



REVISITING THE GLOBAL IMAGINARY

THEORIES, IDEOLOGIES,
SUBJECTIVITIES: ESSAYS
IN HONOR OF
MANFRED STEGER

EDITED BY CHRIS HUDSON
AND ERIN K. WILSON



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Editors

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CHAPTER 7

Into the Glorious Future: The Utopia of Cybernetic Capitalism According to Google's Ideologues

Timothy Erik Ström

INTRODUCTION

you hit a button and within seconds a self-driving car pulls up outside your apartment. You both get in, say your destination, and are whisked away. On your journey, you talk, play games, and catch up on news, while the car effortlessly navigates the roads. It merges onto a freeway and gets into a high-speed lane where self-driving cars flow faster, more smoothly and use less of the road (Page and Brin [2012](#)).

This is how Larry Page, co-founder of Google and CEO of its parent company Alphabet, opened his 2012 letter to investors. Characters like Page are fond of inviting us to imagine various futuristic fantasies, typically ones where carefree people enjoy a privileged life of technologically augmented leisure. These fantasies are usually peppered with capitalist watchwords: productivity, efficiency, innovation, as well as a futurist fetishization of

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speed. This chapter is interested in the ideological function of ‘the future’ when uttered by elite members of Google, one of the world’s most powerful high-tech firms. I am interested in how they ideologically formulate and frame their conception of ‘the future’; the cultural myths that they draw on. I argue that these visions have an ideological function in the present, serving to legitimize, naturalize, and decontest the status quo of the present.

This chapter draws on and extends the work that Manfred Steger presented in his book *Globalisms* (2009). There, Steger critically analyzed several competing ideological frameworks for interpreting the multidimensional processes of globalization, putting a focus on the dominant frame, what he calls ‘market globalism.’ This ideological formation bears a certain ‘family resemblance’ to the discussion in this chapter, which puts less focus on globalization per se, and more on ‘the future’ and technology more broadly. Following Steger, I use a similar methodology, with the below research drawing from a large body of public statements issued by elite members of Google between 1998 and 2017. These statements were drawn from letters to shareholders, books, official blog posts, and media statements. Anytime one of the Google’s elite (founders, top executives, spokespeople, etc.) spoke about ‘the future,’ I saved the relevant quote and context in an archive. Later, I went over this coded archive and subjected the material to a critical discourse analysis that embeds the language into a ‘cultural political economy,’ which provides a practical context while emphasizing the socially constructed nature of economies, states, and other social institutions (Fairclough 2006, 27). This work is done in order to tease out the ideological work performed in the practices of elite members of Google.

This ideology serves to naturalize global capitalism, the dominant and dominating mode of social practice. It is characterized by world-wide regimes of extraction and production, connected by heterogeneous supply chains and subsumed by layers of financialization; all featuring a deeply uneven distribution of wealth and power. In this context, the ideology of ‘the future’ serves a political function in the present. As I show in the below chapter, this capitalist ideology of the future serves to legitimize problematic practices in the present by projecting a glorious future.

NEW OLD FUTURES

When cyber-capitalists evoke a radiant future, they draw on a long historical legacy that goes back to Christian millennialism and its dreams of redeeming humanity; of elevating us from our fallen state into the divine.

Historian of technology David Noble has shown how today's technologists, in their 'sober pursuit of utility, power, and profit,' are driven by 'an enduring, other-worldly quest for transcendence and salvation' (1999, 3). Noble looks at the religious and mythological motivations that have been intimately bound-up with technological and scientific developments. Instead of using the simplistic and misleading science-versus-religion framework, he looks at the ideological narratives to see how dreams of salvation have been secularized and maintain a key place in meaning-making of contemporary technologists.

With the rise of capitalist modernity, technology became privileged as the worldly means to achieve these other-worldly goals. Certain thinkers began to imagine humanity as outside and above nature, made in the image of God, and destined to have dominion over the earth. This vision was most concisely captured by Descartes who proclaimed that humanity must become 'masters and possessors of nature' (2008). Crucially, scientific knowledge and technology were considered to be the best means to achieve this goal, with empire and capitalism functioning as an implicit and unquestioned background. This culminated in the peculiar cultural assumption of 'Progress' with a capital 'P.' The idea that the future will be better than the present first came to prominence in Europe when Enlightenment thinking became entangled with imperial expansion, industrial production, scientific abstractions, utilitarian ethics, instrumental reason, technological developments, and capital accumulation (Mumford 1963). All of this amounted to a major ontological mutation, as the historic experience creating a social imaginary where 'the future' became an ideological projection; a linear, masterable extension of the present moving ever upward in an infinite expansion (Berardi 2015, 199).

More recently, these long-term trajectories took a different inflection with the rise of computing machines during World War II. Fred Turner has described how cybernetics emerged in military-industrial research labs, before some of its ideas merged with a depoliticized segment of the counter-cultural movement that arose in the USA during the 1960s (2006). Departing from the New Left, this depoliticized strand of the counter-culture chose not to directly confront injustice, inequality, or war, and it neglected questions of gender, race, and class. Rather, they believed that through individual empowerment, 'free markets,' and technological solutions they could change the world for the better (Turner 2006). Much of this thinking went into the budding high-tech sector that rose to prominence in the 1990s. It has cumulated in Silicon Valley elite articulating a

world-view ‘inspired by an X-Men reading of *Atlas Shrugged*,’ to use Benjamin Bratton’s colorful phrase (2014).

The long-term dynamics of capitalism as a world-historic system combine with these technological and cultural developments to create the increasingly dominant social formation that I call ‘cybernetic capitalism.’ I use the concept of cyber-capitalism as an analytical category; it can be imagined as a kind of layer enabled by the abstracting power of computing machines that is spread unevenly across the capitalist world-system, a layer that bleeds through and changes patterns of social practice (Ström 2017, 2018). This formation is centralized on a cluster of massive monopolistic communications technology companies which currently occupy the ‘commanding heights of world capitalism’ (McChesney 2013, 131).

These tech-giants have tremendous power. One indication of this can be gauged via the metric of market capitalization. In October of 2017, five of the top six corporations by market capitalization are tech-giants—namely 1. Apple, 2. Alphabet, 3. Microsoft, 4. Amazon, and (after 5. Berkshire Hathaway) 6. Facebook. The total market capitalization of these five tech-giants comes to \$2674 trillion, which if placed in the ranks of nation-state GDP, would push the United Kingdom out of the number five slot and sit below Germany. Market capitalization, which measures the value of shares on the stock market, gives an idea of how valued these firms are by financial investors, and serves to demonstrate how entangled these tech-giants are with processes of financialization. This is significant to discussions of the future, for as Cédric Durand notes, financialization is ‘above all distinguished by the accumulation of drawing rights over values yet to be produced’ (Durand 2017, 4). Hence, when Wall Street invests massively in cyber-capitalist firms, they are betting on even bigger returns, thus hoping to appropriate future wealth.

While this process transcends any one firm, Google are a useful model in so much as they are considered an *exemplar* of cybernetic capitalism. Not only do they have a market capitalization of US\$668 billion—about the same as the GDP of Saudi Arabia or Switzerland—but they have literally billions of people engaging with their technology in their everyday life. The company is so normalized that they have become a verb. As a result, many other companies, start-ups and other organizations aspire to be like Google, thus making them a privileged actor and articulator of the cybernetic capitalist social formation.

The dynamic mix of cybernetics, counter-culture, and religions of technology come together in the ideology of cyber-capitalism. This is where

meaning-making happens, where values, myths, and narratives are intertwined with these social practices—legitimizing, naturalizing, and extending them via cultural webs of meaning. In a subjective material way, myths and matter, ideas and infrastructure, and symbols and systems are interwoven, mutually determining one another. With this in mind, I am not interested in individual moral make-up of the Google elite, but rather how they ideologically interpret the world and how this is operationalized to defend and extend cybernetic capitalism as a dominant and dominating social formation.

‘THE FUTURE’S SO BRIGHT...’

Many a cybernetic capitalist claim begins with the line: ‘In the future...’ This is generally followed by a bright fantasy which stems from, in Page’s words, ‘a deep sense of optimism about the potential of technology to improve people’s lives, and the world’ (Page 2013). Ignoring the profound ambivalences immanent in technology, cyber-capitalists staunchly remain a vanguard of their own brand of bright futurism. Google’s CEO-for-a-decade Eric Schmidt teamed up with Page’s advisor, Jonathan Rosenberg, to write a best-selling book called *How Google Works* (2014). In this, the authors affirm beyond any shadow of a doubt, that:

things will get better. We are technology optimists. We believe in the power of technology to make the world a better place [...] We see most big problems as information problems, which means that with enough data and the ability to crunch it, virtually any challenge facing humanity today can be solved. We think computers will serve at the behest of people—all people—to make their lives better and easier. (2014, 255–6)

This glorious vision rests on the belief that they possess a neat answer to all questions: *technology*, or more specifically, elite-led, profit-maximizing technology. Google’s rhetoric of ‘inclusion,’ ‘cooperation,’ and ‘equality’ (2014, 155) cannot dodge the fact that the co-founder and Schmidt control 66 percent of voting power for the entire corporation, a massive centralization of decision-making power under the reign of three white, male billionaires (Goodman 2012). Furthermore, any decision they make is fundamentally constrained by the limits of capital accumulation, with the company beholden to its legal responsibility to maximize profits for its external investors. The Google elite skip this drastic shrinking of

possibilities but claim it to be a virtue: as Schmidt's 'aphorism' states: 'Revenue solves all known problems' (2014, 153). Believing they possess the patented cure-all, the authors claim: 'It is hard for us to look at an industry or field and not see a bright future' (2014, 258).

Elsewhere, Schmidt gives an example where he fantasizes that in the future profit-maximizing techno-fixes can solve the problem of terrorism. In the context of suggesting 'public-private partnerships' to prevent the 'radicalization of youth'—hence countering terrorism, cyber-capitalist style—the following argument is made:

Technology companies are uniquely positioned to lead this effort internationally. Many of the most prominent ones have all the values of a democratic society with none of the baggage of being a government—they can go where governments can't, speak to people off the diplomatic radar and operate in the neutral, universal language of technology. Moreover [...the tech-industry] has perhaps the best understanding of how to distract young people [...] These companies may not understand the nuances of radicalization or the differences between specific populations in key theaters like Yemen, Iraq and Somalia, but they do understand young people and the toys they like to play with. Only once we have their attention can we hope to win their hearts and minds. (Schmidt and Cohen 2013, 180–1)

So, rather than considering systemic problems—such as gaping inequality, environmental degradation, colonial legacies, US military aggression, or the lack of meaningful democracy—these members of the Google elite are of the opinion that a good dose of technologically augmented consumerism will cure the world's ills. Seeking to get attention through distraction, these cyber-capitalists seem to be suggesting that people in 'key theaters' should not be concerned with the drones that buzz overhead; rather, focus on the devices that plug them into Google's circuits of surveillance-fueled accumulation.

This faith in a technology-enhanced future is overtly—and at times even desperately—optimistic. Hence Schmidt and Rosenberg repeating variations on the theme: at Google 'we are all technology optimists: We believe technology and the Internet have the power to change the world for the better' (2014, 185). Not even serious threats to the structure of global capitalism have succeeded in denting Google's glorious vision. Writing in the bowels of the global financial crisis, co-founder Sergey Brin said to investors:

I am optimistic about the future, because I believe scarcity breeds clarity: it focuses minds, forcing people to think creatively and rise to the challenge. While much smaller in scale than today's global collapse, the dot-com bust of 2000–2002 pushed Google and others in the industry to take some tough decisions—and we all emerged stronger as a result. (Page and Brin 2008)

One may pause to ask: scarcity for whom? The multi-billionaire was hardly in danger of having any of his private jets repossessed. Indeed, the co-founders, Page and Brin, have exorbitant wealth, around US\$45 billion each, putting them in 12th and 13th place on *Forbes'* world's richest list. By my calculations they are many orders of magnitude above 'the 1%,' to use the phrase popularized by the Occupy Wall Street movement. Rather, they are 'the 0.00,000,001%.' This is a symptom of the extreme concentration of wealth in the capitalist world-system, a phenomenon captured in many popular facts, such as the recent Oxfam report that noted that eight men (purposeful gendering) own the same wealth as the poorest half of humanity (Hardoon 2017). Importantly, four of this eight are from the tech sector: (1. Bill Gates, Microsoft), 3. Jeff Bezos, Amazon, 5. Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook, 7. Larry Ellison, Oracle. As Page and Brin had to divide their wealth between them, they sit just outside the top eight at numbers 12 and 13 respectively.

Twenty years ago, Barbrook and Cameron wrote that cyber-capitalism's upbeat optimism depended on 'a wilful blindness toward the other much less positive-features of life on the West Coast: racism, poverty, and environmental degradation' (1996, 45). Observations like this now need to be extended onto a global level, with this 'wilful blindness' extending around the world, often cascading down outsourced supply lines and seeping through food chains. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the fact that the cyber-capitalist elite live in extreme privilege. In late 2011 Schmidt said to *BusinessWeek*:

We live in a bubble, and I don't mean a tech bubble or a valuation bubble. I mean a bubble as in our own little world... And what a world it is: Companies can't hire people fast enough. Young people can work hard and make a fortune. Homes hold their value. Occupy Wall Street isn't really something that comes up in daily discussion, because their issues are not our daily reality. (cited in Stone 2011)

The only threat that the Google elite worry may dare throw shadows onto their glorious future is the creeping scourge of government regulation. Page bemoans that regulations are ‘preventing real technological progress,’ arguing that government institutions are too old and slow to deal with what is unfolding. Demonstrating the full force of his historical sensibility, Page said: ‘Law can’t be right if it’s 50 years old. Like, it’s before the Internet’ (2013). According to Page, society needs ‘mechanisms to allow [for] experimentation. There’s many, many exciting and important things you could do that you just can’t do ’cause they’re illegal or they’re not allowed by regulation’ (2013). He proposes the creation of a *Jurassic Park* style enclave: a lawless, techno-utopian colony surrendered to the utterly unregulated dominion of cyber-capitalists. Something like a Congo Free State for the twenty-first century. This frightful proposal would, in Page’s view, create the conditions for making ‘real technological progress.’

This ‘regulation-is-bad’ thinking is locked firmly in the cyber-capitalist belief that the global integration of profit-driven, ‘free’ markets will allow avarice to be transmuted by the ‘invisible hand’ into a virtuous ‘rising tide that lifts all boats.’ This draws legitimacy from the long history of market utopianism, with its ideals of incentives, efficiency, and competition. This powerful ideological background is implicit when, for example, Schmidt admits that he subscribes to the ‘trickle-down’ school of economics (Goodman 2012). Outside the rhetoric of power, such claims are increasingly difficult to substantiate in the age of austerity, monopoly capital, and rapidly intensifying inequality. As Arundhati Roy noted, while ‘trickle-down’ has unambiguously failed for the vast majority of the Earth’s population, ‘gush-up’ clearly functions splendidly for the elite (2015, 8). Even if we put aside this vision of the future’s dependence on willful blindness, on closer inquiry, the Google elite’s staunch optimism seems kind of perverse. As Jason Moore noted, perhaps the most pessimistic view is one that hopes for the survival of capitalist modernity in something like its present form (2015, 87).

DETERMINISM AS DEPOLITICIZATION

Schmidt regularly receives the invite-only summons to attend the World Economic Forum, in Davos, Switzerland. Before an elite audience of politicians, corporate executives, lobbyists, and well-behaved journalists, Schmidt delivered a keynote where he lathered praise upon capitalism’s

‘creative destruction,’ describing it as a fundamental force for good in the world. He claimed that waves of job losses resulting from computerized automation ‘is no different from the loom when it was invented, and I don’t think any one of us would want to eliminate the loom [...] This is how the world gets better. This is how the GDP grows. This is how we leave a better world for our children’ (cited in Goodman 2012). Page eagerly agrees with this assessment, painting the future with thick strokes of techno-determinist inevitability:

You can’t wish away these things from happening, they are going to happen [...] You’re going to have some very amazing capabilities in the economy. When we have computers that can do more and more jobs, it’s going to change how we think about work. There’s no way around that. You can’t wish it away. (cited in Waters 2014)

Determinism is a philosophical theory based on the assumption that all events can be usefully described in terms of causes and effects connected by specific causal chains, contexts, or frames. Across history, various cultural manifestations of determinism have appeared: from an omnipotent God to scientific materialism. Theories of determinism have been simultaneously strengthened and weakened in the twentieth century. They have been actively rejected and seriously qualified in many natural sciences, such as in physics with, for example, Werner Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle blurring the borders between phenomena and perception. Yet, at the same time in the social sphere, a misplaced physic envy has led to many approaches, such as behavioral economics, increasingly incorporating determinism into their analytic frameworks.

Following Raymond Williams’ conception of determinism, the problem is not that things may be determined to various extents—because such limits are a constitutive part of subjective material reality—but rather the problem is based on specific epistemological claims made for determinative relations. Techno-determinists tend problematically to assert one-to-one relations with ascribed outcomes in a one-dimensional manner. Admittedly, ‘techno-determinism’ is a highly complex phenomenon, with various interpretations of it. In this chapter, I am not interested in how Marx, McLuhan, or any other philosopher conceptualized the problem; rather I seek to investigate the influential doctrine of techno-determinism to note its political function in cybernetic capitalism (Steger 2009, 68–75).

When a small group of powerful people frame their political decisions as ‘inevitable’ it has a strong ideological function. For example, in the above quotes, Schmidt and Page claim that the large-scale destruction of jobs is not motivated by capital’s need to save labor, maximize profits, control workers, and monopolize markets; rather it is the technology itself that determines these changes. This formulation has an important ideological function, for one cannot challenge what is determined, one cannot contest what is inevitable: ‘there is no alternative,’ to use Thatcher’s grim slogan. In this, they are going far beyond determinism as a theoretical description of how the universe supposedly functions. As Berardi noted, determinism is also a *political project* (2015, 323). Framed in this way, the political project of cyber-capitalism is actively advanced by weaving techno-determinism into its ideological vision of the future.

This has the effect of projecting an imaginary of ‘depoliticization.’ Discussing the dangers of this, Ingerid Straume has argued that to change existing institutions and creatively imagine new social meanings and formations, ‘it is necessary to realise that all things could be otherwise.’ She notes that if this is not properly understood or instituted, then determinism results; society is imagined as controlled by forces beyond its influence and hence a social practice like capital accumulation may be conceived of as a law-like force which cannot be questioned (Straume and Humphrey 2011, 47). Such determinism is incompatible with democracy, and can be mobilized to serve powerful interests.

What is more, this determinism conflicts with the freedom loving rhetoric of ‘free choice,’ ‘free markets,’ ‘free speech,’ and ‘free trade’; for human agency seems to play no role under techno-determinism. This contradiction in cyber-capitalism was noted two decades ago by Barbrook and Cameron who wrote that the ideology was a ‘contradictory mix of technological determinism and libertarian individualism’ (1996, 49), concealing the contradictions that flow from this unstable union by accepting ‘both visions at the same time and by not criticising either of them’ (52). Projecting ‘the future’ as techno-determined is thus a powerful depoliticizing tactic used to advance the cyber-capitalist vision. This ideological function serves up the future as determined, thus inevitable and incontestable; this serves to insulate today’s hegemons from alternatives. The futurist rhetoric can be seen as being less about ‘the future’ and more about control in the present.

The Google elite tap into this when they claim that we are moving toward a utopian future of total automation. This has been a capitalist

fantasy for centuries—a world without workers. Curiously, the same fantasy exists in many radical writings, albeit for inverted ideological reasons. For example, Marx emphasized in the *Grundrisse* that automation could lead to a situation in which the worker could be transformed into a ‘watchman and regulator’ of machines, leaving them much more non-work time where they would be free to engage in meaningful and creative activities (1973, 705). Crucially, this vision is fundamentally incompatible with the doctrine of infinite accumulation and exploitation which lies at the heart of capitalism.

The capitalist version of this fantasy serves an ideological function in the present, where by it can downplay growing unemployment and spiraling inequality in the present, because in the glorious future, technology will fix everything. Yet, as the push to total automation is being designed and implemented unilaterally by cyber-capitalist corporations—who must systematically put maximizing shareholder returns *über alles*—this raises many questions. Following Brecht, we may ask: Who is to maintain this automated utopia? Who will cook and clean, and under what labor standards? Then, we may go further and ask how will the legions of newly unemployed be able to partake in the endless consumerism necessary to drive this endless economic growth? How can states deprived of tax revenue deal with the mounting ‘externalities’? And last, but not least, how is this infinite growth even possible within finite nature, including finite human nature? Within the confines of cyber-capitalism, the circular answer-to-all-questions is simply: elite-led, for-profit technology.

As feminist scholar Maria Mies has noted a generation ago, the utopia of total automation is rooted in the continued exploitation and domination of people who are pushed into increasingly precarious situations. She sees this fantasy as ‘the last desperate effort of White Man to realise his technocratic utopia, based on the domination of nature, women and colonies’ (2014, 215–6). The dynamic that she confronted is powerfully evident in the present, with significant increases in the exploitation of the precarious and peripheral. An example can be seen with the material production of the infrastructure of computers. These devices are the product of a specific reorganization of nature, intimately entangled with social relations and labor. Yet, despite the huge amount of work that goes into producing, organizing, and maintaining these computing machines, the process is painted as ‘automatic,’ a product of the technology itself. This deeply alienating process is intensified by patterns of supply chains—outsourcing and offshoring—which serve to multiply and divide global labor (Mezzadra

and Neilson 2013; Tsing 2009). Cyber-capitalist companies work with material mined and recombined by a diverse array of workers, with high levels of exploitation unevenly scattered across the chains (Fuchs 2014). In short, many precarious laborers toil in grueling conditions to make the machines that we ‘just can’t live without.’ Through the image of ‘total automation,’ the embodied labor and reorganized nature embedded in technology is alienated, thus obscuring the real relations of power in the present. In this way, techno-determinism has a powerful depoliticizing function that serves to ideologically legitimize and naturalize the hegemony of cybernetic capitalism.

THE NEW DISMAL AGE

The futuristic rhetoric of cyber-capitalists at times appears not to need to provide any specifics. For instance, the team at Google’s Advanced Technology and Projects (ATAP) are fond of whispering sweet futuristic nothings into high-definition video cameras: ‘The future is what we choose to make. We make what we believe in’; or ‘The future is awesome. We can build it faster together’ (Google 2014). Another example of this came from Rosenberg who came out with the following waves of vacuous soundbites: ‘The future of government is transparency. The future of commerce is information symmetry. The future of culture is freedom. The future of science and medicine is collaboration. The future of entertainment is participation’ (2009). Thus spoke Rosenberg.

Ignoring these dim evocations, it is worth looking through the rhetoric and consider what exactly this ‘awesome’ future may look like. One of the most detailed descriptions of the glorious future of cybernetic capitalism began in occupied Baghdad. It was there that Eric Schmidt met Jared Cohen and the two soon began to collaborate. Cohen then worked in the US State Department, under both Bush and Obama, as an advisor respectively to Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton. After leaving the State Department, he continued through the ‘revolving door’ to head up Jigsaw, Google’s ‘think-do tank’ slash political technology incubator.

It is worth noting that revolving door movements between governments and corporations is very common. Campaign for Accountability and *The Intercept* teamed up and studied Google’s relationship with the Obama regime, discovering almost 250 cases of people moving from positions in the US federal government to positions within Google and vice versa. The authors argue that the vertical integration that Google has

achieved with the US government can be regarded as a ‘true public-private partnership,’ stating: ‘Google doesn’t just lobby the White House for favors, but collaborates with officials, effectively serving as a sort of corporate extension of government operations in the digital era’ (Dayen 2016). This is another instance where Google can be seen as an exemplar of a larger tendency within late capitalism, with much of the global governing apparatus being composed of a clockwork of revolving doors, all spinning to keep the cycles of accumulation suitably greased.

Cohen and Schmidt teamed up to write a best-selling book called *The New Digital Age* (2013). This book can be read in part as a futurist fantasy about the magnificent prospects of unfettered cybernetic capitalism. Significantly, the book received advance praise from Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Madeline Albright, Michael Bloomberg, Henry Kissinger, and the former CIA director Michael Hayden. This is an impressive collection of the global power elite, with outstanding neoliberal credentials and more than a few accusations of war crimes. The fact that they publicly endorsed the book tells us something about its content and about its target audience. The future it presents is an extension of the present status quo, a future where American hegemony continues unabated.

Schmidt and Cohen begin their book by fabricating exotic examples of people in the global south and picturing how they could benefit from their benevolent vision. This is an example of the global imaginary in action, whereby the entire planet is interpreted as ripe for the business of Silicon Valley tech-titans (Steger 2008, 184–96). The Googlers wheel out a nameless Congolese fisherwoman and a Maasai cattle-herder and imagine how they ‘find ways to use the new tools at their disposal to enlarge their businesses, make them more efficient and maximize their profits’ (Schmidt and Cohen 2013, 15). These obedient and imaginary Others are quickly ushered offstage as the fantasy gets more neurotic.

They conjure up a mind-blowing future where ‘haircuts will finally be automated and machine-precise’ and wardrobes can ‘algorithmically suggest outfits based on the user’s daily schedule’ (16). This oppressively banal fantasy climaxes in a no-holds-barred prediction for the dazzling destiny of society’s ‘upper band.’ This is clearly the target audience that the book is seeking to impress. ‘Connectivity benefits everyone. Those who have none will have some, and those who have a lot will have even more’ (28). It is as Roy puts it; ‘According to the gospel of Gush-up, the more you have, the more you can have’ (2015, 9). The authors then spend a few pages detailing the average morning of a young, urban professional

living in an American city in a few decades time. Writing in an eerie second-person tense, the writers prophesize:

Your apartment is an electronic orchestra, and you are the conductor. With simple flicks of the wrist and spoken instructions, you can control temperature, humidity, ambient music and lighting. You are able to skim through the day's news on translucent screens while a freshly cleaned suit is retrieved from your automated closet because your calendar indicates an important meeting today. (2013, 29)

For all of its triumphant techno-aggrandizing, there is something pathetic about their vision. Schmidt and Cohen—and cyber-capitalists more generally—take a privileged and sterilized present and impose it on the future by simply adding more and better high-tech toys. Their future can be read as an unmitigated control fantasy—with all of the repressed anxiety that this entails. Indeed, it probably says more about the authors' fears and limitations than it does about any possible future. Despite having a privileged grip on the popular imagination of 'the future,' cybernetic capitalist's vision of the world-to-come is, when subject to critical inquiry, rather dismal. Infinite capital accumulation and techno-determinism come together in this ideological interpretation of 'the future' to serve as a way to depoliticize the present. Ultimately, their creatively bankrupt vision forecasts a purified world scrubbed clean of surprises, unknowns, and alternatives. To hazard a speculative theory: if one profits massively from what is, then perhaps they are poorly placed to imagine what might be.

CONCLUSION

'If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.' This line was spoken by the character Prince Tancredi in the famous Italian historical novel *The Leopard* (Lampedusa 2007, 21). To work that quote into the terms of this chapter: if everything is to remain as it is—if Google is to keep its monopoly power, if the regime of cybernetic capitalism is to remain its hegemonic control—then it is necessary that everything must change—cars will have to become self-driving, accumulation will have to become cybernetic, and suit selection will have to be algorithmically automated. In this way, Google's futurism is essentially about reproducing and augmenting the status quo of cybernetic capitalism.

Rooted in the harmful control fantasy of endless expansion and mastery, this vision of a ‘glorious future’ of cybernetic capitalism is bringing about an increasingly precarious world of intensifying inequalities and ecological catastrophes. Indeed, perhaps a more compelling argument can be made that cybernetic capitalism is headed on a trajectory toward ‘artificial life on a dead planet,’ to use Charles Thorpe’s phrase (2013). Despite having a privileged grip on the popular imagination of ‘the future,’ cyber-capitalist’s vision of the world-to-come is, when subject to critical inquiry, rather dismal. Capital accumulation, instrumental rationality and techno-determinism come together in elite-led, for-profit technology as the panacea—the cure-all long sought by alchemists. This ideological interpretation of the future serves to legitimize and depoliticize the inequalities, exploitation, and domination of the present, and to insulate it from any alternatives. If we strip the B-grade sci-fi marketing spin from Google’s articulations, the glorious future of cybernetic capitalism is a dim augmentation of the status quo.

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