism in blockchain culture: from quasi-religious source of universal truth to new mythologies that break colonial orders of knowledge

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This paper investigates mysticism in blockchain culture and the different socio-technical imaginaries it performs. For example, Bitcoin is often referred to as ‘magic internet money,’ and its inventor, Satoshi Nakamoto, viewed as a god-like figure whose writings are interpreted like religious scripture. Similarly, blockchain is often portrayed as a quasi-religious truth machine that can provide a new source of universal knowledge in the post-truth era. However, mystifying technology in this way can make it inscrutable and difficult to analyze critically, leading to harmful hype cycles that reinforce existing power dynamics.

Yet, the appearance of mysticism does not determine these outcomes. Instead of mystifying the technology, some instead aim to do justice to the mysteries of life and explore different ways of seeing the world beyond Western rationalism. This pluralistic approach to technology can open up possibilities and decenter dominant perceptions of techno-social life. Here, mysticism takes on new forms, for example, those tapping onto the practices of chaos magic or epic mythologies to radically alter perceptions of reality and harness the technology’s potential to chip away at centuries-old colonial orders of knowledge. By exploring these alternative perspectives, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which mysticism is employed in blockchain culture either to reproduce capitalist dynamics or to challenge power relations and support alternative ways of knowing, being, and relating in a pluralistic and entangled world.