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New Book Examines Steve Jobs, the Cult of Apple, and the Engineering of Enlightenment

Apple founder Steve Jobs's visionary use of media to explain technology to a hungry culture has created a de facto religion, says University of Notre Dame business professor Brett T. Robinson in his new book, *Appletopia: Media Technology and the Religious Imagination of Steve Jobs* (Baylor University Press, \$24.95 cloth, August 15, 2013).

"The Renaissance Man from Los Altos found a way to imitate God by endowing a cold lifeless bundle of circuits with a soul," Robinson says. A unique combination of left- and right- brain, Jobs provided the meaning that people were eager to find in the burgeoning technological revolution. He re-imagined technology not as a dehumanizing force but as spiritually liberating. He believed that the computer was for more than crunching code, it was meant to be an aesthetic experience.

Yet Apple's romantic notions of self-fulfillment in the form of enlightened machines have resulted in a device lifestyle that breeds internet addiction, hollow relationships, and short attention spans. Jobs spent his life trying to resolve the contradiction that the more we use media technology the more our interior lives shrivel, says Robinson. "Jobs never lost his inner Buddhist monk. He confronted the paradox by adhering to the tenets of Eastern spirituality, imagining technology as a tool for expanding human consciousness rather than diminishing it."

Apple stores have become modern-day shrines—the \$7 million shimmering glass cube on Fifth Avenue is one of the most photographed landmarks in New York. Examining Apple iconography, Robinson shows how it conflates technology and the sacred. Apple's advertising campaigns, branding messages, product design and store layout are emblems of a culture that has adopted technology as a religion.

Whether iMacs, iPhones or iPods, Apple offers its acolytes a way to fulfill the human desire for transcendence. "When the shared sense of transcendence recedes from the wonders of nature and the baroque cathedrals of religion, enchantment is sought elsewhere," Robinson says. The number of people turning to technology in search of transcendent experiences illustrates what it means to be human in the age of machines.

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About the Author

Brett T. Robinson is a Visiting Professor of Marketing in the Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre Dame. Dr. Robinson is a graduate of Notre Dame where he studied marketing and English literature. His doctorate is from the University of Georgia where he helped establish the New Media Institute, a program for exploring the critical, commercial and creative dimensions of innovative digital media technology. Dr. Robinson has industry experience in advertising, public relations and digital media management. He has worked in several industries including consumer packaged goods, professional sports, and manufacturing in a variety of marketing communications roles. Robinson's interests include consumer culture theory and the integration of the liberal arts with business teaching and research. Dr. Robinson lives with his wife, Danielle, and four children, John, Joseph, Anna, and Michael, in South Bend.

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by Brett T. Robinson

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