Escape, Erase, Entangle

Three Aesthetic Regimes Re-composing the Californian Ideology

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, Milan Design Week had an unusual exhibitor: Google. Its first time in Milan, Google's vice president of hardware design waxed lyrical about its reasons for attending:

> People think that aesthetics is making something pretty, and it's really not. Aesthetics is about igniting our senses, to take a moment to sense and feel I think we're all craving that a little bit … My team's job is to figure out what it feels like to hold Google in your hand … We're here at design week. It's the first time Google has a presence in Milan, and we're very excited … As technology progresses, it needs to be closer to us. What is the design language for Google? Bold and optimistic, human in our forms, our colors, our shapes, so we translated that into textures, tactility, fabrics, soft colors, things that are approachable and human to the core … I think technology will eventually be invisible. The design challenge is to make that transition smooth and beautiful. (Google, 2018)

In 2019, Google went back to Milan. And things had escalated:

> Form follows feeling … space actually affects people … design matters … it's why we spend the time making the decisions we do … Those things that we as designers intuit, neuroscience is now proving to have an effect. Google created an exhibition that is showing design's impact on our biology … When you have a heightened aesthetic experience, a sunrise, a piece of music, things that really elevate your everyday experiences, they change you, they change your biology, they change your mood, they change your emotion … The goal [of the Google exhibition] is to see how people resonate with space and to really find out whether what they think they resonate with is what their body is actually resonating with … Where does your physiology feel most peaceful, I think is what people are searching for …

> We've always known this … but we haven't been able to quantify it … This is about data used as a mirror back to yourself … data is just a bunch of numbers and we wanted to make it artistic in its expression … Technology has the ability to make you know yourself better … the problems of the future are only going to become more complicated, the solutions have to happen in this collaboration of technology, the arts and science. (Google, 2019)

So: form, function, aesthetics, sensibility, invisibility, beauty, affect, neuroscience, biology, physiology, quantification, technology. Google's description of the centrality of design to its activities is an unusually explicit example of what we explore in this essay: the ways in which the social and political power of technology is fundamentally related to the ways in which a kind of aesthetic 'resonance' is actively generated through its workings. To the ways in which it—indeed—works to "ignite our senses." Put simply, we want to explore how objects do not work upon our bodies and subjectivities solely due their functional capacities, the semiotic meanings they communicate, or their specific material agencies, but also because of their aesthetic form. Of course, this is not the usual view. Typically, Google's focus on "igniting our senses" is considered a kind of ideological gloss to the real (socio-economic and political) bases of their power. As a distraction, as mere advertising. This reading reflects a more general wish to divide the aesthetic and the political into two separate spheres of sociality, maintaining aesthetics as something purer than politics. For example, while social theory has long considered the aesthetic practices of authoritarian polities, it has typically done so in order to stress the danger of that process, arguing that this represents merely an instrumentalization of aesthetics as a form of camouflage that both enables violence and debases the aesthetic. As the power of technology companies like Google continues to grow, this is also a prominent reaction to their deployment of aesthetic sensibilities: 'The aestheticization of technology is dangerous.'

In this essay, we seek to nuance that view. While the (aesthetic or otherwise) politics of contemporary technology certainly poses dangers, our goal is to situate the aesthetic practices at the heart of that politics as something more than a form of instrumentalization. Put differently, we articulate how the aesthetic qualities of technological objects are both reflections of, and increasingly constitutive of, our sense of the troubles facing the world, as well as its future promises. In this view, Google's attention to aesthetics is not simple ideological camouflage but a co-produced vision of an alternative relationship to technology building a 'better' set of human-machine entanglements (Jasanoff, 2004). It is about a struggle to compose a novel kind of resonance with the technological in the face of its current alienating consequences. Now, to make this claim does not imply Google is a place of innocence. When a corporation speaks about how aesthetic experiences "change you … [and] your biology," the implications are dramatic. More so when we reflect on the ways

in which Google's algorithms animate military drones and the dynamics of surveillance capitalism.

In our view, however, addressing those political dangers cannot be achieved by denying the ways in which aesthetics are built into the technological. Instead, examples like Google require we shift our definition of aesthetics. Aesthetics does not refer to an attribute (e.g., an essential quality of art) nor the psychological-emotional-affective states such attributes might evoke. Rather, as underscored in the introduction to this volume aesthetics practices are doing and undoing of sensorial perceptions. More specifically aesthetics refers to "a mode of experience that rests on the directness and immediacy of sensuous perception" (Berleant, 2010, p. 195). For example, goosebumps was Theodor Adorno's favored image for the aesthetic experience (Adorno, 1997, p. 331).[1] Aesthetics is thus something inescapably embedded across social ecologies and the appreciation of which thus demands an "openness to experience while judgement is suspended" (Berleant 2010, pp. 149–53). Such a position requires that the aesthetic be connected to 'sensibility,' 'sensuality' and 'sensations' rather than intellectualist evaluations of aesthetic experience and, more importantly, that "nothing in the human world is excluded" from this understanding of aesthetics (Berleant 2010, p. 46). Following this, the politicality of aesthetics is self-evident in its capacity to produce modes of resonant experience that attract or repel us from particular modes of ordering the world. Seen in this regard, the intimate aesthetic relationship we possess with technology is not simply an imposition upon our lives, artificially placed there by the powerful, but something far deeper and whose consequences—we think—are being underestimated in debates over the future of technological politics.

To explore all this, we move in several stages. We begin by discussing the impression that we are increasingly alienated from the world through our technological enmeshing. But our focus is on the degree of generality of this sentiment and the ways it even extends into those who work at technology companies like Google, not solely as a fear for their business model, but also as a personal experience of those who make real its activities. This move highlights the decline of the socio-political "resonance" once vested in the so-called Californian Ideology (Barbrook and Cameron 1996). To trace that decline, we draw on Hartmut Rosa's conceptualization of resonance, putting it into conversation with earlier discussions of the relevance of a certain "sensual credibility" to the functioning (or not) of society (Kluge and Negt 2016). The bulk of our paper then proceeds discuss how the Californian Aesthetic is

1 In his words: "Ultimately, aesthetic comportment is to be defined as the capacity to shudder, as if goosebumps were the first aesthetic image. What later came to be called subjectivity, freeing itself from the blind anxiety of the shudder, is at the same time the shudder's won development; life in the subject is nothing but what shudders, the reaction to the total spell that transcends the spell."

being re-composed and novel technological material aesthetics are emerging in its wake. More specifically, we focus on three examples of aesthetic regimes that are being deployed across the technology industry—which we term regimes of escape, erasure, and entanglement—and unpack the social resonances these regimes generate so to grasp how they are 're-enchanting' the technologies that permeate our worlds. Finally, by way of conclusion, we touch on the politics of these regimes and in particular highlight the ways in which they afford possibilities for contestation and composition. In so doing, we extend the argument beyond the decline of the Californian Ideology and its re-composition in the three epistemic regimes discussed, underscoring the more general implications for our conceptualization of the connection between political agency and aesthetics.

Our analysis of aesthetic regimes informed by an analysis of images, videos, and statements by companies. We have worked bottom up, in quasi-ethnographic fashion, to identify our three regimes. We have assembled something we might term a "cabinet of curiosities" (Latour, 2002, p. 23) that helps us establish how technology is being re-enchanted by the tech industry through its marketing but also through its self-reflections. Working in this manner has allowed us to explore the re-composition of the Californian aesthetic through the multiple media involved but most significantly, through their inter-connections and the manifold connections they therefore open towards their audiences. Such openness to a variety of sources is essential for any approach to aesthetics that sees it at work in affective, contextual atmospheres rather than through an isolated channel. "There are no visual media" as Mitchell puts it (2015, p. 125). The aesthetic regimes we delineate, reflect the processes and relations we found most relevant in our cabinet of curiosities. Other regimes could exist and might emerge. We claim neither exclusivity nor eternity for the regimes we outline. Rather our ambition is to exemplify the political salience of aesthetic resonances that we found to be particularly densely present and to do so in view of underscoring the political openings they afford.

2. THE DECLINE OF THE CALIFORNIAN AESTHETIC

If acceleration is the problem, then resonance might be the solution.
– Hartmut Rosa

Classically, the technology industry has been described as subsumed within a so-called Californian Ideology. This ideology "promiscuously combines the free-wheeling spirit of the hippies and the entrepreneurial zeal of the yuppies" achieved through "a profound faith in the emancipatory potential of the new information technologies" (Barbrook and Cameron 1996, p. 45). In our view, however, this image

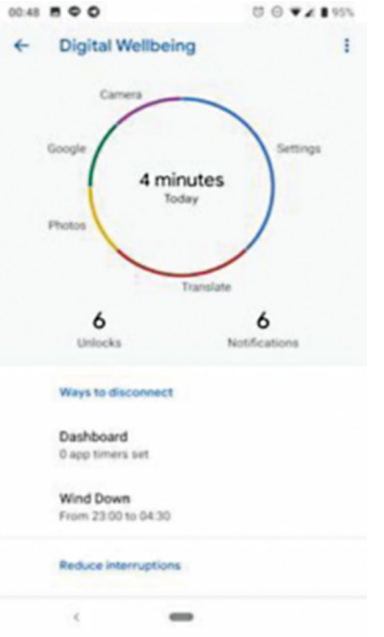
of the technological should not be reduced to 'ideology' but instead to a certain Californian *Aesthetic* which has—we want to say—declined in its socio-political resonance. As Saara Tuusa (2018) has written, the Californian Aesthetic is prominently linked to an aesthetics of futurism and modernism. As she puts it, "futurism's influence on the digital code is undeniable. In the beginning of the 20th century, with the rise of industrialization, the belief in technological progress' ability to emancipate the human race had unprecedented proof." Within this, "the aesthetics of the future" was "defined by the materials linked to industrial progress—chrome, shiny glass, stainless steel, electronic bright colors—and a hard-boiled belief in the perpetual future." These forms were linked to modernist design and its prioritization of "functional requirements instead of traditional aesthetics. As a result, modernist design was simple and clean, based on rationality and functionality, always aiming for a seamless and purposeful experience." This minimalist and functionally-focused aesthetic of the future is directly replicated in the aesthetic design of contemporary technologies. But:

> Today, the dream of the digital has been realized, the aesthetic seeping everywhere. The digital code does not signal a future anymore, it has become the status quo. It reflects the desires and needs of a bygone era, where digitization was only a fantastical dream—not a mundane reality. (Tuusa, 2018)

The result is alienation. A feeling that we have "lost touch" with the world and the realization that utopian visions of the technological were always already myths. A feeling that technology offers no route towards a different kind of future because, well, that future is already here. Importantly, such a perspective is not necessarily reflexively perceived. Indeed, it would be an error to suggest that we can rationally diagnose precisely what is 'wrong' with the technological. Instead, our perception of technological aporia (or danger) seems related to what Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (2016) termed "sensual credibility." For Negt and Kluge, this term referred to the ways in which the proletariat could 'sense' something wrong with the world despite being unable to reflexively articulate it: "the masses" who "live with experiences of violence, oppression, [and] exploitation … possess material, sensual evidence of the restriction of possibilities in their lives … Accordingly, the resistance to this restriction has a sensual credibility" (Kluge and Negt, 2016, p. 43). In their view, the restrictions that the proletariat's enmeshing in the logic of capitalism places on the possibility of rational or reflexive (i.e. strategic) resistance to that suffering means that their anger and resentment is affectively felt and experienced rather than thought and reasoned. The sensual and affective is therefore located at the core of their resistance. It affords it the 'credibility' required for resistance to be possible. This too seems to be the status quo. We 'feel' that something is wrong with our technological entanglements but quite what 'it' is harder to define. Electoral interference, autonomous weapons systems and surveillance: sure, these are real and press-

ing problems. But those dangers are things that *could* (bracketing the reasons for why they are not) be dealt with through regulation. The displeasure we feel with the technological, however, goes deeper towards a fundamental alienation with the ontological place of technology in our lives: with its goals, telos, meanings, and—above all—*futures*.

Figure 1: Google's wellbeing (…)
A set of 'digital wellbeing' tools now provided in Google's Android platform.



Source: The Android Open Source Project

What appears to be missing—in short—is Rosa's aforementioned "resonance." For Rosa, the production of resonance is central to overcoming the alienating effects of social acceleration. In his view, the ways in which social systems are—or are

not—entangled, fused or knitted together in a meaningful manner rests on whether or not forms of resonance exist therein. According to Rosa (2016, p. 269), humans are "resonating bodies" who find meaning not solely 'in-relation' to the world (that is to other objects, people, and ideals) in a static or fixed sense but in the 'movements' or 'exchanges' that developing resonant relationships with open up. As he puts it, both the subject and her world "are formed, coined by and even constituted in and through their reciprocal relation" (p. 62). In this:

> Resonance is a form of relation to the world that is constituted through af←fection and e→motion, intrinsic interest and perceived self-efficacy, in which subject and world at the same time touch and transform each other. (Rosa, 2016, p. 298)

The arrows in the terms af←fection and e→motion signal the ability to be affectively connected to the world and to actively affect it. They are especially important here for stressing that emotional and affective events require a transformatory dynamic that 'shifts' the locus of the subject. In colloquial terms, we want to be 'moved' by something in the world. As such, "resonance is no echo, but a relation of answer; it presupposes that both sides speak with [their] own voices" (p. 298). Resonance is not achieved through similarity or evoking a known state but, rather, through sensual interactions: the subject and her world must be "*'closed' or consistent enough in order to speak with their own voices, and open enough to be affected*" (p. 298 emphasis added). Resonance is thus about "bidirectional vibration" (p. 279) vis-à-vis corporeality, affectivity, cognition, etc. In all this—to rephrase—"resonance is not agreement; resonance is in between consonance and dissonance" (p. 279).

Now resonance is, we want to suggest, centrally constituted through our *aesthetic* engagement with the world. This becomes clear in the predominant place of art and design in discussions of objects that create affect, emotion, and resonance within individuals. Art is said to 'move' us (for whatever reason). But when we move away from the separation of art into a separate sphere of sociality to politics and technology, it becomes possible to also consider the technological as an object with an aesthetic that does (or does not) produce resonance. And with this, we turn full circle. The critics who originally coined the term the Californian Ideology, Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, closed their discussion by offering alternatives to what they saw as its pathologies. Specifically, they advocated for the emergence of new "digital artisans" who would "reconnect themselves with the theory and practice of productive art" to become "artist-engineers" or "designers of the next stage of modernity" (Barbrook and Cameron, 1996, p. 68). In this, they would "create a new machine aesthetic for the information age" in which they would "push beyond the limitations of both the technologies and their own creativity" (Barbrook and Cameron, 1996, p. 68). Notably, they advocated specifically that these digital artisans push away from the Californian Aesthetic's centralization in the social and political culture of the United States (favoring instead a 'European' model) in order to create new forms of reso-

nance that could counter the muting of the world. The goal was to re-infuse the digital or technological with intensity and enthusiasm, countering the anomie, blasé indifference and undoing of affective relations that they diagnosed Silicon Valley as having provoked. What we want to suggest, however, is that despite their diagnosis of a certain "fatalism" within the Californian Ideology, it is paradoxically Silicon Valley that has taken up their challenge (with, perhaps, others in Shenzhen) and begun to actively situate their 'digital artisans' at the center of its activities in order to re-compose the Californian Aesthetic on different terms. The accelerating, capitalist 'de-aesthetization machine' muting society somewhat paradoxically becomes a 're-aesthetization machine' (Reckwitz, 2012, p. 35). Such a suggestion dovetails well with the perspective expressed in the hope that 'digital artisans' may take technology beyond the Californian Ideology. As they pick up the task, they become 'changemakers' not only for the tech industry but also for the mediated, post-modern, contemporary 'digital' society more generally (Arvidsson, 2019). We now proceed to looking more closely at some examples of the aesthetic regimes that are emerging and recovering the resonance that the declining Californian Aesthetic can no longer generate.

3. AESTHETIC REGIMES RE-ENCHANTING TECHNOLOGY

In the wake of the decline of the Californian Ideology, the task is not making technology 'good' but making it feel good. It's not *just* about building ethical algorithms, using technology to better the treatment of the disenfranchised, or diverting its use away from autonomous weapons systems. The trouble is conceiving of a place for technology within the ecological entanglements that cut across the gamut of world politics that gives us a resonant sense of purpose and the possibility of imagining the possible futures that we are moving towards, however contingently and chaotically. The challenge for the tech industry and its digital artisans, to speak with Barbrook and Cameron, is therefore to change our 'sense' of technology. But how do they tackle that challenge? How are technology corporations reacting? In what ways are they re-enchanting our technologically pregnant worlds? How do they make technology speak to us? And how does this contribute (or not) to composing resonance? The answer to these questions could not conceivably be singular. Rather, if we imagine a deeply competitive, constantly shapeshifting tech industry where each company puts digital artisans to work and indeed many of these artisans themselves are (or become) companies in their own right, what we see is more like a small army of artisans, each proposing and marketing its own aesthetics. Instead of a singular aesthetics, we are facing a plethora of aesthetics shifting at an ever-accelerating pace. These aesthetics emerge from the Californian Ideology in decline and so are closely associated with it. They are in close connection with the tech industry. They draw on its aesthetic codes but are re-purposing it, and moving it beyond the image of

an unproblematized emancipatory future. Shades and nuances are correcting and masking the defects that made that aesthetic lose its efficacy. This is what we mean by re-composing of the Californian Aesthetic. But, can we be more specific about how this multifarious re-composing is operating and how the resonances it generates re-enchant the world?

To gauge the significance of the re-composing of the aesthetics underpinning the Californian Ideology, and the resonances it is generating, requires fixing it and finding ways of dealing with its complexity. One way of doing so would be to work top down, that is from and with theory, using sharp concepts to "carve out portions of sensible reality" and associating them with specific processes and relationship and so constitute "footholds" from which the significance of the re-composition can be approached and assessed (Brown and Tucker, 2010, p. 235). An opposite way of handling this is to begin from below, upwards as it were, accepting and working with the flux and complexity, embracing the "the messy *informe* of the ongoing-ness of process" (Highmore, 2010, p. 123). Making sense begins with the spaces where the re-composing appears most dense. This latter route is the one we follow. More specifically, we focus on three aesthetics that are particularly densely present in the current efforts by the tech industry to generate resonances for technology beyond the Californian Aesthetic. Our claim is neither that these aesthetic regimes are exclusive and somehow representative nor that they are unchanging. Rather, this is an exploration of densities appearing from our perspective. Working with these densities is a heuristic allowing us to describe the (indeed empirical, material, commercial, political, aesthetic) processes re-composing the Californian Aesthetic and so to open them for analysis and intervention while (and by) accepting their un-containability. To do this, we proceed focusing on how three densely present aesthetics make technology sensible and resonant, and secure sensuous credibility. Connecting these aesthetics to political practices, we sketch the contours of three aesthetic regimes: escape, erase, and entangle and their (respectively) nihilist, conservative, and symbiotic politics.

3.1 Escape

In 2018, Elon Musk's commercial spaceflight venture Space X conducted a test of its rocket Falcon Heavy. Jarringly—however—a Tesla Roadster sportscar produced by another of Musk's corporations was mounted on top of the rocket. A mock astronaut was seated in the car, which now orbits the sun (Figure 1). Generally, these instances of commercial extravagance are seen as symptoms of the narcistic self-perception of those who work in the technology industry as 'visionaries.' Indeed, critiquing Musk's stunt, Alice Gorman has written that:

> It feeds into a cult of personality which is at odds with the 'space for all humanity' narrative … And let's face it, there's no getting away from the fact that a red sports car is all about boys and their toys. The car is a signifier of wealth and masculinity. We've been trying so hard to leave behind the era where the archetypal astronaut was an elite white male, and we've just stepped right back into it. (cited in David, 2018)

Figure 2: Tesla's "Starman" launched into orbit around the sun.

Source: SpaceX, Falcon Heavy Demo Mission, CC0, 2018

The critique here is surely true. Especially given the abundant examples of Musk's indulgence for the misogynistic, meme-ified and flippant. Nonetheless, at the root of this event and the aesthetics it encapsulates is something more. SpaceX encapsulates a growing technological nihilism. Indeed, it is not without irony that so many of Musk's ventures involve a focus on ecological catastrophe. Tesla has done more to promote electrical vehicles than any other corporation, not to mention its development of the Tesla Powerwall: an off-the-grid storage solution for electrical energy. SolarCity is one of the largest providers of solar electricity. And SpaceX is ultimately founded on escaping humanity's reliance on Earth by allowing us to become a "multi-planetary" species, first by travelling to and colonizing Mars. Indeed, Musk once described his motivation for SpaceX as revolving around the fact that there are hypothetically "many dead one-planet civilizations … out there in the cosmos that never made it to the other planets and ultimately extinguished themselves or were destroyed by external factors" (Biong, 2019). He specially quotes

the late astronomer Carl Sagan's words that "our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves" (Biong, 2019). And, with those words, Musk ultimately proposes himself to be the figure who will save us from ourselves.

There is little romanticism in that venture, however. Musk acknowledges that "your probability of dying on Mars is much higher than on Earth" (Pengelly, 2018). There is a distinct aesthetic shift here from the NASA-era of space exploration. In *Star Trek*, which in popular imaginary perhaps best encapsulates that older aesthetic, expeditions into space sought to expand humanity's knowledge by exploring "strange new worlds" but *not* to abandon the earth. Indeed, in the lore of *Star Trek*, earth "enjoys one of the most advanced, peaceful and materially pleasant cultures of any known." (http://www.trekipedia.com/file/EarthTrekipedia, n.d.). Earth remains home. For SpaceX, its missions to Mars will eventually replace Earth and its immutable problems. If we stay, we will die, so the goal must be to leave. Indeed, Lila Moore (2018) links the symbolism of Musk's Tesla roadster floating around in space to that of biblical revelation through comparisons to the horse, horseman, and rider of the apocalypse. This aesthetics of escape is also firmly situated within a transhumanist perspective at a literal level. Another of Musk's ventures, Neuralink, seeks to create implantable brain-machine interfaces. Neuralink's first goal is to treat neurological diseases but, more broadly, Musk sees it as a means to human enhancement that will create a "symbiosis" between humans and artificial intelligence, with the latter otherwise being seen as a further existential threat to humanity. Again, we must escape ourselves in order to slowly save ourselves.

Notably, the aesthetics of SpaceX are quite literally professionally designed into its products. The spacesuits worn by its astronauts were designed by José Fernández who has more usually worked to craft costumes for films like Men in Black, Black Panther and Ironman, as well as the electronic music duo Daft Punk. Interestingly, Fernández was not aware he was designing spacesuits for real-world space travel, instead assuming he was commissioned to work on another film production (Guy, 2020). SpaceX thus mixes those fictional influences into its aesthetic practices quite directly: a strange mixture between Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, with its ultimately sinister gleaming glass and whites, and the Arnold Schwarzenegger-starring *Total Recall*, with its mix of dirt, conspiracy, and sleaze (that is set—not without irony—on a colony on Mars). A set of aesthetic practices constituting a regime simultaneously hinting at dystopia and salvation.

If acceleration is the problem, then the resonance offered as a solution by the aesthetic of escape is that of a grand 'interruption' or 'break' from history. While this echoes to some degree the discourse of disruption at the heart of the Californian Aesthetic, it jettisons the good life. It is the Californian version of Year Zero. Musk personifies this aesthetic. When he embraces the use of cryptocurrencies by 'average'

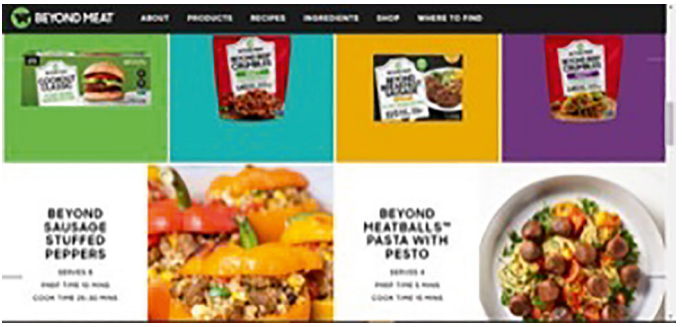
investors, he acknowledges the corruption of the global financial system and situates himself as somehow outside that sphere. When Musk smokes weed with the popular libertarian podcast host Joe Rogan, he does not do so in homage to the Californian Aesthetic's past debt to "the freewheeling spirit of the hippies" but—instead—with a serene sense of self-irony (Barbrook and Cameron, 1996, p. 45). When he posts endless memes on Twitter or produces novelty flamethrowers to advertise his ventures (not least one named the Boring company), he articulates this spirit of meaninglessness that resonates directly with the experiences of many who refer to him as "Daddy Musk" (a trend that even the most skilled of psychoanalysts would have difficulty interpreting given the self-conscious irony in which the term is used). And while it is straightforward to critique the seemingly juvenile nature of these endeavors, they constitute and restore a sensual credibility for technology based on the resonances of an aesthetic of escape and replacement, associated with nihilistic political practices. The image of the successful white, male who can afford to be the provocative and ego-centric boy with toys supports and lends force to this resonance. Indeed, it resonates far beyond other white boys with toys. As such, it would be naïve to belittle or ignore the salience of Musk's aesthetics of escape and the nihilism associated with it. Instead, the power that it holds over many imaginaries deserves to be explored and engaged.

3.2 Erase

In stark contrast to an aesthetics of technological escape is that of technological erasure. If the transhumanist dreams of abandoning the world embraces our 'becoming-technological' in order to save ourselves, an aesthetics of erasure scrubs the technological from visibility. Two seemingly opposed sectors encapsulate this aesthetic: environmental and security technologies. To begin with the environmental, consider the company Beyond Meat, which believes:

> There is a better way to feed our future and that the positive choices we all make, no matter how small, can have a great impact on our personal health and the health of our planet. By shifting from animal to plant-based meat, we can positively impact four growing global issues: human health, climate change, constraints on natural resources and animal welfare. (www.beyondmeat.com).

Figure 3: Example of BeyondMeat's product marketing.



Source: www.beyondmeat.com

Beyond Meat seeks to produce replacements for meat products "without compromise" in the sense that the products will be indistinguishable from the 'real' thing (Figure 3). Going further, Beyond Meat insists that its products *are* meat: "meat is really made up of five constituent parts: the amino acids, lipids, carbohydrates, minerals, and water. They're all actually present in plants. What we're doing is building a piece of meat directly from those plants … we are delivering meat" (Sexton 2016, 66). The hyper-technological modes through which this 'meat' is produced, however, is seemingly deliberately erased from view. In all this, Beyond Meat is fundamentally conservative, especially compared to alternatives. The traditional environmental approach has been to abandon meat entirely and accept the aesthetic changes this demands to our lives. While often bound-up with romanticism for a less-exploitative past (or images of the 'harmony' of 'traditional' society), this stance is explicitly political and radically so in its requirements to abandon the status quo. By contrast, those more attuned to a Musk-esque aesthetics of escape seek to entirely overcome our reliance on food, advocating for 'meal replacements' that fulfil our nutritional requirements in a functional, utilitarian, and often 'tasteless' way. The development in Silicon Valley of the product known as Soylent) "takes a few things off our plates" while keeping it all. "Protein, carbohydrates, lipids, and micronutrients: each Soylent product contains a complete blend of everything the body needs to thrive" (https://soylent.com). By contrast, and again erasing the presence of technology, *Beyond Meat* plays with an aesthetic of similitude that seeks to subordinate even the most technologically advanced product to human culture. Again, it seeks to address ecological catastrophe "without compromise" in the sense of allowing all to go on as if nothing had changed. Technology gains resonance here for its capacity to assist us in maintain our status quo. Eating meat is not a problem in this utopia.

A second articulation of this aesthetic of erasure is found across security technology. Historically, practices linked to security politics (war-fighting, policing, etc.) have been interwoven with technological imaginaries extensively. This is still evident in the ways governments parade their latest high-tech fighter jets, drones, or weapons systems. However, as security politics has proliferated and infiltrated almost every aspect of our lives, such an aesthetic becomes problematical. Armed drones gleaming in the sky with aggressive names and sharp angles are acceptable when they are flying over far-away places to ruthlessly attack clear-cut enemies. They are less aesthetically acceptable at home where security technologies are increasingly—thus—being erased from view. Virtual fencing technologies, for example, draw on a combination of cameras, sensors, and other technologies hidden discretely around cities to feed data to algorithms that can 'automatically' detect intrusions into protected spaces. In this they allow citizens to 'forget' the politics of insecurity and live a depoliticized life of aesthetic continuity and normality (Austin and Leander, forthcoming). At the same time, these technologies can be 'visibly' articulated in the aesthetic practices of governments, commercial actors and others, who cite their presence in speeches, advertise their effectiveness and reassure publics that technology is working 'behind the scenes' to keep them safe.

Figure 4: Nofence's description of its livestock monitoring technologies.

Source: www.nofence.no

Indeed, there is a core tension within this aesthetics of erasure: For the tech industry to produce resonance it must make us 'aware' that it is facilitating the smooth workings of our lives but do so unobtrusively, even invisibly. To see this, consider Douglas Rushkoff's (2019) manifesto *Team Human*, which tackles what he

terms the "antihuman" agenda of modern technology. This includes the usual list of fears: robots taking our jobs, algorithms controlling attention spans; social media destroying democracy. Rushkoff's suggests that technology has forced us into a situation in which:

> We begin living as if we were in a shopping mall or casino, where day and night—as well as desire—are programmed by the environment. Everything is strategized by something or someone, even though the walls, lights, ceiling, and signage appear like features of the natural world. We are being optimized by something outside ourselves, toward purposes we don't even know … [The] lighting in the office changes to increase our productivity during the afternoon "lull." Our digital world is like the ultimate casino in this respect. It may have begun as a series of tools for specific purposes—spreadsheets, word processors, calculators, messaging, calendars, contact lists—but these tools went from being analogs or metaphors for real-life activities into being their replacements. Our technologies change from being the tools humans use into the environments in which humans function (2019, section 29).

His manifesto is a plea to reverse this flow: to return technologies to "being the tools humans use." This again is a conservative reading of the (superior) place of the 'human' that more-or-less denies that humans have always been entangled parts of the "environments" in which we function (a house being—indeed—a technology). Against this, the aesthetic of erasure seeks to build resonance in which the 'human' firmly controls the technological and—preferably—banishes it from sight. This is perhaps best seen in an example of its deployment that fuses the ecological (i.e. Beyond Meat) and the securitizing (i.e. virtual fences): the use of technology to control cattle and other livestock. A Norwegian company—Nofence—has developed a technology that allows livestock to graze without fences being installed to contain them. It does so by placing GPS sensors around the livestock's necks. If an animal passes outside a virtually designated 'zone' in which they are allowed to graze, they receive a warning and/or electric shock via their collars. Generally, technologies like these are cited as being useful for reducing labor costs, improving herd management and protecting environmentally-sensitive areas. As Nofence puts it, the tool "safeguards the welfare of the animals and contributes to sustainable agriculture" (https://www.nofence.no/en/). Aesthetically, moreover, they allow for the picture-postcard image of freely and 'naturally' grazing animals to dominate our landscapes. The at first glance amusing but otherwise rather sinister image (Figure 4) of a goat being cybernetically linked to satellites and invisible forcefields is erased in all this, of course. Instead, resonance is generated here by reference to a return to 'traditional' modes of farming and a purer symbiosis between humans and nature. In line with Rushkoff, high-technology is converted here into a tool that

can be productively used to manage certain aspect of our lives but which—quite literally in this case—does not 'corrupt' or become our environment.

3.3 Entangle

Back to Google. Its desire to "ignite our senses" represents an aesthetic of 'entanglement' that avoids the more extreme desire to either depart the world and its limits through the technological (the aesthetic of escape) or to return to a purer human realm scrubbed of the technological (the aesthetic of erasure). In part, this is necessitated by the focus of its innovations. Google's tools are very intimate to our lives: smartphones, calendars, mailboxes, search engines, maps. As such, these tools cannot easily be scrubbed from view (at least for the moment) and Google must instead search for a distinct (from the futurism and modernism of the originary Californian Aesthetic) mode of aesthetically resonantly integrating them into our lives. Indeed, at the core of this aesthetic of entanglement is a 'domestication' of the digital that attempts to render the technological an unexceptional object. This is seen—first—in the diversity of Google's design activities. Apparently, only 25% of Google's hardware design team have previous designed electronic devices. Instead, the rest have experience designing bicycles or clothing, and Ivy Ross, Google's Vice President of Hardware Design, began as a jewelry designer. In integrating this expertise, Google seems to aim at situating the digital in symmetrical terms to that which we consider other technological objects that we do not see as being fundamentally dangerous (espresso machines, electric bicycles and so on).

Indeed, it is interesting that Ross has expressed an ontological understanding of human–machine relations that is not in its essence dissimilar to that described by social theorists (among many Haraway, 1991, Bijker and Law, 2004)—focused on the ways the human and the non-human cannot be separated but are instead fundamentally entangled. She writes that though "people are scared of [technological] change" it has to be accepted that "*everything is technology in a way*. We think of it now as screens, but as humans evolve there are new technologies that offer us new things. I want to reshape people's definitions of technology" (Wadsworth, 2018). For Ross, the challenge is thus not returning technologies to "being the tools humans use" but finding a balance in which technology provides greater "sensory experience" because "in some ways we are numbed to feelings in general and technology is reflecting that. The more time people spend on screens, the more they will want three-dimensionality" (Wadsworth, 2018). This is reflected in Google's use of soft color palettes, fabrics (rather than metals) and sounds that evoke the natural world more than the futurist Californian Aesthetic of the technological (Figure 5). However, it is important to stress that Google's arrival at this aesthetic was not a straightforward process but one of constant experimentation.

Figure 5: Early (left) and late (right) designs for Google Glass, depicting the shift from a minimalist and futuristic technological aesthetic (that of the classical Californian Ideology) towards an aesthetic of entanglement privileging soft colors, light, and forms (i.e. sunglasses) that domesticate the high-technological into our lives.

Source: www.google.com

To stay with Ivy, it is notable that she first arrived at Google to take over its development of the now defunct Google Glass. Google Glass was intended to operate as an augmented reality tool in which a small screen built-in to eyeglasses would project information and tools more usually accessed via our smartphones directly in front of our eyes. A true merging of the digital and the physical. Google Glass was not successful, however, in large part because potential consumers were not only uncertain about its functionality (it was originally released in 2012) but more because they disliked its design and fashion aesthetic. As one critique noted, Google Glass faced the problem that wearable technologies:

> Will challenge the tech industry to be more than a pair of white earbuds, to weave themselves even deeper into our clothes and our culture. Could you imagine just one label selling khakis at Macy's? Of course not. Hire a few geniuses, and tech is easy. But fashion is a means of personal expression and identity, making it an infinitely ebbing task that no one company will ever be able to develop alone. (Wilson, 2014)

Ross was hired from the art and design world to help solve these problems, and while she failed with Google Glass, the tweaks she made to that product (shifting it from looking as if it was a *Star-Trek*-esque headset towards integrating more primary colors and soft frames) fed directly into her future roles developing its other products. Indeed, the lessons Google learned fed directly into its establishment of its Design Laboratory that sought to understand how it could build resonance through entangling with fashion "as a means of personal expression and identity" (https://design.google). The result was the products it showcased at Milan Design Week, which we opened with, and which have steered it towards an aesthetic of entanglement

privileging an ever-deeper expansion of its understanding of human beings at aesthetic, affective, cultural, psychological, and personal levels. Again, Ivy encapsulates that logic in her words that while "some people feel fashion is frivolous" but "if you really tap into society, and can have a feeling of where as a society we want to go, fashion is a way to express that–and I was always looking at technology to get there" (Wilson, 2014). That shift ultimately represented Google conceiving of itself not only as a technology company but also as a design company preoccupied with the 'crafting' of objects: "technology won't eclipse craft. You don't have to make that choice" (Wadsworth, 2018). At least within this aesthetic of entanglement, both should be actively embraced.

The aesthetic of entanglement generates resonance—then—through affectively re-composing technological objects as something intrinsically part of us and not at odds with our taste in fashion, music, decoration, etc. In this, rather than situating technology as a mode of replacing the human (an aesthetics of escape), emancipating the human (in the classical Californian Ideology), or fundamental danger (an aesthetics of erasure), the aesthetic of entanglement seeks to define the technological as something 'neutral' that can be designed happily into our lives, without making grand claims about its possibilities. The political practice embedded here is one then, perhaps, of the 'symbiosis' that is rhetorically characteristic of liberal democratic values in which extremes must be reconciled and the future something that cannot be predefined but which must be negotiated-with. Of course, the usual banal critiques of such a politics being depoliticizing apply. Nonetheless, the 'democratization' of the technological through this aesthetic is clearly one of the most prominent ways in which the technology industry has shifted in the context of its fragmentation of resonance, as we saw in our earlier discussion of moves towards co-design and prod-users. Indeed, it extends far beyond Google. Apple and Microsoft are veering in similar directions, as are innumerable smaller technology companies who explicitly describe their products as 'artisan' objects. Ultimately, the aesthetic of entanglement is one that seeks to design *us* into the technological, and vice-versa.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE AESTHETIC POLITICS OF TECHNOLOGY

The three aesthetic regimes we have just discussed are re-composing the Californian Ideology, re-enchanting technology in its wake. This said, they vary greatly in terms of the aesthetic resonances by which they do so and so the political practices with which they are therefore associated. Above we drew the contours of three emerging aesthetic regimes to describe this point. Working backwards, we concluded describing an aesthetic that *entangles* technology pervasively in contemporary life. Technology has potential in "every community, every sector and every country," as Microsoft

CEO Satya Nodella put it when introducing the Microsoft Mesh (Microsoft News, 2021). This aesthetics resonates with as symbiotic presence of technology in all political subjectivities and processes. It is an aesthetic regime that sees technology and technological expansion as inexorably connected to any and all politics. Not surprisingly, it is prominent in the big tech industry, including Google, Microsoft, Samsung, and Apple that we drew on to illustrate this point. Distinct from this, an aesthetic *erasing* technology, invisiblizing its centrality to contemporary life. Such aesthetics promise tradition untouched. It mimics, supports, and stabilizes the already existing. In that sense, its politics is conservative. As illustrated by our examples—an aesthetic of technology preserving a meat-based diet as a vegan and a conventional form of farming relying on satellite communications—, this aesthetic works well in areas where technologization is expanding but also resisted and resented as a threat and where, therefore, to misrecognize its significance is to reassure. Lastly, the aesthetic of *escape* we began with, associates technology with the move out and away from the present into an unknown future; a future that is no more problematized or engaged with than is the present. It is a nihilistic politics of sorts associated with a reluctance or refusal to engage politically or even ethically with societal concerns beyond technology itself. We associated this aesthetics with Tesla and Elon Musk's more eccentric projects, underscoring that they resonate with a fascination for and fetishization of technology that is widespread among tech innovators from the hypervisible bitcoin pioneer Vinklevoss twins to the imperceptible hacker.

Nihilism, conservatism, and symbiosis, we do not need to insist, are fundamentally different forms of politics. Engaging the aesthetic regimes that underpin them by re-enchanting technology and redistributing the sensible with regard to its place in contemporary society, therefore, is a correspondingly differentiated challenge. It is a challenge that is particularly exacting, as the aesthetic regimes we have described are never isolated or pure. They are overlapping and fuzzy. Elon Musk is known also for his proposals geared to fix humanitarian crises or move the world to sustainable energy sources that are strong engagements with the problems of contemporary society in both conservative and symbiotic ways. While rendering both analysis and politics more complicated, the fissures and frictions generated by this overlaying of aesthetic regimes are also helpful. They bring forth the contractions in practices of aesthetic politics and so become indicators of possible openings for political agency and change. Driving a wedge into the cracks might widen these openings and so pave the way for responsible and reflective re-workings the of contemporary technological aesthetics and their politics. Even if such agency may be moot for many reasons, directing attention to its possibility is crucial. Indeed, this has been the motivation and ambition of our contribution to this volume and the broader project underlying it. The commercial re-composing the Californian Ideology through commercial aesthetics that we have delved into in this chapter remains mostly overlooked and so

unproblematized. Yet, the aesthetic regimes associated with technology are becoming steadily more significant as society is becoming ever more deeply permeated by technology. The aesthetic regimes re-composing of the Californian Ideology permeate processes and practices that extend far beyond those associated with technology markets narrowly defined. Therefore, creating the openness required for prodding, problematizing, disturbing, redirecting, and (why not?) re-composing the deeply commercialized re-composing of the Californian Ideology is a worthwhile endeavor to which this chapter has contributed.

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