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## **Magicians of the Twenty-first Century: Enchantment, Domination, and the Politics of Work in Silicon Valley**

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### Abstract

What is the political theorist to make of self-characterizations of Silicon Valley as the beacon of civilization-saving innovation? Through an analysis of “tech bro” masculinity and the closely related discourses of tech icons Elon Musk and Peter Thiel, we argue that undergirding Silicon Valley’s technological utopia is an exploitative work ethic revamped for the industry’s innovative ethos. On the one hand, Silicon Valley hypothetically offers a creative response to what Max Weber describes as the disenchantment of the modern world. Simultaneously, it depoliticizes the actual work necessary for these dreams to be realized, mystifying its modes of domination.

In a 2012 commencement speech at Caltech, tech billionaire Elon Musk discussed the popular hypothesis of his childhood inspiration, author and futurist Arthur C. Clarke, in which Clarke proffers that “a sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”<sup>1</sup> Musk in turn concluded his address with an exhortation for the graduating students to become the “magicians of the twenty-first century,” yet it is often he who presents himself as a paragon of magic and technological wizardry, as the singular figure who has intentionally decided to solve the problems that are “going to most affect the future of humanity.”<sup>2</sup> Musk and Peter Thiel—another prominent Silicon Valley magnate, and one-time colleague of Musk in the early days of PayPal—are the two twenty-first century magicians whose paradigmatic high-tech visions we explore in order to understand how technological enchantment depends upon, and ultimately masks, a reliance on an exploitative work ethic.<sup>3</sup> They animate the work of their companies and the image of Silicon Valley with an innovative charisma that, to use Max Weber’s explanation of the quality, is “set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” that are “not accessible to the ordinary person.”<sup>4</sup> As we will demonstrate, Musk and Thiel deploy their utopian visions and charismatic self-representations to sustain their images as exceptional leaders who can generate enchanting projects, innovation, and results. Behind the magic, however, one finds oppressive modes of masculinity and dominating forms of the work ethic, both appropriately updated for the twenty-first century tech sector. The tension between the enchanting otherworldly visions of Silicon Valley and the domineering work processes that make them possible forms the central focus of this article.

Even with a consistent flow of news stories about the lavish lifestyles of Silicon Valley’s elite, criticism from Democratic and Republican politicians, and the exploitation of its laborers, and even as positive views of social media and large technology corporations are somewhat waning, more people think “technology companies” have a “positive effect” on the country than they do “labor unions,” “banks and other financial institutions,” “large corporations,” and the “national news media.”<sup>5</sup> What is the political theorist to make of the public visibility of Silicon Valley, the excessive behavior of its chosen few, its popular characterizations as the beacon of futuristic, enchanting innovation, its transformation of work into lifestyle, and centrally for our concerns, its mystification of labor politics and hierarchies? Following the calls of Kathi Weeks and Elizabeth Anderson for political theory and political philosophy to politicize work as a site of theoretical analysis,<sup>6</sup> we interrogate the ideology and politics of work undergirding Silicon Valley.

This article builds upon Weeks’s analysis of the work ethic under post-Fordism, asking how the subjectivization of workers and the mystification of their labor takes a distinctive form within the tech sector. We argue that Silicon Valley’s claims to enchanting horizons of technological utopia and humanity-saving space exploration depend on a version of the conventionally capitalist work ethic gussied up for the tech company, tech icon, and tech bro of the

twenty-first century. The specific milieu of Silicon Valley reshapes what Weeks conceptualizes as a general post-Fordist work ethic in her wide-ranging account, in four primary ways. First, we demonstrate how Silicon Valley supplements the traditional post-Fordist work ethic of neoliberal professionalization with a magical civilizational discourse that underwrites and obscures its attendant forms of domination. Secondly, we argue that Musk and Thiel, as two figures widely deploying this discourse to justify their own capital gains, illustrate how the work ethic becomes a personal identity, a lifestyle, and a form of self-branding. They thus demonstrate how the work ethic within the tech sector may function in more capacious ways than the self-disciplining neoliberal entrepreneur, providing a constructive purpose to the worker. Thirdly, we illustrate how the Silicon Valley work ethic evinces a form of masculinity which, on the surface, claims an opposition to traditionally dominative masculinities, while masking multiple layers of labor exploitation specific to this industry. Attention to the relationship between masculinity and the tech sector work ethic enriches Weeks's account of the gendering of the work ethic. Finally, we examine how this work ethic requires both bosses and workers to be devoted to innovation and to the company, generating a form of enthusiastic docility. We thus elaborate upon Weeks's vital framework, examining it in the context of the tech bro, the tech icon, the cyborg, and the related discourses of enchanting civilizational innovation. These characteristics of the Silicon Valley work politics and ethics render its supposedly radical dreams and "creative destruction"<sup>7</sup> impossible, fantastical, and treacherous—especially in the context of a pandemic intensifying people's reliance on tech industry innovations in many ways.

We claim that behind the self-representations of civilizational progressivism and humanity-saving fortitude among Silicon Valley elites is the refiguring of work as, on the one hand, something to be eliminated in its mundane forms, but on the other hand, something that can be redirected toward endless wonder, innovation, and growth. This refiguration depoliticizes the very work necessary for any of the industry's techno-utopian dreams to be actualized by mystifying its hierarchies, modes of domination, and power relations. While the politics of work in Silicon Valley may be structurally similar to modes of hierarchy and exploitation in other sectors, it is distinctive in two linked ways. First, much of Silicon Valley attaches a utopian, civilizational mission and importance to conventional understandings of work and labor. As we will show, discourses about work in Silicon Valley present industry elites as saviors of humanity's future. Second, Silicon Valley provides a creative response to what Weber describes as the progressive disenchantment of the modern world.<sup>8</sup>

In developing these claims, we examine what Jason A. Josephson Storm terms the "myth of disenchantment," but in the context of the magic-labor-technology-capital nexus of and in Silicon Valley.<sup>9</sup> Josephson-Storm rethinks Weber's disenchantment thesis, arguing that "the disenchantment of the world does not mean there is no magic," and furthermore that we "understand Weber better if we read him as also theorizing the persistence of magic into modernity."<sup>10</sup> Magic has not been evacuated from the world, but rather endures in various spheres alongside contested processes of disenchanting. Crucially for our project, Josephson-Storm demonstrates that "disenchantment is fundamentally incomplete" such that "magic lingers on to be potentially recouped by science and technology."<sup>11</sup> The uniqueness of Silicon Valley lies in how it seizes on this magical and enchanting potentiality of technology and uses it to mystify the operation of a dominating work ethic, thus marking it as something more than a rehearsal of the "secular religiosity" of the electronic revolution's "electrical sublime."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, "capitalism has the capacity to absorb" magic, and "technology and enchantment can be intertwined."<sup>13</sup> Silicon Valley actualizes this capacity and turns that "can" into a "does." In turn, the dream of re-enchantment promised by the electrical revolution of an earlier era is rendered a work-as-lifestyle by Silicon Valley, one sold to both consumer and worker.

In the face of the technical rationalization that *supposedly* evacuates the world of splendor, mystery, and plasticity, Silicon Valley, as epitomized in this paper in the figures of Musk and Thiel, offers a *magical yet also technical-scientific* fix that marries a utopian technological progress with (re-)enchanted imaginings of progress, Mars settlements, cyborgs, and endless innovation, to name a few. This utopianism and re-enchantment work together: specific to Silicon Valley is the industry's self-depiction as a pioneer of civilizational transformation and human progress, underwriting its claims to technological magic that then pervade the rational, scientific emptying of mystery with bewitching visions of extra-worldly achievement. Haunting both of these claims is a reformulated, technology- and "innovation"-oriented version of a dominating, exploitative work ethic.

To demonstrate these dynamics, our first section maps the hypermasculinity of Silicon Valley's "tech bro" culture that underlies the enchanting visions of celebrity innovators like Musk and Thiel. We argue that discourses of alternative, "nerd" masculinity obscure the hegemonic nature of the work ethic and reinscribe material conditions of inequality for workers. From here, we interrogate the speeches, interviews, and writings of Musk and Thiel, as lenses into the

performativity of the Silicon Valley work ethic. We focus on these two figures as high-profile, eccentric, and celebrity magnates because they are highly visible exemplars of civilizational enchantment and Silicon Valley work ideologies. Further, the fame, outrageousness, and perceived charisma of Musk and Thiel is analytically useful for understanding how the Silicon Valley work ethic is legitimized.<sup>14</sup> The section on Musk demonstrates how he pairs extravagant claims about the humanity- and civilization-saving missions of his companies with clichés about working hard, reconfiguring an insidious commitment to “do what you love,” and implicitly providing justification for the depoliticization of work and its exploitative dimensions. Next, we examine how Thiel pursues the immortality of innovative start-ups (and potentially of humans themselves) through the figure of the cyborg. We juxtapose his start-up manifesto with Donna Haraway’s feminist account of the cyborg in order to examine Thiel’s consistent sublimation and erasure of the worker to the company, of product to value, and of work to creativity. The conclusion briefly suggests that a project of wonder unmoored from the work ethic and the myths that infuse it is a necessary alternative political imaginary to that of Silicon Valley.

### “Tech Bro” Masculinity and the Silicon Valley Work Ethic

Central to understanding shifts in the post-Fordist work ethic as it unfolds within the tech sector are the particular ways masculinity interacts with the imperative to work, buttressing grandiose claims to civilizational edification and mystifying relations of exploitation and domination in new ways. Underlying the self-fashioning of Musk and Thiel as two paradigmatic proponents of an enchanting techno-utopia is the image of the hard-working, non-threatening “tech nerd” or “tech bro.”<sup>15</sup> Though at first glance tech nerd masculinity seems to offer an alternative to the traditionally hypermasculine values attached to capitalism such as competitiveness, hierarchy, and aggression, in reality it constitutes a form of nerd machismo that permeates the “Valley of the Boys.”<sup>16</sup> In its multiple iterations of “nerd masculinity,” the tech bro work ethic obscures the structural, material conditions of inequality that have enabled the rise of entrepreneurial stardom in Silicon Valley, including the racialized, sexualized, and gendered forms of labor undergirding the success of Silicon Valley start-ups.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, it inculcates an imperative to work hard and do what one loves among middle- and upper-middle class tech workers who may not share the same precarity as the industry’s service workers, but whose indefatigable commitment to work will nevertheless fall short of turning them into the next Musk or Thiel. In this section, we argue that the tech bro work ethic and its foundational ideology of “nerd masculinity” enable the disembodied erasure of material conditions, ultimately mystifying the presence of more coercive and hierarchical masculinist discourses, and re-enchanting the humdrum tedium of work.

Despite its reliance on tropes of gender equality and multicultural meritocracy, several scholars, journalists, and cultural critics have highlighted how the work culture of Silicon Valley lends itself to pervasive sexism within the tech industry.<sup>18</sup> We argue that this seeming contradiction is made possible by a “nerd masculinity” particular to the tech sector, which, on the surface, embraces horizontal company structures and collaboration over competition, hierarchy, and individualism.<sup>19</sup> This nerd masculinity serves to justify and bolster a work culture that constructs Silicon Valley as a “techno-utopian” meritocracy “where intelligence and enthusiasm matter more than gender, skin color or pedigree.”<sup>20</sup> A romanticized celebration of the liberatory, civilization-enhancing potential of technology centers “both the heroism of the liberal individual and generate(s) popular imaginaries of ‘personal’ and intimate computing as necessarily egalitarian, horizontal, and democratic.”<sup>21</sup>

In reality, this ethos of self-sacrifice, “disruption,” individualism, and creativity has been variously characterized as one of “toxic masculinity,” “aggressive masculinity,” “hypermasculinity,” and “hypersexualized culture.”<sup>22</sup> While some critics have underscored the numerous instances of sexual harassment within the tech industry as indicative of a masculinist culture, others have pointed to the discriminatory hiring and promotional practices faced by women in general, and by women of color in particular.<sup>23</sup> That the disproportionate number of white men running Silicon Valley start-ups must—and do—possess the venture capital necessary to catapult the industry is obscured beneath the willing self-identification of many Silicon Valley workers with lifelong nerd-dom. Indeed, PayPal co-founder Max Levchin once asserted that he hires someone if “he thinks like me, he’s just as geeky, and he doesn’t get laid very often. Great hire!” Revealingly, he also attributes the lack of women in the organization to its “nerdiness and alpha-maleness.”<sup>24</sup> Among such self-avowed nerds, the disavowal of virility, self-proclaimed unpopularity, and admitted lack of machismo in high school contribute to a distancing from traditional masculinity, thereby obscuring the forms of dominance and coercion demanding adherence to the work ethic for the industry’s army of entrepreneurs and service workers alike.

As a supposedly *alternative* form of masculinity, the self-fashioned opposition to alpha-male masculinity exhibited by Levchin and others often obscures the power and privilege afforded to “founders,” and the subjectivizing power of the work ethic, through the language of progressivity and gender equality. On the one hand, these “nerd” discourses work to condone and conceal a misogynist “hypersexualized culture” where rich founders once unable to get a date can justify predation, sexual abuse, and discrimination.<sup>25</sup> The “revenge” of the tech bros is thus one enacted through and upon sexist ideologies of easy access to women as status symbols. Marianne Cooper's ethnographic interviews with men working in Silicon Valley reveal that many tech workers characterize themselves as having “more enlightened personal attitudes towards and relationships with women,” comparing themselves to men in other industries who are “stereotypically macho,” “frat boys,” or “locker room guys.”<sup>26</sup> Some even expressed a feeling of virtuousness for their modern, progressive attitudes towards women.

A related look at the culture of misogyny within Silicon Valley by Emily Chang, for instance, details a conversation with one venture capitalist who characterized his teenage existence as one of “playing computer games and not going on a date until he was twenty years old. Now, to his amazement, he finds himself in a circle of trusted adventurous tech friends with the money and resources to explore their every desire.”<sup>27</sup> One of Chang's informants details an invitation to an “orgy party” in which attendees—consisting disproportionately of women, by design—were asked to come in “glamazon adventurer, safari chic and jungle tribal attire,” all notably racialized terms. She also reports being given the psychedelic drug MDMA by the venture capitalist hosting the party, who then coerced her to kiss him. Some male attendees describe the women at these parties as “founder hounders”—women desperate to meet the rich, genius “technorati” of Silicon Valley—and to take advantage of their wealth and status. Underscoring the connection between the self-perception of being alternatively masculine and commendably progressive, Chang notes that some venture capitalists presented their behavior at the parties as a version of progressive open-mindedness they perceive as characterizing their broader success in the tech industry. Across numerous accounts, Chang details the rampant objectification of women pervading such Silicon Valley gatherings that themselves become networking events for entrepreneurs looking to find investors.<sup>28</sup>

Equally at play in the tech nerd work ethic is the glorification of a multicultural “nation of immigrants” story, often emphasized through reference to the large number of Asian immigrants who have come to Silicon Valley as technology workers.<sup>29</sup> As a recent Ascend Fund study indicates, however, “Asians are the least likely to be promoted to managerial or executive positions, in spite of being the largest minority group of professionals.”<sup>30</sup> Ascribing such mythical meaning to the presence of Asian and immigrant workers thus reinforces the notion of Silicon Valley as “a mecca for talent from around the world” where plucky individuals with a smart idea and a desire to work hard can become the next icon like Musk or Thiel, regardless of racial, national, gender or ethnic background.<sup>31</sup>

The discourse of “nerd masculinity” underpinning the Silicon Valley work ethic also reinforces other facets of hegemonic masculinity, namely, the virtues of self-sacrifice and devotion to a higher mission at all personal costs. Indeed, the Silicon Valley work ethic is built upon the value of doing what one loves and living one's work, which is inextricably tied to one's passion, in all facets of life. This emphasis on work as passion, one that blurs the line between job/home and professional/personal, encourages the tireless pioneering towards the realization of one's intellectual goals, lends itself to an ethos of self-sacrifice,<sup>32</sup> and an iteration of virility that echoes traditionally hegemonic forms of masculinity.<sup>33</sup> Risks must be taken and precarious work romanticized, even at the cost of obliterating the divide between work and life. This glorification of the entrepreneur who must only produce value for himself further imbues the tech worker with a sense of individual responsibility for his economic precarity and emotional balance.<sup>34</sup> Discourses of “nerd masculinity” perpetuated by tech founders thus operate on two levels. On the one hand, as the mouthpieces of Silicon Valley they inculcate an imperative to “do what you love” among tech workers who do not share the same kind of precarity with service and switchboard workers whose earnings are the lowest of the tech sector, yet who are simultaneously required to embody the Silicon Valley work ethic without the promised rewards of the “founders.” At the same time, the disproportionate media attention given to “founders” such as Musk, Thiel, Levchin, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg alike, disavows the lowest-paid workers whose exploitation is the condition of possibility for the industry as a whole. Growth models that value fast profit over the well-being of all workers, “risk” and its accompanying forms of precarity over stability, short-term achievement over long-term security, horizontal over hierarchical structures, cooperation over competition, and innovative genius over the materiality of the body all saturate the supposedly-alternative work structures of Silicon Valley.<sup>35</sup> The ideology of “nerd masculinity” underlying the Silicon Valley work ethic thus upholds a neoliberal emphasis on flexible, precarious labor that disproportionately impacts low-wage workers and erases gendered, racialized, and sexualized histories of labor expropriation upon which they depend.<sup>36</sup> Weeks's formative work on neoliberal professionalization demonstrates the

close connection between masculinity and a post-Fordist work ethic. Expanding this further, the seemingly benign nature of nerd masculinity offers a positive, progressive quality to those subjectivized through its discourses, alongside the equally positive promised outcome of working so hard: claims to civilization-saving innovation.

In reality, the successes of Silicon Valley are inextricable from the multiple low-wage forms of labor that have upheld its infrastructure since the initial tech boom, and from gendered, racialized, and sexualized divisions of labor. The spawning of the microelectronics industry that catapulted Silicon Valley through the 1980s relied, for instance, on the expropriation of labor from predominantly immigrant women from Mexico, China, Vietnam, Korea and the Philippines.<sup>37</sup> In addition to the women who manufacture switchboards in California, there were those in factories in Southeast Asia, Mexico, and Puerto Rico who took part in outsourced production for exceedingly low wages, especially considering the price and the power of the products of their labor. Moreover, Silicon Valley bosses have historically attempted to strategically divide workers along ethnic, class, and gender lines so as to discourage solidarity and meaningful organizing.<sup>38</sup> More recently, the rise of “gig economy” companies such as Uber and Lyft have likewise rendered other low-wage, racialized workers increasingly vulnerable through discourses of entrepreneurship and individual responsibility that place the onus of precarity on those with less access to economic security. Like the Silicon Valley work ethic itself, the racialized distribution of precarious labor underscores “Silicon Valley Ideology” as a form of “free market fundamentalism.”<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, the rise of Silicon Valley itself has been premised upon the displacement of predominantly non-white and working-class residents of the San Francisco Bay Area, who have witnessed widespread gentrification as the tech industry has grown economically and spatially. The creation of “private luxury shuttle buses” by Facebook, Google and Apple stand in marked contrast to the sixty-nine percent of San Francisco evictions that have taken place near these same bus stops.<sup>40</sup> The growing political and spatial presence of Google and Facebook—who also hold partnerships with military surveillance companies—has also led to a correlative increase in police violence in the Bay Area. The overreaching power and prestige of Google, Facebook, and other tech giants—which have facilitated “pro-development,” so-called “urban renewal” projects—has functioned to pit utopian, enchanted suburban Silicon Valley against the many social movements that have historically fought for social transformation within the Bay Area’s urban spaces, such as the Black Panthers, the Brown Berets, and La Raza Unida.<sup>41</sup>

A discourse of enchanting civilizational edification and charismatic coolness as leadership—epitomized by Musk and his language of world-historical development, or Thiel and his discourse of the immortal cyborg start-up—veils this displacement and precarity, as well as the mundaneness required of entrepreneurs in their day-to-day work. Its technoutopian claims to expansion of the horizons of life mystify the domination and displacement carried out against those not privy to the inner sanctums of Silicon Valley. The masculinized Silicon Valley work ethic of self-sacrifice thus justifies itself through the evocation of a greater civilizational mission that will save the destructive human race from its own degeneracy by, in Musk’s words, “expand[ing] the scope and scale of consciousness.”<sup>42</sup> Notably, such gestures towards an inter-planetary civilizing mission parallel the language of modernization theory, where scientific inquiry and discovery are deemed the inevitable terrain of the West and European Enlightenment humanism. This language takes on a multicultural, alternatively masculine, and post-racial valence, one that erases the material inequalities and dominating structures upon which Silicon Valley has been built. Tech bro masculinity seeks to repackage its bearers as the figures who can knot together rationality, technology, wonder, and enchantment. As such, another form of magic exists in Silicon Valley, namely the alchemy of transforming white masculine domination into a seemingly progressive form of masculinity and work.

#### Let Them Eat Frozen Yogurt: Elon Musk, Banal Grandiosity, and the Work Ethic

With a net worth of \$166 billion as of early May 2021,<sup>43</sup> Musk is the founder and CEO of electric car company Tesla and aerospace manufacturer and space transport company SpaceX, along with his side projects in tunnel construction (The Boring Company) and artificial intelligence (Neuralink). He is also a controversial yet cult-like “messiah” figure in Silicon Valley and around the world<sup>44</sup> and a quasi-inspiration for Robert Downey Jr.’s Tony Stark character in the *Iron Man* and Marvel Cinematic Universe movie franchises.<sup>45</sup> Musk has attracted multiple fan clubs of “Musketeers,” creating what one industry journalist calls a “fandom” and “following” rivaling only that of the deceased Steve Jobs.<sup>46</sup> Such characteristics beg the question of how representations of founders like Musk legitimize and reinforce the enchanting dreams of Silicon Valley. Musk is a self-styled cool tech entrepreneur, thought leader, mystical innovator, and potential savior of humanity. Indeed, he justifies his massive wealth on this very basis, defending himself from criticism of his wealth by tweeting that he is “accumulating resources to help make life multiplanetary & extend the

light of consciousness to the stars.”<sup>47</sup> This section analyzes Musk’s speeches, interviews, and writings as an exemplar of the type of work ethic that underlie the technological magic of Silicon Valley. Behind the grandiose entrepreneurial wizardry of Musk lies a selective uptake of the work ethic that implicitly justifies Musk’s ideology of civilization-saving innovation. If work is ordinary and commonplace on the one hand, yet capable of magically enchanting the world, expanding consciousness, or exploring space on the other, then investment in the work ethic can make invisible most mundane forms of work while valorizing the small subset of work that can re-enchant the world, transform humanity, and colonize the cosmos.

Particularly in discussing his vision for establishing a self-sustaining human base on Mars, to be actualized through SpaceX, Musk often speaks in the dramatic language of civilization, humanity, the species, consciousness, and human existence itself. As he says in a “Commentary” piece in a 2017 issue of the academic journal *New Space*, Musk deeply believes that “history” currently has “two fundamental paths”: one involves staying on Earth and succumbing to a high likelihood of “some eventual extinction event,” while the “alternative is to become a space-bearing civilization and a multi-planetary species.”<sup>48</sup> This language imagines his projects and approach as world-historical developments in response to existential threats. He variously presents them as: making “humanity” a “spacefaring civilization out there exploring the stars”;<sup>49</sup> “advanc[ing] the knowledge of the world” and “expand[ing] the scope and scale of consciousness”;<sup>50</sup> establishing the “idea of making life multi-planetary” as something he “thought might affect humanity”;<sup>51</sup> guaranteeing the “preservation and extension of consciousness” through “the effort to back up the biosphere”;<sup>52</sup> extending “the probable lifespan of human civilization and the life of consciousness as know it”;<sup>53</sup> “exploring the frontier”;<sup>54</sup> opening up “full access to the greater solar system”;<sup>55</sup> “supersed[ing] political parties, race, creed, it doesn’t matter”;<sup>56</sup> and ensuring “there is enough of a seed of human civilization somewhere else to bring civilization back and perhaps shorten the length of the Dark Ages” so that his space colony “perhaps could help regenerate” life back on Earth.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, Musk shoulders a portentous responsibility for civilization itself, with himself at the head of this re-enchanting promise.

Musk pairs this ostentation and magical striving with banality. He retells the same stories across speeches and interviews a decade apart, while his speaking engagements belie his inspirational image as someone who arouses a devoted following and cultivates a mystique as a genius innovator. Musk closes his 2012 Caltech commencement address—which includes language about extending consciousness and affecting the future of humanity—with a hackneyed appeal to not “let anything hold you back,” because “imagination is the limit.”<sup>58</sup> His 2014 commencement address at USC offers such advice to graduates as “attract great people,” “don’t just follow the trend,” “take risks,” and “do something bold...you won’t regret it.”<sup>59</sup> A disjuncture emerges between the extremity of his majestic vision and the simplicity of his clichés. This extends, most importantly for us, to his prosaic adherence to and articulation of the work ethic. His first life tip to graduating University of Southern California students is that “you need to work super hard...work hard, like, every waking hour.”<sup>60</sup> This raises an obvious question: how does one scale up from working “super hard” to solving the existential problems of humanity?

A version of the work ethic sutures the gap between Musk’s banal utterances and grandiose visions. Musk’s ideology of work valorizes highly skilled, innovative, complex forms of labor in a way that renders unseen the everyday, lower-paid, and lower-skilled kinds of work, upon which Musk’s grand work ultimately depends. Working “super hard” transcends its clichéd nature and acquires self-styled world-historical meaning once it is directed not towards making ends meet but instead towards the kind of romanticized work that might save the world. This dynamic of pairing the work ethic with civilizational enchantment is unique to Musk, and therefore particularly revealing of Silicon Valley’s politics of work.

In Weeks’s analysis, the work ethic necessitates that work be “a calling” requiring of the worker an “identification with and systematic devotion to” work, an “elevation of work to the center of life,” and an “affirmation of work as an end in itself.”<sup>61</sup> Cockayne’s analysis of digital media companies in the San Francisco area demonstrates that amid this “creative and entrepreneurial tech hub,” one finds a proliferation of “affective attachments” to “normative work ethics and values.”<sup>62</sup> Musk takes these processes and adds civilizational grandiosity to it. In line with nerd masculinity, he also feels *entitled* to this grandiosity. Simply working super hard and living at the office while showering at the YMCA—as Musk recounts doing early in his career<sup>63</sup>—might not, in itself, be a routine formidable enough to valorize work. Mapping this lifestyle into a broader vision oriented toward space colonization and re-enchanting human life, though, takes what seem to be the clichés of the work ethic and animates them anew. In his sweeping vision, Musk demonstrates how the work ethic can subjectivize not only the average worker but also the CEO who is benefitting from the exploitation. The more conventional work ethic might not be able to sustain an investment in work enough

to justify, for instance, Musk's eighty-five to one-hundred-hour workweek,<sup>64</sup> but the work ethic embellished with enchanting multi-planetary dreams can achieve that feat.

In this sense, Musk—and the broader Silicon Valley ideology he so vividly enacts—solidifies and insulates the work ethic against its tensions and vulnerabilities. If the post-Fordist organization of labor amplifies both the need for and tensions of the work ethic,<sup>65</sup> then Musk's marrying of banality with grandiosity might function to shore up the gravitational pull of the work ethic, for himself and potentially also his employees. A 2016 salary survey of workers in technology companies showed that employees of SpaceX and Tesla had the highest percentage of workers of the eighteen Silicon Valley companies surveyed who responded that their work made the world a better place *and* that their work environment is “fairly” or “extremely” stressful.<sup>66</sup> Upon someone tweeting these survey results to him, Musk responded that the stress “goes with the territory.”<sup>67</sup> Here, not only do Musk's extraterrestrial dreams function to save the work ethic from meaningless clichés; they also legitimize a vampirical, self-sacrificing drain of the worker's capacities.

Many problems arise from Musk's hyper-amplification of work from banal to civilizational. Broadly, as Weeks notes, it is exceedingly difficult to challenge the hierarchical and dominating “structures of work” without also challenging the “ethics on which their legitimacy depends.”<sup>68</sup> Imagining, enacting, and struggling for a life outside or against work becomes near-impossible so long as work is both celebrated and mystified. This is especially true if work becomes the primary or even sole source of meaning for life. Musk's 2003 advice to young entrepreneurs at Stanford was to find something that activates “an obsessive nature” for oneself where “you think about it [the work] even when you're not working.”<sup>69</sup> This notion suggests that the only work that is worthy of the entrepreneur is that which colonizes one's life, turning leisure time into time spent thinking about work. In a 2013 interview, Musk quipped that he could never not work and do something like “going to the beach” instead, saying that this “just sounds like the worst—that sounds horrible to me. I would go bonkers. I would have to be on serious drugs. I'd be super-duper bored. I like high intensity.”<sup>70</sup> Only this high-intensity work—that fusion of stress and ascribed meaningfulness he celebrates in his response to the survey discussed above—can fulfill Musk, not to mention the “nerd masculinity” undergirding the Silicon Valley work ethic more broadly. Leisure time is “super-duper” boring and lacks meaning. No wonder Musk told USC graduates to “do the simple math, you say [that if] somebody else is working fifty hours a week and you're working a hundred, you'll get twice as [much] done.”<sup>71</sup>

Musk's passionate commitment to the work ethic also perpetuates what Miya Tokumitsu analyzes as the ethic of “Do What You Love” (DWYL). For her, DWYL tropes generate several deleterious effects: individualizing workers so that they focus only on themselves rather than the working conditions of others; justifying overwork, under-payment and other sacrifices by workers, rendering invisible work not seen as worth loving; promoting autonomy while workplace surveillance and discipline increase; and distracting attention away from wages, working conditions and social services.<sup>72</sup> Musk expresses a sentiment quite similar to Tokumitsu's object of analysis, advocating “really liking what you do, whatever area that you get into, even if you're the best of the best, there's always a chance of failure so I think it's important that you really like whatever you're doing. If you don't like it, life is too short.”<sup>73</sup> The DWYL ethic is what enables the outpouring of work to all of life, because for Musk “if you like what you're doing, you think about it even when you're not working.”<sup>74</sup> Such an ethos functions as “agitprop” that authorizes cultures of “overwork and sleep deprivation” in which the tech bro, “the ceaselessly productive worker, with little time for rest, let alone any need or desire for it, stands as a heroic icon, particularly in the high-strung white-collar milieu of Silicon Valley and Wall Street.”<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the affective connection to creative entrepreneurial work—or at least to its ideal embodied by Musk—entrenches what Cockayne describes as attachment to the precarity of tech workers.<sup>76</sup>

Who has access, though, to doing what they love, and thus to enacting Musk's hyper-charged ideal of the work ethic? Does Musk's passion for and valorization of work apply to a janitor who cleans the bathrooms at Tesla's state-of-the-art “Gigafactory” in the Nevada desert? Does the “team” that he celebrates in interviews and on Twitter<sup>77</sup> include a person emptying the trash from SpaceX offices at night as their second job? In fact, it may not include anyone but Musk himself; in a fall 2018 interview, Musk responded to a question about the toll the previous year had taken on him and his employees with: “It's been terrible. This year felt like five years of aging, frankly. The worst year of my entire career. Insanely painful.”<sup>78</sup> When Musk lauds the “canonical Silicon Valley startup” structure and its “pretty flat hierarchy” in which “everybody [has] a roughly similar cube” and “anyone could talk to anyone,”<sup>79</sup> are service workers and manual laborers counted, or are they the subordinate workers enabling non-hierarchy among a small segment of workers? Who can be re-enchanted, and who is left behind on Earth?

Not only does Musk's work ethic leave behind workers themselves; it also depoliticizes the work they do and prevents collective action. Musk displays this sort of attitude with a February 2017 email to Tesla employees obtained by *BuzzFeed News*.<sup>80</sup> The email harshly criticizes unionization efforts at the Tesla factory in Fremont, California for being "disingenuous," and defends Tesla against claims that workers are overworked, underpaid, and face unsafe working conditions. He accuses the United Auto Workers of being beholden to the traditional American car companies and characterizes Tesla as being in a "David vs [sic] Goliath" fight against the "forces arrayed against us [that] are many and incredibly powerful."<sup>81</sup> More brazenly, he sells Tesla as *fun*: he promises "to hold a really amazing party" when the next production target is met; vows that "it's going to get crazy good" when the "Tesla electric pod car roller coaster (with an optional hyperloop route, of course!) that will allow fast and fun travel throughout our Fremont campus" is finished; and allays concerns about working conditions with the assurance of "free frozen yogurt stands scattered around the factory."<sup>82</sup>

Musk's "let them eat cake" moment—with the frozen yogurt appropriately updating it for the twenty-first century—encapsulates his work ideology. Forget pay, working less, working more safely, or the solidarity and collective bargaining that might help you achieve these gains. Forget the above-average rate of injuries for Tesla workers combined with an under-reporting of these injuries,<sup>83</sup> with Musk dismissing the investigation as being written by "some rich kids in Berkeley who took their political science prof too seriously."<sup>84</sup> Ignore the lawsuit alleging racist harassment at a Tesla factory,<sup>85</sup> or anti-gay harassment and retaliation for reporting the alleged harassment,<sup>86</sup> or the reports that laborers were offered free Red Bull beverages to stay awake and asked to walk through raw sewage in an attempt to speed up work to meet production targets.<sup>87</sup> Forget the need to settle with the Securities and Exchange Commission after being charged with securities fraud.<sup>88</sup> Forget the National Labor Relations Board ruling that a Musk tweet and a Tesla employee firing constituted illegal anti-union behavior.<sup>89</sup> Forget the constant stream of COVID-19 misinformation,<sup>90</sup> intentionally flouting public health orders,<sup>91</sup> or the September 2020 interview saying any employee worried about COVID-19 should stay home from work followed by defensively refusing to answer questions about whether his companies would pay this hypothetical worker.<sup>92</sup> Instead, Musk presents a vision in which one works hard in service of a grandiose and enchanting mission, with the hyperloop roller coaster, frozen yogurt, and fun following from the hard work. Mundane work and the conditions under which it is done are invisibilized or ignored, while (over)work that innovates or saves the species is romanticized and valorized. While Musk has suggested that the form of government in a hypothetical society on Mars would be "somewhat of a direct democracy where people vote directly on issues instead of going through representative government...everyone votes on every issue," he demonstrates no inclination to give workers on Earth any democratic control on the factory floor.<sup>93</sup>

Finally, Musk embodies what Tokumitsu identifies as the "hypermasculine cast" of the DWYL ethos in Silicon Valley, where the "desired persona is one that transcends needs for sleep, care, relationships, and any other obligation that might distract from work and profit."<sup>94</sup> In his 2014 speech to graduating USC students, Musk deploys this very language of avoiding obligation, imparting to the audience of young adults that "now is the time to take risks" because "you don't have kids...well! Some of you, haha, you probably don't have kids," but "as you get older, your obligations increase" and "it gets harder to do things that might not work out."<sup>95</sup> While Musk avers that he's not a "swinging bachelor" because he "spend[s] his weekends going to Disneyland,"<sup>96</sup> in a 2013 interview he admits that he is "able to be with them [his kids] and still be on email. I can be with them and still be working at the same time ... If I didn't, I wouldn't be able to get my job done."<sup>97</sup> Even if he cannot fully free himself from the strictures of family, Musk can at least extend work into his family life, thus reinscribing the masculinist dimension of the work ethic. Musk has more recently demonstrated what could be characterized as vulnerability. He has cried while giving an interview discussing the "excruciating" personal and professional toll developments with Tesla in 2018 has caused,<sup>98</sup> and lamenting in a different interview that "I don't think you'd necessarily want to be me ... I don't think people would like it that much," because his brain is like a "never-ending explosion that he cannot turn off."<sup>99</sup> However, Musk's response to this excruciating experience has been to cut back to a "pretty sustainable" eighty-hour work week (down from 120).<sup>100</sup> This is not to mention that some of these emotional admissions came in the course of an interview in which Musk smoked marijuana and brandished a flamethrower with podcaster, comedian and mixed-martial-arts commentator Joe Rogan.<sup>101</sup> Apparently, even revelations of emotional and personal difficulties must be quickly responded to with re-assertions of masculine bravado, coolness, and overwork.

Musk may be the ultimate magician of the twenty-first century, but his magic is underwritten by a simultaneous grandiose and banal vision of the work ethic. Both of these versions of the work ethic are upheld, in turn, by hegemonically masculinist ideologies. While the first is undergirded by a sense of entitlement to the (self-appointed) position of wizard of the world, the second is upheld by a commitment to hard work, self-sacrifice, and perseverance.

This vision is appropriate for the way that Silicon Valley's dreams about itself, labor, innovation, and the future ignore the precarious, stressful, life-invading patterns of the actual work that is necessary to realize those dreams. In Musk's vision, bureaucratized, rationalized progress and work without the magical vision and wonder would be, to use a Musk-ism, super-duper boring. Indeed, he has remarked—in an idiom strongly resonating with questions of enchantment—that “life cannot just be about solving this problem or that problem,” but rather “we must have inspiring things in this world,” celebrating a “will” and “spirit” of exploration.<sup>102</sup> For him, a charismatic leader enchanting the public<sup>103</sup> with utopian visions for human colonization of space or fully electric cars might bring back some mysticism to the supposed cold progress of technological rationality. Such vision, though, ignores the ideologies and relations of domination enabling Musk's re-enchantment.

### Peter Thiel and Cyborg Capitalism

If Musk is Silicon Valley's resident magician and wizard, Thiel might be thought of as its own alchemical Dr. Frankenstein. His *Zero to One: Notes on Startups, or How to Build the Future*<sup>104</sup>—a #1 *New York Times* bestseller in the business category—reveals how human and machine come together in his dreams of Silicon Valley and the role he imagines technology to play in a world-historical project. Thiel—(in)famous for his quasi-relationship with President Trump, takedown of online publisher *Gawker Media*, and explorations of immortality—presents a somewhat different object of study in exploitative Silicon Valley enchantment. Unlike Musk, Thiel usually has little to nothing to say about work, itself. And yet, his insistence that we are in “a race between technology and politics,”<sup>105</sup> combined with his own quasi-libertarianism, is precisely the vehicle through which the exploitation and domination required for the realization of his vision are smuggled into (or glossed over for) the promise of Silicon Valley—and thus make him significant for an analysis of the Silicon Valley work ethic. In interviews, Thiel has expressed both personal and financial interest in various technological innovations that extend human life (for those who can afford it) beyond its “natural” limits, including: parabiosis, a procedure in which people over the age of 35 would receive blood transfusions from people 25 years old or younger; the use of human growth hormones; cryogenics; and most recently, the use of synthetic psychedelics for a variety of “wellness” benefits.<sup>106</sup> He was an early investor in the SeaSteady Institute, whose mandate is to “promote the creation of floating cities as a revolutionary solution to some of the world's most pressing problems: rising sea levels, overpopulation, and poor governance.”<sup>107</sup> He also played a somewhat unexpected role in the 2016 presidential race, indicating in his remarks at the Republican National Convention both a concern for the economic conditions of everyday Americans, and a commitment to the idea that technological innovation is the answer to our collective political and economic woes.<sup>108</sup>

But, more directly important for political theories of work, Thiel's theorizing of startup culture survival conceives the Silicon Valley company through the figure of the cyborg. We suggest that the cyborgian discourse contained within Thiel's theorizing of successful startups reinforces the tech bro masculinist work ethic, and should be read as its own cyborg manifesto, one in which the survival of the cyborg as a singular entity, comprised of its animal-human-machine parts, is the ultimate end in itself, superseding even the potential benefits to humanity it may accrue along the way. In this way it reinforces the devotion to one's company expected of workers and bosses alike within the Silicon Valley work ethic. Employees are expected to go on forever as machine-animals in service of the broader company mission. This expectation is realized through a consistent sublimation of the worker to the company, of product to value, and of work to creativity. In this sense, Silicon Valley's cyborg is reminiscent of the masculinist liberal subject, its autonomy dependent “upon the suppression of other subjects—throwaway cyborgs used as servants, laborers, or toys.”<sup>109</sup> But it is also superhuman, greater than the sum of its parts, and directed toward endless innovation for its own sake. In this sense, it acquires certain mystical qualities, transmuting its elements into something much greater, valuable, and more impactful. In these ways, Thiel's valorization of the cyborg company offers another route for technological enchantment against rationalizing processes of disenchantment.

In her classic essay “A Cyborg Manifesto,” feminist scholar Donna Haraway argues for an ironic and blasphemous political myth that can provide a standpoint on technological and political change, at the center of which is the image of the cyborg.<sup>110</sup> The cyborg signals a breakdown of the boundaries between animal, human, and machine, and serves as a revolutionary political project, resisting the totalizing force of capitalist and socialist projects alike. Haraway imagines the cyborg as a figure that allows for new analyses of economies, labor, and knowledge in a world increasingly transformed in and by its animal-human-machine interactions. The cyborg is playful, born of the legacies of colonialism, patriarchy, and the enlightenment, and yet irreverent of its originary myths and material conditions. This section interrogates the cyborg startup company of Silicon Valley's work imaginary, read through Thiel's ideas. How do animal-human-machine come together in Thiel's construction of the startup work ethic? What role does the

cyborg play in re-enchanting the modern world? What are the politics authorized in the cyborg as figured in this work ethic, and what are the monsters that delineate its community? Where Haraway's cyborg is a "condensed image of both imagination and material reality,"<sup>111</sup> Thiel's (decidedly unironic) company cyborg not only does not account for the material reality of its workers, but also actively requires that workers' bodies *become* the company.

As in Musk's articulations of the work ethic, Thiel's book weaves together a visionary theory of progress, an economic account of value, and banal pieces of advice. Above all, the figure of the company looms large over any of the book's other subjects. The book touts itself as a manual for building "companies that create new things,"<sup>112</sup> but is better thought of as a series of quasi-philosophical platitudes for correcting what Thiel views as common misconceptions about the notion of progress and the role that technological innovation plays in its advancement—platitudes all funneled back through the life of the startup company. It continually gestures toward the future as some kind of goal, but the *nature* of this future is subsumed by a company's ability to creatively anticipate its unknowns, amass value in the future, sustain its own life and health into that future, and somehow create a "more peaceful and prosperous" world along the way.<sup>113</sup> The characterization and development of the image of "the company" and the theory of progress it espouses are essential for understanding the cyborg work ethic of Thiel's imagination. Because the book as a whole is addressed to the entrepreneur who will be applying Thiel's philosophical and economic theories to the development of their own successful company, Thiel spends very little time talking about work itself. The majority of the book focuses on such subjects as: "the ideology of competition"; whether luck or skill determines success in startup capitalism; "the power law of venture capital"; what characteristics make a founder; and the imperative for creativity.<sup>114</sup> Workers appear in only four places, and the only place where they receive extended treatment is in a chapter entitled "The Mechanics of Mafia: Why You Should Run Your Startup Like a Cult," which delineates company culture and ownership dynamics.<sup>115</sup>

For Thiel, the successful company literally takes on the form of a body. If you have workers that are only part-time, or brought on as consultants, the body is "fundamentally misaligned."<sup>116</sup> The parts that make up the body are not workers at all. In fact, they are the culture of the body itself—"company culture does not exist apart from the company itself: no company has a culture; every company is a culture. A startup is a team of people on a mission, and a good culture is just what that looks like on the inside."<sup>117</sup> And most importantly, the health of the body is the primary determinant of the company's survival:

...more than that, internal peace is what enables a startup to survive at all. When a startup fails, we often imagine it succumbing to predatory rivals in a competitive ecosystem. But every company is also its own ecosystem, and factional strife makes it vulnerable to outside threats. Internal conflict is like an autoimmune disease: the technical cause of death may be pneumonia, but the real cause remains hidden from plain view.<sup>118</sup>

The company is a self-contained ecosystem that, much like a body, is vulnerable to infection, and is at its healthiest (and most successful) when all of the parts are working together towards its own self-perpetuation. It is particularly revealing that the only Silicon Valley "work perks" Thiel thinks are necessary are basic health insurance and a belief in the company mission—"the opportunity to do irreplaceable work on a unique problem."<sup>119</sup> The entrepreneur who starts the company is at the center, responsible for cultivating the body and spirit with his innovativeness, but whose own body is not of an order outside the company body. A CEO should toil, earning not too high a salary lest "he risk becoming more like a politician than a founder."<sup>120</sup> Musk, too, has recently engaged in similar rhetoric. He justified his work practices as the *only option* to prevent Tesla's "death," but "Tesla cannot die," because it "is incredibly important for the future."<sup>121</sup> In rendering Tesla as the civilization-saving life-force and Musk as the one who must push himself in order for it to survive, he participates in the same ideology of the company and of Thiel, its founder.

Importantly, the metaphor of the company as body does not merely render the company human, for though the company is also "born" at its founding, its life need not run a "natural" course. In fact, a successful company ought not to live the way we expect humans to:

[T]he most valuable kind of company maintains an openness to invention that is most characteristic of beginnings. This leads to a second, less obvious understanding of the founding: it lasts as long as a company is creating new things, and it ends when creation stops. If you get the founding moment right, you can do more than create a valuable company: you can steer its distant future toward the creation of new things instead of the stewardship of inherited success. You might even extend its founding indefinitely.<sup>122</sup>

This passage is revealing for its characterization of the body's purpose. The moment of creation does not bring the body into being so that it may pursue some other end. Rather, it is the central defining characteristic of the body's "success," measured as its own survival coupled with the constant production of "new things"—never mind the visions towards what these things are directed. We are reminded here of Carole Pateman's feminist critique of social contract theory,<sup>123</sup> which notes that the myth of the "founding" of a state is a particularly masculinist project allowing men as founders to "give birth" to the nation, while relegating those who do the material work of reproduction and birth to a purview outside of the state and the domain of freedom existing among brothers. But perhaps more importantly, this characterization of the company as a body highlights, paradoxically, the deeply *disembodied* nature of the company in practice. In likening the company to a body while simultaneously discounting the actual labor of the workers (beyond their necessity as both cog and antibody), much like tech bro masculinity more broadly, Thiel effectively reinforces the bodilessness and presence of workers.

Consider his comparison of the successful startup to a cult. Thiel notes that in cults, members ignore their families and abandon the outside world in exchange for a feeling of belonging, and though a company should probably not precisely be a cult, it should not be far off in its ability to entrance and enchant.<sup>124</sup> Not only should the company take precedence over any other material concerns, including family, but a company's body parts (workers) should also be identifiable as belonging to that particular body—"the startup uniform [branded t-shirt or hoodie] encapsulates a simple but essential principle...a tribe of like-minded people fiercely devoted to the company's mission."<sup>125</sup> And from within, each part should take on its proper role required for "simple optimization" of the whole.<sup>126</sup> It is worth noting that another of Thiel's own companies, Palantir, which derives its name from J.R.R. Tolkien's term "palantíri"—a magical orb granting its possessor the ability to see anything in the world—is famous for its own cult-like company culture. Readers may also recognize Palantir as the company responsible for building the Department of Health and Human Services data platform HHS Protect, which for a time replaced the CDC as the entity collecting data on the COVID-19 pandemic, at President Trump's order, and for its various contracts with the federal government and local police departments to provide forms of big-data surveillance.<sup>127</sup>

In the book's final gesture towards the worker, Thiel's cyborg company engages the human-machine boundary in a slightly different manner. He argues that the conflict between "futurists" and "luddites" over how to answer the question of whether computers should replace workers is centered on a fundamentally mistaken assumption by both parties that computers inevitably will automate humans away. Thiel instead hypothesizes that we should understand computers as "complements" to humans rather than their "substitutes."<sup>128</sup> The worker here appears more as a feature of an abstract thought experiment than as an embodied entity whose material conditions are at stake. Nowhere does Thiel detail the day-to-day work required to maintain the company, and specific workers only appear as nodes of stability in the company's cyborgian ecosystem. For Thiel, the qualitative difference between man and machine is the capacity for intentionality and creative thinking. While computers can complete tasks in response to problems humans have already identified and begun to solve, they cannot do the work of intentionally directing creative energy towards new and more difficult problems. And this kind of "man-machine symbiosis," Thiel argues, is the path to building a great company.<sup>129</sup> Here we encounter another magical feature of the cyborg of Thiel's imagining. The human-machine boundary is both transgressed *and* reaffirmed, and the company is both man and machine, but an essential difference between each is maintained.

Where Haraway sees the cyborg as exploding the "border war" between organism and machine,<sup>130</sup> Thiel's cyborg renders the machine (as both computer and as conglomeration of workers) in service of the organism, in turn negating the workers' bodily existences. Whereas Haraway's cyborg "defines a technological *polis* based partly on a revolution in social relations within the *oikos* [household],"<sup>131</sup> Thiel's technological vision is no *polis* at all; it is both devoid of, and in opposition to, politics. It is an autonomous, disembodied subject with zero understanding of its own reliance on the maintenance of deeply gendered and racialized social relations in the household, at the same time as it imagines itself capable of somehow magically surviving forever and constantly regenerating. Thiel's cyborg feigns a willingness to overturn all conventions and origins, while in effect leaving all of their machinations and hierarchies perfectly intact. Meanwhile, the monsters that threaten the company cyborg, the disenchanting workers, are the very same ones that destabilize production under capitalism. An exploration of Thiel's approach to the startup and the work ethic thus demonstrates the paradox of the enchanting wonder offered by this technological wizard. Charisma and cyborgian alchemy aside, Thiel's appeal to reenchantment does not extend to the magician's assistants, as the vast majority of the workers engaged in the actual labor who make the magic possible.

Conclusion: Re-Enchantment and Post-Work Imaginaries

Against rationalizing processes supposedly emptying the modern world of an enchantment borne of the unknown, unknowable, and incalculable, Silicon Valley's mythos promises the reverse and thus makes vivid the latent magic that Josephson-Storm argues persists. The supposedly-utopian vision vows to *re-enchant the world through magical technological progress*.<sup>132</sup> The imperative to build companies that create new things and foster workers who realize the civilization-enhancing mission of technological progress is encapsulated and valorized in different ways by the work ethos of tech stars like Musk and Thiel. Such an ethos relies in turn on hegemonically masculine commitments to power, privilege, hierarchy, and competition, mystified as they are by claims to non-hegemonic co-operation and alternative masculinities.

For Musk, the emphasis on doing what you love in order to expand the scope and scale of consciousness serves to justify the stress and banality of dominating round-the-clock (over)work and the melding of personal and professional realms. The abstract language of world-historical development thus cloaks the day-to-day, embodied realities of Silicon Valley's demands on workers at all levels. More pronouncedly, the abstract language of pushing the bounds of human consciousness and expanding planetary life beyond Earth serves to erase the material conditions of racialized, gendered, sexualized, and class-based inequality propping up the infrastructure of Silicon Valley. For Thiel, the likening of the start-up to a cyborgian organism that infinitely reproduces its own conditions of survival renders invisible the tech workers and the material conditions of work in the tech industry more broadly. Ironically, Thiel's emphasis on the cyborg body reinforces the faceless, disembodied nature of both tech company employees and the working-class labor undergirding the industry's broader infrastructure and the narratives of its elite seeking to imbue its precarious labor structures with meaning. Discourses of Silicon Valley start-ups as the civilizational *avant garde* therefore conceal the politics of work enabling Silicon Valley to thrive.

We have argued that undergirding these discourses—and the Silicon Valley work ethic more broadly—is an ideology of tech bro masculinity through which tech workers and “founders” represent themselves as alternatively masculine. Emphasis on the creative, horizontal, disruptive, non-hierarchical nature of Silicon Valley's work culture positions itself against profit-driven, bureaucratic work cultures that are more “traditionally” masculine. Further, many Silicon Valley start-ups adopt the language of multicultural meritocracy, obscuring the racialized inequalities underpinning the history of Silicon Valley's success. Tech bro masculinity thus bolsters and justifies a work ethic of tireless, continual labor in service of a broader civilizational mission. Taken with the grandiose language used by “founders” such as Musk and Thiel to sell their civilization-saving enterprises, tech bro masculinity reinforces and upholds the language of progressivity and transgression of the status quo within the Silicon Valley work ethic. Through this process of mystification of the material conditions of workers, the precarity of labor gets redistributed onto gendered and racialized workers who do not necessarily have access to the capital required to take romanticized risks.<sup>133</sup> The 2020 election literalized this commitment, as app-based companies such as Uber, Lyft, DoorDash, Instacart, and more collectively spent over \$200 million on an ultimately successful campaign for a California ballot proposition that formally classifies gig economy workers as “independent contractors” not covered by state employment laws.<sup>134</sup> The work ethic of “disrupting” the status quo thus reinforces short-term interventions over long-term stability and structural transformation.

We feel compelled to note that our analysis of the politics of work in Silicon Valley occurs and is being finalized against the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. While unemployment rates in the United States peaked in April 2020—disproportionately affecting low-income workers, women, and racial/ethnic minorities—the tech industry and its bosses are richer than ever.<sup>135</sup> For tech industry workers working from home, the line between work and not-work has been increasingly blurred, if not obliterated completely. Workers report longer working hours, high levels of burnout, and increasing mental health issues, and for women, the situation has been exacerbated by the demands of childcare in an economy that relies on unpaid reproductive labor in the home.<sup>136</sup> In light of these patterns, it is more urgent than ever to attend to the gendered, racialized landscape of work in general, and in particular to reveal the dynamics at play in the tech sector that contribute to the erasure of the very structure of work that elevate tech industry “giants” to their dominant status in the first place.

The structures of precarity underlying the Silicon Valley work ethic raise the question of how the field of political theory can better respond to its promises of enchantment. Jane Bennett challenges Weber's disenchantment thesis, arguing that the contemporary world is rife with sites that enchant, including affective engagements with technology and technological progress.<sup>137</sup> Our article demonstrates that current forms of re-enchantment risk appropriation by interests with social cachet, including when the aspirations are not ethical, democratic, or egalitarian. Contemporary

modes of re-enchantment, even if technological in their actualization, must be decoupled from the work ethic, hegemonic masculinities, and other enactments of domination, and ought to offer their own enchanting counter-visions of freedom that contrast with the dreams specific to Silicon Valley. We suggest that efforts to incorporate an anti-work politics into theorizations of democracy and “the good life,” one that helps imagine futurities beyond the tireless need to labor, are essential for this task. Thiel’s assertion that the only thing workers need to succeed is health insurance and a belief in the company, and Musk’s anti-union efforts to placate dissatisfied workers with frozen yogurt both hearken to the need for this reimagining beyond reformist interventions, a reimagining that might also upset the masculinities undergirding Silicon Valley. So long as only some work—that of the genius innovator, the civilization-saving man, the cool startup entrepreneur, and so on—is able to be valorized by the ideologies of Silicon Valley, its utopian cyborg dreams can admit only a chosen few magician-messiahs.

While the industry might imagine itself to have moved beyond conventional masculinity, while Musk might like to offer a grand interplanetary adventure to escape the trappings of Earth, and while Thiel might posit the endless growth of the startup cyborg, none are in fact able to disrupt normative masculinity or the work ethic, and consequently their attempts at re-enchantment fail at a political level. Amid Silicon Valley’s radical and grandiose self-image, domination and hierarchy persist, even as they are transfigured to be made at minimum suitable, and at most vital, to the high-tech industry. While a future of anti-work politics, post-work imaginaries, and life beyond work<sup>138</sup> might appropriate some of the technological changes actualized by Silicon Valley in order to minimize necessary labor, an emancipatory—and re-enchanting—vision must explicitly and intentionally repudiate the domination constituting the current institutional, ideological, and personal bearers of technological disruption.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, “Hazards of Prophecy: The Failure of Imagination,” in *Profiles of the Future: An Inquiry into the Limits of the Possible*, New (London: Pan Books, 1973); Elon Musk, “Magicians of the Twenty-first Century: Commencement Address - 2012,” Caltech Commencement, June 2012, [https://commencement.caltech.edu/archive/speakers/2012\\_address](https://commencement.caltech.edu/archive/speakers/2012_address).

<sup>2</sup> Musk, “Magicians of the Twenty-first Century.”

<sup>3</sup> On the work ethic, see Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), chap. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons, trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1947), 358–59.

<sup>5</sup> Carrol Doherty and Jocelyn Kiley, “Americans have become much less positive about tech companies’ impact on the US,” *Pew Research Center*, July 29, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/29/americans-have-become-much-less-positive-about-tech-companies-impact-on-the-u-s/>  
<https://www.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/18033NBCWSJJanuaryPoll01192018Complete.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 2–5; Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don’t Talk about It)* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), chap. 2. Both question how political theory and political philosophy have not fully engaged work itself, although this dynamic has changed through an increasing exploration of work by political theorists. See, for example, Paul Apostolidis, “Migrant Day Laborers, the Violence of Work, and Politics of Time,” in *Time, Temporality and Violence in International Relations*, ed. Anna M. Agathangelou and Kyle D. Killian (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 159–71; Samuel Arnold, “The Difference Principle at Work,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (2012): 94–118; James A. Chamberlain, *Undoing Work, Rethinking Community: A Critique of the Social Function of Work* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2018); Anca Gheaus and Lisa Herzog, “The Goods of Work (Other than Money!),” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 47, no. 1 (2016): 70–89; Alex Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press,

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2015); Julie L. Rose, *Free Time* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016); Nicole Marie Shippen, *Decolonizing Time: Work, Leisure, and Freedom* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Doug Henton and Kim Held, “The Dynamics of Silicon Valley: Creative Destruction and the Evolution of the Innovation Habitat,” *Social Science Information* 52, no. 4 (2013): 539–57.

<sup>8</sup> Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 129–56. For an analysis of tropes of technological magic in a case study of programmers in Silicon Valley, see Stef Aupers, “‘The Force Is Great’: Enchantment and Magic in Silicon Valley,” *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology* 3, no. 1 (2009): 153–73.

<sup>9</sup> Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 300.

<sup>11</sup> Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 257.

<sup>12</sup> While we do not explore it further in this paper, James W. Carey and John J. Quirk’s concept of the secular religiosity of futuristic technology discourses would offer a further genealogy of the technological dreams of SV made available for capture by its work ethic. James W. Carey and John J. Quirk, “The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution,” *The American Scholar* 39, no. 2 (1970): 219–241 and Part II, *The American Scholar* 39, no. 3 (1970): 395–424. Further generative connections might be made to the work of Vincent Mosco and David E. Nye. Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 2004). David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Josephson-Strom, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 315.

<sup>14</sup> A corollary of this is that less ostentatious or less visible tech figures are unlikely to provide us with the same opportunity for insight into Silicon Valley’s utopian dreams and enchanting visions. The fame and braggadocio of Musk and Thiel is, we argue, clarifying for the analytical project.

<sup>15</sup> Erin McElroy, “San Francisco Tech Bus Stops, Displacement, and Architectures of Racial Capitalism,” *Arcade*, 34(2), 26–26.

<sup>16</sup> Marianne Cooper, “Being the ‘Go-To Guy’: Fatherhood, Masculinity, and the Organization of Work in Silicon Valley,” *Qualitative Sociology* 23, no. 4 (2000): 379–405.

<sup>17</sup> Cooper, “Being the ‘Go-To-Guy’”; Erin McElroy, “Postsocialism and the Tech Boom 2.0: Techno-Utopics of Racial/Spatial Dispossession,” *Social Identities* 24, no. 2 (2018): 206–21.

<sup>18</sup> McElroy, “San Francisco Tech Bus Stops.”

<sup>19</sup> Tamsin McMahan, “Tech Industry’s Toxic Masculinity Problem: Inside the Valley of the Bros,” *The Globe and Mail*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/technology/toxic-masculinity-in-silicon-valley/article35759481/>; “Cooper, “Being the ‘Go-To Guy.’”

<sup>20</sup> McMahan, “Tech Industry’s Toxic Masculinity Problem.”

<sup>21</sup> Daniel G. Cockayne, “Entrepreneurial Affect: Attachment to Work Practice in San Francisco’s Digital Media Sector,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3 (2016): 460; Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Cooper, “Being the ‘Go-To Guy’”; Sean Illing, “Uber and the Problem of Silicon Valley’s Bro Culture,” *Vox*, February 28, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/conversations/2017/2/28/14726004/uber-susan-fowler-travis-kalanick-sexism-silicon-valley>; McMahan, “Tech Industry’s Toxic Masculinity Problem.”

<sup>23</sup> Sam Levin, “Black and Latino Representation in Silicon Valley Has Declined, Study Shows,” *the Guardian*, October 3, 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/03/silicon-valley-diversity-black-latino-women-decline-study>; McMahan, “Tech Industry’s Toxic Masculinity Problem”; Liza Mundy, “Why Is Silicon Valley So Awful to Women?,” *The Atlantic*, April 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/04/why-is-silicon-valley-so-awful-to-women/517788/>. A race- and gender-blind emphasis on “like-mindedness” and subjective measures such as being a “good fit” for startup work culture have ensured a disproportionate number of white male entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley. Multiple studies have demonstrated the drastic overrepresentation of white men in positions of power within Silicon Valley technology companies. See Ascend Foundation, “Race Trumps Gender in Silicon Valley’s Double-paned Glass Ceiling,” Ascend Foundation Press Releases, October 3, 2017, <http://www.ascendleadership.org/page/Pressrelease/www.ascendleadership.org/>; McMahan, “Tech Industry’s Toxic Masculinity Problem”; Julianne Pepitone, “Silicon Valley Fights to Keep Its Diversity Data Secret,” *CNNMoney*, November 9, 2011, [http://money.cnn.com/2011/11/09/technology/diversity\\_silicon\\_valley/index.htm](http://money.cnn.com/2011/11/09/technology/diversity_silicon_valley/index.htm); Mundy, “Why Is Silicon Valley So Awful to Women?” Meanwhile, the nature of venture capitalist investment culture in Silicon Valley further reinforces the gendered, racialized and classed hierarchies structuring access within this “techno-

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utopian” meritocracy, as rising entrepreneurs often make connections with investors at social events and parties, or through alumni networks that reproduce the same closed cohort of business elite. See Lux Alptraum, “The Silicon Valley Revolution Is for White People Because Its Investors Are All White Too,” *Quartz*, July 6, 2016, <https://qz.com/722095/the-silicon-valley-revolution-is-for-white-people-because-its-investors-are-all-white-too/>;

Emily Chang, *Brotopia: Breaking Up the Boys’ Club of Silicon Valley* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2018);

Mundy, “Why Is Silicon Valley So Awful to Women?”; Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*.

<sup>24</sup> McMahon, “Tech Industry’s Toxic Masculinity Problem; O’Brien, Jeffrey. “The PayPal Mafia.” CNN. 26 Nov., 2007. [https://money.cnn.com/2007/11/13/magazines/fortune/paypal\\_mafia.fortune/index2.htm](https://money.cnn.com/2007/11/13/magazines/fortune/paypal_mafia.fortune/index2.htm).”

<sup>25</sup> Emily Chang, ““Oh My God, This Is So F---Ed Up’: Inside Silicon Valley’s Dark Side,” *Vanity Fair*, February 2018, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2018/01/brotopia-silicon-valley-secretive-orgiastic-inner-sanctum>

<sup>26</sup> Cooper, “Being the ‘Go-To Guy,’” 382-83.

<sup>27</sup> Chang, ““Oh My God, This Is So F---Ed Up.””

<sup>28</sup> Chang, *Brotopia*; Chang, ““Oh My God, This Is So F---Ed Up.””

<sup>29</sup> Marina Levina and Amy Adele Hasinoff, “The Silicon Valley Ethos: Tech Industry Products, Discourses, and Practices,” *Television and New Media* 18, no. 6 (2017): 489–95; McElroy, “Postsocialism and the Tech Boom 2.0.”

<sup>30</sup> Ascend Foundation, “Race Trumps Gender in Silicon Valley’s Double-Paneled Glass Ceiling.”

<sup>31</sup> Cooper, “Being the ‘Go-To Guy,”” McMahon, “Tech Industry’s Toxic Masculinity Problem.”

<sup>32</sup> Cockayne, “Entrepreneurial Affect.”

<sup>33</sup> Cooper, “Being the ‘Go-To Guy.””

<sup>34</sup> Cockayne, “Entrepreneurial Affect”; Sean Doody, Victor Tan Chen, and Jesse Goldstein, “Varieties of Entrepreneurial Capitalism: The Culture of Entrepreneurship and Structural Inequalities of Work and Business Creation,” *Sociology Compass* 10 (2016): 858–76.

<sup>35</sup> Cockayne, “Entrepreneurial Affect”; Cooper, “Being the ‘Go-To Guy.””; Marina Levina, “Disrupt or Die: Mobile Health and Disruptive Innovation as Body Politics,” *Television and New Media* 18, no. 6 (2017): 548–64; McElroy, “Postsocialism and the Tech Boom 2.0.”

<sup>36</sup> It moreover shapes racialized narratives of responsibility, success and aspiration differentially applied to white and Latina girls growing up in the Silicon Valley area. See Elsa Davidson, “Responsible Girls: The Spatialized Politics of Feminine Success and Aspiration in a Divided Silicon Valley, USA,” *Gender, Place and Culture* 22, no. 3 (2015): 390–404. For a critique of ideologies and practices of “flexibility” in work, see Chamberlain, *Undoing Work, Rethinking Community*, chap. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Karen J. Hossfeld, ““Their Logic Against Them’: Contradictions in Sex, Race, and Class in Silicon Valley,” in *Women Workers and Global Restructuring*, ed. Kathryn Ward (Ithaca and London: ILR Press, 1990), 152.

<sup>38</sup> Hossfeld, ““Their Logic Against Them.””

<sup>39</sup> Jen Schradie, “Silicon Valley Ideology and Class Inequality,” in *Handbook of Digital Politics*, ed. Stephen Coleman and Deen Freelon (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015), 67. In dealing with Silicon Valley’s grandiose visions for re-enchantment, in this article we focus more on the mythos upholding and justifying its contours than on the lived material conditions of the workers themselves. It should be noted, though, that there is much more to be said about the workers that make up Silicon Valley’s infrastructure. For an important recent exploration of such workers’ meaning-making and identity-formation through their everyday experiences of labor, see Sara James, *Making a Living, Making a Life: Work, Meaning and Self-Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> McElroy, “Postsocialism and the Tech Boom 2.0.”

<sup>41</sup> McElroy, “Postsocialism and the Tech Boom 2.0.”

<sup>42</sup> Musk, “Magicians of the twenty-first Century.”

<sup>43</sup> Forbes, “Elon Musk.” *Forbes 400*, May 4, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/profile/elon-musk/?sh=4cb1c92a7999>.

This makes him the second-wealthiest person in the world, as of May 2021; his net worth has grown from \$40 billion in February 2020, driven primarily by a rapid increase in the stock price of Tesla.

<sup>44</sup> Johana Bhuiyan, “The Cult of Elon Musk Lives On,” Recode, December 6, 2017,

<https://www.recode.net/2017/12/6/16680816/elon-musk-spacex-tesla-recode-100-electric-car-rocket-hyperloop-boring>. On Twitter, Musk has himself playfully acknowledged his cult-like following Elon Musk, “Dear Cult Members, I Love You,” Tweet, @elonmusk, October 26, 2016,

<https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/791389989477036032>.

<sup>45</sup> Ashlee Vance, “Elon Musk’s Space Dream Almost Killed Tesla,” Bloomberg, May 14, 2015,

<http://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2015-elon-musk-spacex/>.

<sup>46</sup> Alyssa Berezna, “Meet the Internet’s Biggest Elon Musk Fans,” The Ringer, October 4, 2016,

<https://www.theringer.com/2016/10/4/16044804/meet-the-internets-biggest-elon-musk-fans-6590531f1fe6>.

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- <sup>47</sup> Elon Musk, “I am accumulating resources...,” Tweet, @elonmusk, March 21, 2021, <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1373507545315172357>.
- <sup>48</sup> Elon Musk, “Making Humans a Multi-Planetary Species,” *New Space* 5, no. 2 (2017): 46, <https://doi.org/10.1089/space.2017.29009.emu>. He elaborates that he does not “have an immediate doomsday prophecy, but eventually, history suggests, there will be some doomsday event.” In a recent interview at the South by Southwest festival, he suggested that his greatest concerns are a third world war and the exponential growth of artificial intelligence. SXSU, *Elon Musk Answers Your Questions! | SXSU 2018*, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzIUyrcb0s>.
- <sup>49</sup> Wall Street Journal, *Elon Musk: I’ll Put a Man on Mars in 10 Years*, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiPJs18pl8Q>. Here, and with other references to videos of interviews and speeches by Musk, the transcription is our own.
- <sup>50</sup> Musk, “Magicians of the Twenty-first Century.”
- <sup>51</sup> Musk, “Magicians of the Twenty-first Century.”
- <sup>52</sup> Musk, “Magicians of the Twenty-first Century.”
- <sup>53</sup> The Mars Society, *Elon Musk “Mars Pioneer Award” Acceptance Speech - 15th Annual International Mars Society Convention*, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=710&v=PK0kTcJFnVk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=710&v=PK0kTcJFnVk).
- <sup>54</sup> The Mars Society, *Elon Musk “Mars Pioneer Award” Acceptance Speech*.
- <sup>55</sup> Musk, “Making Humans a Multi-Planetary Species,” 61.
- <sup>56</sup> Eric Johnson and Kara Swisher, “Full Q&A: Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk on Recode Decode,” Recode, November 2, 2018, <https://www.recode.net/2018/11/2/18053428/recode-decode-full-podcast-transcript-elon-musk-tesla-spacex-boring-company-kara-swisher>.
- <sup>57</sup> SXSU, *Elon Musk Answers Your Questions! | SXSU 2018*.
- <sup>58</sup> Musk, “Magicians of the Twenty-first Century.”
- <sup>59</sup> USC, *Elon Musk USC Commencement Speech | USC Marshall School of Business Undergraduate Commencement 2014*, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7Qh-vwpYH8>.
- <sup>60</sup> USC, *Elon Musk USC Commencement Speech*.
- <sup>61</sup> Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 46; also see Chamberlain, *Undoing Work, Rethinking Community*, chaps. 1–2.
- <sup>62</sup> Cockayne, “Entrepreneurial Affect,” 457–58.
- <sup>63</sup> Stanford Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders, *Elon Musk’s 2003 Stanford University Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders Lecture*, 2003, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afZTrfvB2AQ>; USC, *Elon Musk USC Commencement Speech*.
- <sup>64</sup> Áine Cain, “A Look at the Demanding Schedule of Elon Musk,” *Business Insider*, February 6, 2018, <http://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-daily-schedule-2017-6>.
- <sup>65</sup> Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 75–77.
- <sup>66</sup> PayScale, “Top Tech Companies Compared,” PayScale, 2016, <https://www.payscale.com/data-packages/top-tech-companies-compared>.
- <sup>67</sup> Elon Musk, “SpaceX and Tesla Rated...,” Tweet, @elonmusk, March 6, 2016, <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/706610504161107968>.
- <sup>68</sup> Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 38.
- <sup>69</sup> Stanford Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders, *Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders Lecture*.
- <sup>70</sup> Computer History Museum, *CHM Revolutionaries: An Evening with Elon Musk*, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1706&v=AHHwXUm3iIlg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1706&v=AHHwXUm3iIlg).
- <sup>71</sup> USC, *Elon Musk USC Commencement Speech*.
- <sup>72</sup> Miya Tokumitsu, *Do What You Love: And Other Lies About Success and Happiness* (New York: Regan Arts., 2015).
- <sup>73</sup> Stanford Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders, *Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders Lecture*.
- <sup>74</sup> Stanford Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders, *Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders Lecture*.
- <sup>75</sup> Tokumitsu, *Do What You Love*, 122. Musk is indeed this kind of icon of the overwork and under-sleep that constitutes and is constituted by the DWYL ethos, for instance in a recent *Business Insider* slideshow that lets the reader “take a look at a day in the life of Elon Musk” See Cain, “A Look at the Demanding Schedule of Elon Musk.”
- <sup>76</sup> Cockayne, “Entrepreneurial Affect.”
- <sup>77</sup> This team is, for example, “incredible ... super-talented people who really work like crazy... a great team” SXSU, *Elon Musk Answers Your Questions! | SXSU 2018*.
- <sup>78</sup> Johnson and Swisher.
- <sup>79</sup> Stanford Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders, *Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders Lecture*.

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- <sup>80</sup> Caroline O’Donovan, “Elon Musk Slams Tesla Union Drive, Promises Workers Free Frozen Yogurt,” *BuzzFeed News*, February 24, 2017, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/carolineodonovan/musk-slams-union-drive-in-email-to-employees>.
- <sup>81</sup> He has nonetheless claimed in a tweet that there is “nothing stopping” Tesla workers from voting to form a union, but that he thinks it would make no sense to do so Elon Musk, “Nothing Stopping Tesla Team...,” Tweet, @elonmusk, May 21, 2018, <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/998454539941367808?s=11>.
- <sup>82</sup> O’Donovan, “Elon Musk Slams Tesla Union Drive.”
- <sup>83</sup> Will Evans and Alyssa Jeong Perry, “Tesla Says Its Factory Is Safer. But It Left Injuries off the Books,” *Reveal*, April 16, 2018, <https://www.revealnews.org/article/tesla-says-its-factory-is-safer-but-it-left-injuries-off-the-books/>
- <sup>84</sup> Elon Musk, “No, They’re Just Some...,” Tweet, @elonmusk, May 23, 2018, <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/999376607662952448>.
- <sup>85</sup> Louis Hansen, “Epithets, Racist Drawings at Tesla Factory, Ex-Workers Say,” *The Mercury News*, October 17, 2017, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2017/10/16/4792668/>.
- <sup>86</sup> Sam Levin, “Tesla Workers Claim Anti-LGBT Threats, Taunts, and Racial Abuse in Lawsuits,” *The Guardian*, October 19, 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/19/tesla-factory-workers-discrimination-claim-race-lgbt-elon-musk>.
- <sup>87</sup> Sara Salinas, “Tesla Factory Workers Were Reportedly Offered Free Red Bull, Walked through Raw Sewage to Meet Model 3 Quotas,” *CNBC*, July 12, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/12/teslamodel-3-workers-got-free-red-bull-walked-through-sewage-report.html>.
- <sup>88</sup> Matthew Goldstein, “Elon Musk Steps Down as Chairman in Deal With S.E.C. Over Tweet About Tesla,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/29/business/tesla-musk-sec-settlement.html>.
- <sup>89</sup> Noam Scheiber, “Tesla employee’s firing and Elon Musk tweet on union were illegal, labor board rules,” *The New York Times*, March 25, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/25/business/musk-labor-board.html>
- <sup>90</sup> Joe Walsh, “Elon Musk’s False COVID Predictions,” *Forbes*, March 13, 2021.
- <sup>91</sup> Elon Musk, “FREE AMERICA NOW,” Tweet, @elonmusk, April 29, 2020, <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1255380013488189440?s=12>; Elon Musk, “Tesla is starting...,” Tweet, @elonmusk, May 11, 2020, <https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1259945593805221891>.
- <sup>92</sup> Kara Swisher, “Elon Musk: ‘A.I. Doesn’t Need to Hate Us to Destroy Us’,” *The New York Times*, September 28, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/28/opinion/sway-kara-swisher-elon-musk.html?showTranscript=1>.
- <sup>93</sup> SXSW, *Elon Musk Answers Your Questions! | SXSW 2018*.
- <sup>94</sup> Tokumitsu, *Do What You Love*, 122.
- <sup>95</sup> USC, *Elon Musk USC Commencement Speech*.
- <sup>96</sup> Wall Street Journal, *Elon Musk*.
- <sup>97</sup> Alyson Shontell, “The Way Elon Musk Manages 5 Kids And 3 Businesses Has People Up In Arms,” *Business Insider*, March 9, 2013, <http://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musks-secret-to-managing-5-kids-and-3-businesses-at-the-same-time-2013-3>. Musk shares custody of his children with his first wife. In 2018, he began dating the musician Grimes, and has encouraged her decision to change her legal first name to *c*, the symbol for the speed of light; see Laura Hudson, “Grimes Is Changing Her Name to the Symbol for the Speed of Light, Encouraged by Elon Musk,” *The Verge*, May 19, 2018, <https://www.theverge.com/2018/5/19/17372526/grimes-c-boucher-name-change-elon-musk>.
- <sup>98</sup> David Gelles et al., “Elon Musk Details ‘Excruciating’ Personal Toll of Tesla Turmoil,” *The New York Times*, August 21, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/16/business/elon-musk-interview-tesla.html>.
- <sup>99</sup> Mullen and Shane, “Weed, Whiskey, Tesla and a Flamethrower.”
- <sup>100</sup> Johnson and Swisher, “Full Q&A.”
- <sup>101</sup> Joe Rogan, *Joe Rogan Experience #1169 - Elon Musk*, accessed November 3, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycPr5-27vSI>.
- <sup>102</sup> The Mars Society, *Elon Musk “Mars Pioneer Award.”*
- <sup>103</sup> Here, we note Josephson-Storms’s claim that magic and charisma frequently work together in Weber’s thoughts. *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 279.
- <sup>104</sup> Peter Thiel and Blake Masters, *Zero to One: Notes on Startups, or How to Build the Future* (New York: Crown Business, 2014).
- <sup>105</sup> The Rubin Report, *Trump, Gawker, and Leaving Silicon Valley | Peter Thiel*, 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h10kXgTdhNU>.
- <sup>106</sup> Jeff Bercovici, “Peter Thiel Is Very, Very Interested in Young People’s Blood,” *Inc. Magazine*, August 1, 2016, <https://www.inc.com/jeff-bercovici/peter-thiel-young-blood.html>; Maureen Dowd, “Peter Thiel, Trump’s Tech Pal,

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Explains Himself,” *The New York Times*, January 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/11/fashion/peter-thiel-donald-trump-silicon-valley-technology-gawker.html>; Sam Shear, “Peter Thiel-backed psychedelics start-up plans to raise \$100 million in IPO,” *CNBC*, April 21, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/21/atai-ipo-peter-thiel-backed-psychedelics-firm-to-raise-100-million.html>.

<sup>107</sup> The SeaSteadying Institute, “Home Page,” *The SeaSteadying Institute*, accessed November 29, 2019

<sup>108</sup> Will Drabold, “Read Peter Thiel’s Speech at the Republican Convention,” *Time*, July 22, 2016, <http://time.com/4417679/republican-convention-peter-thiel-transcript/>.

<sup>109</sup> Mimi Nguyen, “Queer Cyborgs and New Mutants: Race, Sexuality, and Prosthetic Sociality in Digital Space,” in *Asian America.Net: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cyberspace*, ed. Rachel C. Lee and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (New York: Routledge, 2003), 287.

<sup>110</sup> Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), chap. 8.

<sup>111</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 150.

<sup>112</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 2.

<sup>113</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 31–32; 90–92; 113; 10.

<sup>114</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 35; 62; 84–85; 173–75; 100–102.

<sup>115</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, chap. 10.

<sup>116</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 113.

<sup>117</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 119.

<sup>118</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 124.

<sup>119</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 122.

<sup>120</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 114.

<sup>121</sup> Johnson and Swisher, “Full Q&A.”

<sup>122</sup> Johnson and Swisher, “Full Q&A,” 117.

<sup>123</sup> Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

<sup>124</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 124–25. This is the only mention of “family” in the entire book, reinforcing an unencumbered masculinism of this vision of start-ups.

<sup>125</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 122.

<sup>126</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 123.

<sup>127</sup> Sara Morrison, “Everything you need to know about Palantir, the secretive company coming for all your data,” *Recode*, August 26, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/recode/2020/7/16/21323458/palantir-ipo-hhs-protect-peter-thiel-cia-intelligence>.

<sup>128</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 141.

<sup>129</sup> Thiel and Masters, *Zero to One*, 146.

<sup>130</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 150–51.

<sup>131</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 151.

<sup>132</sup> The self-regulating promise of this new utopia no longer requires a market free from government intervention, as Karl Polanyi observed in the mid-twentieth century—the self-regulating mechanism is instead ensured through the promise of the civilizational-saving work ethic itself. Christopher England, “Karl Polanyi’s Genealogy of Utopian Liberalism,” *Theory & Event* 21, no. 2 (2018): 434–56.

<sup>133</sup> Cockayne, “Entrepreneurial Affect.”

<sup>134</sup> Ryan Menezes, Maloy Moore, and Phi Do, “Billions have been spent on California’s ballot measure battles,” *The Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/projects/props-california-2020-election-money/>.

<sup>135</sup> Gene Falk, et al., “Unemployment Rates During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Congressional Research Service*, Brief R46554 (2021); Shira Ovide, “How Big Tech Won the Pandemic,” *The New York Times*, April 30, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/30/technology/big-tech-pandemic.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Limeade Employee Experience, “Workplaces in Crisis: Employee Care Still Missing the Mark,” *Limeade*, October 12, 2020, <https://www.limeade.com/en/blog/employee-experience-during-the-pandemic-survey/>; Nicole Bateman and Martha Ross, “Why has COVID-19 Been Especially Harmful for Working Women?,” *Brookings Institution*, October 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/why-has-COVID-19-been-especially-harmful-for-working-women/>.

<sup>137</sup> Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001). Note, however, that Bennett’s challenge to Weber differs from that of Josephson-Storm (see *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 5; 319n9).

<sup>138</sup> Weeks, *The Problem with Work*.