ZeMKI Working Papers

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From Disruption to Reaction: The Eschatology of Silicon Valley

ZeMKI Working Paper|No. 57
ISSN 2510-9855

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Working Paper No. 57, March 2026

Published by ZeMKI, Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research, Linzer Str. 4, 28359 Bremen, Germany. The ZeMKI is a Central Research Unit of the University of Bremen.
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ISSN: 2510-9855
Copyright, Electronic Working Paper (EWP) 57 – From Disruption to Reaction: The Eschatology of Silicon Valley, Eugenia Siapera, 2026
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From Disruption to Reaction: The Eschatology of Silicon Valley

Abstract

This article contends that Silicon Valley's apparent rightward turn reflects a structural continuity rather than a rupture with its founding ideology. Reconstructing the genealogy of the Californian Ideology, it shows how the fusion of libertarian market thought and countercultural individualism evolved into technocracy, meritocracy, and state platform capitalism. These formations exhibit clear affinities with neo-reactionary and accelerationist currents that reject democracy in favor of hierarchical, expert rule. Drawing on Geiger's notion of high-tech eschatology, the article argues that contemporary tech elites mobilize apocalyptic and redemptive narratives to frame technological domination as inevitable and salvific. Silicon Valley's endgame thus appears as a post-democratic order in which optimization replaces equality and technological destiny substitutes for political choice.

Keywords

Silicon Valley; Californian Ideology; Technocracy; Meritocracy; Neo-reaction; Accelerationism; High-tech eschatology

1 Introduction: A Rupture in Silicon Valley?

When, in January 2025, during Donald Trump's inauguration, it emerged that the CEOs of nearly all major Silicon Valley tech companies, including Jeff Bezos (Amazon), Elon Musk (Tesla/X), Sundar Pichai (Google), Tim Cook (Apple), Mark Zuckerberg (Meta), and Sam Altman (OpenAI), were in attendance, the prevailing interpretation was that Silicon Valley was paying tribute to Trump 2.0 in an effort to secure his continued goodwill and political favour. Others (e.g. Robertson, 2025) saw their presence as confirmation of Marc Andreessen's thesis that progressives and the Democratic Party had driven Big Tech away through their persistent calls for regulation. For several commentators, it signaled a form of capitulation and a political turn towards the right (e.g. Robertson, 2025; Farrell, 2024; Levy, 2025). In this rhetoric, Silicon Valley, once hailed as the epitome of innovation and progress, has become the site of an ideological upheaval. In the early twenty-first century, the global tech industry embodied a vision of open networks, creative freedom, and human progress through technological mastery. Its availability and openness was hyperbolically credited with enabling democratic protests during for example the Arab Spring and later through hashtag movements, and with widening democratic participation more broadly. But now, it seems that a growing number of tech elites have aligned themselves with authoritarian and reactionary movements, endorsing Trump 2.0, denouncing 'wokeness', and (as always) pushing back against attempts to regulate them.

This article explores this transformation, arguing that rather than rupture, this turn is the logical conclusion of Silicon Valley's founding ideology, emerging out of the contradictions of its liberal–technocratic worldview. In some ways, these developments reflect the evolution of Silicon Valley's pioneering communities (Hepp, 2016; Hepp et al., 2023), whose apparent liberal ideology encountered the limits of profitability, political legitimacy, and the infrastructural concentration of digital media, thereby reconfiguring their experimental orientation toward post-democratic and techno-authoritarian futures. To

substantiate this claim, the article traces the intellectual genealogy of Silicon Valley from the Californian Ideology of the 1990s to the contemporary convergence of technocracy, accelerationism, authoritarianism/anti-equality and hyperindividualism that underpin Silicon Valley. Adopting Geiger's (2020) arguments on high tech eschatology[1], with tech entrepreneurs assuming a quasi-religious role, I argue that the liberatory promise associated with new technology has evolved into a dogmatic, quasi-religious and profoundly anti-democratic set of beliefs, constructed as a divine mission, revealing that Silicon's Valley's endgame is another form of pushing to the 'end of history', towards a perfected technologically driven society where uncertainty and opposition have disappeared (Geiger, 2020).

In pursuing these argumentç, the article begins with a discussion of the ideological roots of Silicon Valley. It then explores far-right ideas and key concepts before moving to examine key overlaps encountered in liberal technocracy and the (neo) reactionary tech vanguard, and finally, considering the tech eschatologies pushed by prominent Silicon Valley figures.

2 Silicon Valley Ideology and its Californian Roots

The cultural and ideological foundations of Silicon Valley lie in what Barbrook and Cameron (1996) termed the Californian Ideology. Emerging in the context of the 1990s digital revolution, this ideology fused the countercultural idealism of 1960s California with the entrepreneurial dynamism of neoliberal capitalism. In particular, the Californian Ideology describes the hybrid political culture that emerged in Silicon Valley, combining the countercultural optimism of the 1960s New Left with the market-driven individualism of the Libertarian Right. On the one hand, it envisions digital technology as a liberatory force, understood as a means for self-expression and personal freedom against social conservatism, while on the other it champions entrepreneurialism, deregulation, and the free market as vehicles for that liberation. The ideology's paradox lies in its synthesis: it advocates freedom both as personal creativity and as market autonomy, producing a techno-utopian worldview rooted in hyper-individualism, technocracy, and capitalist enterprise.

Unpacking the paradox at the heart of Silicon Valley requires some more discussion of its core set of values emerging from the libertarians and the counterculture of the 1960s. The Libertarian Right is grounded in the classical liberal belief that liberty is best secured through individual property rights, voluntary exchange, and a minimal state. As the libertarian theorist Robert Nozick (1974) argues in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, any state intervention beyond the protection of life, liberty, and property violates individual rights. This right-libertarian view prioritises liberty as freedom from state interference (Berlin, 1969) and sees the free market as the most efficient and moral mechanism for organising society. Milton Friedman (1962), the well known libertarian economist and adviser to Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, similarly posits that economic freedom is a necessary condition for political freedom, arguing that decentralised markets, competition, and limited government are the best mechanisms for fostering innovation and progress. In the Californian context, these principles were reinterpreted through the emerging digital economy: faith in the free market evolved into faith in technological entrepreneurship as the new engine of economic and social advancement. The belief that the creativity of individual innovators, operating in deregulated environments, could disrupt existing hierarchies reflects the translation of libertarian economics into technological libertarianism: a conviction that unregulated innovation would yield both personal liberation and collective

[1] In theology, eschatology refers to pronouncements on the end of the world, including the final judgment and the coming of a messiah, or on the apocalypse and the beginning of a new world.

progress. These ideas underpin the Californian Ideology's portrayal of Silicon Valley as a meritocratic, self-regulating ecosystem where entrepreneurial risk-taking replaces state planning as the only pathway to freedom.

By contrast, the New Left arose in the 1960s as a reaction against both Soviet authoritarianism and Western capitalist conformity. Thinkers such as Marcuse (1964) in *One-Dimensional Man* and C. Wright Mills (1960) in *Letter to the New Left* advocated a politics centred on personal liberation, participatory democracy, and cultural transformation, rather than economic class struggle. As Gitlin (1993) notes, the New Left extended political struggle into everyday life, incorporating questions of sexuality and identity. For many in the New Left tradition, individual self actualisation replaced class struggle and the construction of a just society through ownership of the means of production. In the Californian Ideology, this heritage manifests as the belief that digital technology empowers the individual to escape bureaucratic or conservative constraints. Freed from these shackles, individuals can pursue self-actualisation.

Barbrook and Cameron (1996) show how these two traditions, market libertarianism and radical counterculture, converged in Silicon Valley's digital utopianism. The result is an ideology that merges hippie idealism with neoliberal economics, celebrating the Internet as both a site of personal emancipation and a playground for capitalist innovation. A defining feature of the Californian Ideology therefore is its core tenet that digital technology can transcend traditional hierarchies and bureaucratic control, enabling a more decentralised and therefore egalitarian society. Rooted in the countercultural ideal of personal liberation and the libertarian valorisation of individual autonomy, this vision sees the Internet and networked computing as inherently democratising forces. As Barbrook and Cameron (1996) argue, in the imaginary of the Californian ideology, technology can dissolve centralised authority structures, including states, traditional corporations and the mass media, by empowering individuals to create, communicate, and trade freely. Technology in these terms will solve the problems associated with state and corporate bureaucracy and will usher in a new egalitarian era. As Fred Turner (2006) further argued, the countercultural generation reimagined computing as "a tool for personal transformation and social decentralization" (p. 4), removing state bureaucratic control seen as enabling freedom. Technology, in this sense, becomes a post-political technocracy that promises to overcome social inequality and bureaucratic inefficiency through innovation and connectivity.

It is crucial to note here that the focus on equality in Silicon Valley's ideology is formulated in terms of an emphasis on meritocracy: that is, inequality should be addressed because it interferes with meritocratic principles that individuals should succeed according to talent, effort, and innovation. Technology is imagined as an inherently meritocratic force, an equaliser that supposedly removes traditional barriers of class, geography, or institutional hierarchy. By enabling open access to information, networks, and markets, digital technology is believed to create a level playing field where success is determined solely by creativity and initiative. This is how the Californian Ideology conflates technocracy and meritocratic individualism with equality in the context of a deregulated market rule.

Clearly, this vision entails contradictions from its inception. As Barbrook and Cameron note, while digital technologies enable new forms of participation and creativity, they also entrench new hierarchies of expertise, ownership, and capital. The supposedly open and meritocratic digital world depends entirely on infrastructures controlled by private corporations and reinforced by neoliberal economic policies (Plantin and Punathambekar, 2019). Users' 'freedom' is entirely circumscribed by platform design features and algorithms, as well as content moderation regimes (Katzenbach and Ulbricht, 2019). In these

terms, the Californian Ideology's claim that technology can dismantle hierarchy masks the ways in which power is reconstituted through platforms, intellectual property regimes, and venture capital. Despite, or perhaps because of the persistence of these hierarchies and inequalities, reconfigured through platforms and tech corporations, the digital utopianism of Silicon Valley endures. The belief that technology equals meritocracy, progress and liberation and that unhindered and regulation free market rule is the best guarantee for the realization of this vision, continues to underpin most technology companies. Finally, it is crucial to note that these ideological formations persist through communities of practice. As Hepp (2016) notes in his discussion of pioneer communities, collectivities organised around new media infrastructures actively rehearse social futures that may later diffuse more widely. Read in this light, Silicon Valley's actors function as reactionary pioneering communities whose experiments increasingly stabilise technocratic hierarchy, infrastructural dominance, and post-democratic imaginaries.

3 The Far Right and Silicon Valley Ideological Overlaps

Emphasising progress and liberation, Silicon Valley couldn't be further from the conservative and reactionary ideas of the far right. Yet a closer look reveals a number of affinities. I argue here that the overlap between Silicon Valley's technolibertarianism and far-right ideology becomes evident in the rhetoric of meritocracy and technocracy as rational governance. In particular, both meritocracy and technocracy (re)introduce hierarchies and authoritarian rule. While meritocracy is radicalized as techno-eugenics, technocracy's supposed neutral technical expertise disenfranchises citizens and political participation, concealing a belief in 'natural' hierarchies and the exclusion of those deemed unfit to participate in the technological future. Those excluded are typically designated as 'users', cheap labour and source of data but not involved in the design and governance of tech futures. To understand these connections, this section presents a brief description of the key ideas of the far right.

According to Cas Mudde (2007; 2019), the contemporary far right is defined by a combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, forming what he calls a populist radical right ideology. This ideology is structured around a fundamental belief in hierarchy rather than equality, seeing social and political hierarchies, based on nation, ethnicity, gender, or culture, as both natural and desirable. The far right equality constructs equality as the antithesis of freedom: attempts to promote egalitarianism or diversity are framed as coercive impositions that restrict the liberty of the naturally deserving. Within white supremacist patriarchy, the naturally deserving are white men. This hierarchical conception of society inevitably culminates in authoritarianism, legitimising strong leadership and the suppression of dissent in order to preserve an imagined moral or national order (Mudde, 2007). A second core element is nativism, defined by Mudde (2007, p. 19) as the belief that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group and that non-native elements, ethnic, cultural, or religious, are fundamentally threatening. This ethnonationalist worldview escalates into racism and white supremacy, framing social conflicts in terms of cultural contamination or civilisational decline. As Mark Lilla (2017) argues, this nativist turn is part of a broader reaction against liberal universalism, producing a politics rooted in identity, resentment, and nostalgia. Similarly, Forti (2024) speaks of the global far right 2.0 movement, with leaders such as Trump, Milei, Bolsonaro and others, revolving around nationalism, conservative moralism and anti-intellectualism, attacking universities and especially the humanities and social sciences.

With its emphasis on the 'naturally deserving', the far right therefore embodies anti-progressivism, opposing social movements such as feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and

multiculturalism. This often takes the form of reactionary nostalgia for an imagined golden past (Lilla, 2017) where traditional gender roles, supposed national homogeneity and moral order prevailed. Such backward-looking politics combine cultural conservatism with moral panic over the perceived erosion of Western civilization (Wodak, 2015).

Economically, while embracing elements of free-market liberalism, the far right frequently promotes economic nationalism, an approach that defends domestic industries, national sovereignty, and protectionist policies under the banner of populist patriotism. The slogan 'America First' or the Brexit slogan 'Take back control' revolve around these ideas of economic protectionism, even though these two countries were behind the push for economic globalisation. As Ausserladscheider (2019) notes, this blend of market liberalism and protectionism seeks to reconcile capitalist competitiveness with the safeguarding of national interests, producing a hybrid of neoliberalism and economic chauvinism.

Silicon Valley increasingly converges with nativist, authoritarian, and protectionist tendencies that parallel features of the contemporary far right. As Rolf and Schindler (2023) argue in their analysis of state platform capitalism, digital infrastructures have become central to national strategies of economic and geopolitical power. U.S. tech corporations, while rhetorically committed to the libertarian ideal of a borderless digital commons, are deeply intertwined with the U.S. state apparatus, national defence, and trade policy. Their dominance depends on the protection of intellectual property regimes, preferential state contracts, and the global assertion of American technological sovereignty. This is evident in for example the double standards involved in the U.S.'s push to ban TikTok because it is seen as beholden to Chinese national interests while at the same time pushing against European efforts to regulate platforms[2] . This convergence produces a new form of technonationalism, where the rhetoric of free markets and innovation coexists with economic protectionism, with the defence of domestic (U.S.) tech monopolies as instruments of national power. In this sense, Silicon Valley's ideology mirrors the nativist logic of the far right: while professing universalism, it imagines a global order structured by hierarchies of technological capability, moral worth and 'strong' leadership, in which U.S. platforms and entrepreneurs embody the 'builders' of civilization.

At the same time, the Californian Ideology's faith in meritocracy and natural hierarchies aligns closely with authoritarian and technocratic forms of governance. For example, the 'builders versus takers' rhetoric proposed by Marc Andreessen in 2020[3] creates a dichotomy in which entrepreneurs are seen as the builders and innovators who advance society and those who get in the way of innovation, for example regulators, are seen as 'takers' who hold the innovators back. Similarly, the broader technocratic distinction between the 'smart' and the 'incompetent' (Morozov, 2013) constructs a political imaginary in which authority is legitimised by intelligence, innovation, and technical expertise. In this vision, meritocracy evolves into technocracy: if only the most capable and rational individuals deserve success, it follows that only they are qualified to govern. As both Feenberg (2023) and Crawford (2021) note, this faith in technological rationality redefines governance as a technical problem rather than a democratic one, displacing deliberation, equality, and

[2] See for example The Wired: The FTC Warns Big Tech Companies Not to Apply the Digital Services Act, Aug 1, 2025, available at: https://www.wired.com/story/big-tech-companies-in-the-us-have-been-told-not-to-apply-the-digital-services-act/ . Since Januaray 2026 TikTok's US operations are owned by a joint venture partly owned by Oracle, Silver Lake and the Emirati form MGX – see the BBC's article TikTok owner signs deal to avoide US ban, available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgexp1q8wn1o

[3] Andreessen is the co-founder of Netscape and partner in the Silicon Valley venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz. For the builders metaphor, see https://a16z.com/its-time-to-build/ - more recently, Andreessen referred to regulators as 'solvers' and introduced a new category, 'cynics' to refer to those criticising tech, see https://a16z.com/builders-solvers-and-cynics/

accountability in favour of algorithmic efficiency and expert control. In such a system, hierarchy is naturalised as competence, exclusion as optimisation, and domination as the rational administration of complex systems. Thus, beneath its libertarian surface, Silicon Valley ideology combines U.S. nativist protectionism, authoritarian hierarchy, and technocratic elitism to develop a new political formation: a digital order governed by those who claim to know best. In the next section we explore these overlaps in more depth.

4 Technocracy, Meritocracy, and State Platform Capitalism

While Barbrook and Cameron identified the key kernels of Silicon Valley's ideology in its early stages, we argue here that in its post-2008 phase Silicon Valley revolves around three positions, all of which are rooted in the initial ideas found in the Californian Ideology and also have clear ideological overlaps with far right ideas as outlined in the previous section. These positions are technocracy; meritocracy; and state platform capitalism which can be thought of as emerging and consolidating in the aftermath of the 2008 capitalist crisis, which intensified neoliberal policies in a post democratic context (Crouch, 2004; 2011). The 2008 capitalist crisis and resulting restructuring have taken an obvious anti-democratic character, as we argue below. These developments have not gone unobserved: a new strand of thought seeks to theorise them as an entirely new phase, post-capitalist, described as technofeudalism (Varoufakis, 2025; Dean, 2025). Whether this is the case or not, this section seeks to lay bare the common conceptual grounds between the far right and Silicon Valley, demonstrating a continuity and ideological affinity between these two, positing that their alliance is the logical next step in Silicon Valley's quest for dominance.

Technocracy, understood as the political instantiation of instrumental rationality, embodies what Weber (1978 [1922]) described as the dominance of means–end calculation: the pursuit of the most efficient method to achieve a given objective, regardless of any other social or ethical considerations. In this framework, governance is reframed as a technical process, reducible to the optimisation of inputs and outputs rather than a matter of democratic deliberation or conflict over values. As Centeno (1993) notes, technocratic rule depends on the belief that all political and social problems can be resolved through ostensibly value-free, depoliticised, and expert-driven interventions. The typical characteristics of technocracy include rule by experts, data-driven decision-making, and an emphasis on efficiency and technical objectivity as substitutes for collective political will. In technocracy, as Feenberg (2011, p. 3) puts it, "there is always a correct answer to every technical question, and every question can be formulated as a technical one". Morozov's (2013) critique of technological solutionism, i.e. the conviction that digital technology provides the optimal solutions to social and political problems, captures the same logic. Within the Silicon Valley context, technocracy emerges as the political expression of meritocracy's internal logic, reserving governance for those deemed to deserve it. Democracy, in this schema, appears inefficient, irrational, and prone to error, whereas algorithmic governance and expert control are portrayed as objective and effective. The result is a post-political order in which questions of justice, equality, and power are displaced by the rhetoric of optimisation and innovation. Technocracy therefore completes the ideological trajectory of the Californian Ideology, transforming libertarian individualism and market rationality into a depoliticised regime of rule by those who know best.

This technocratic ethos extends into what Noble and Roberts (2019) call 'digital meritocracy', where technological systems reward and reproduce existing privileges. In these terms, technocratic meritocracy implies in fact a rigid hierarchy of human worth. If, as the Californian Ideology assumes, success and progress are determined solely by talent,

creativity, and innovation, then those who fail to thrive within its deregulated digital economy are implicitly positioned as less deserving or even less evolved. However, as thinkers such as Nakamura (2013) and Noble and Roberts (2019) as well as Ruha Benjamin (2019) have shown, it is not talent or worth but structural inequalities that make certain racial and gendered identities seen as technologically advanced or conversely as 'techno-primitive'.

Taken to its logical extension, this meritocratic rationality converges with, and accounts for, Silicon Valley's recent focus on technological eugenics, in which only the most efficient, productive, and visionary individuals are seen as the rightful bearers of humanity's future. As Morozov (2013) notes, Silicon Valley's technosolutionism elevates technical elites to quasi-moral status, granting them authority to decide which human problems, and which humans, are worth saving. This logic resonates with transhumanist aspirations to enhance and optimize human life through technology, such as for example Musk's Neuralink or Bryan Johnson's quest for technologically facilitated immortality. Notwithstanding the hubris and impossibility of such initiatives, under capitalist conditions, any kind of technological enhancement of human life inevitably becomes stratified and exclusive: those with access to capital and expertise are positioned as the evolutionary vanguard, while others are rendered obsolete. In this sense, the Californian faith in meritocracy masks an underlying biopolitical project: a belief that the future belongs to those deemed most capable of 'improving' humanity through innovation. As Crawford (2021) argues, this technocratic valuation of human worth reproduces hierarchies of intelligence and power under the guise of objectivity and progress. What began as a rhetoric of open opportunity culminated in a form of digital Darwinism, where only those recognized by the metrics of technological success are entitled to represent and evolve the human species.

Gebru and Torres (2024) alongside Benjamin (2024) expand this critique through connecting Silicon Valley's eugenics 2.0 to the original eugenics movement of the early 20th century, which was explicitly racist, ableist and classist. Their work points to the resurgence of eugenic logic through algorithmic classification, data profiling, and enhancement technologies. This new eugenics is not enforced through coercion but incentivised through markets and platforms that privilege particular forms of intelligence. Drawing on Nick Bostrom (2002, quoted in Gebru and Torres, 2024: non-paginated), who observed that "there is a negative correlation in some places between intellectual achievement and fertility. If such selection were to operate over a long period of time, we might evolve into a less brainy but more fertile species", Gebru and Torres argue that transhumanist and pronatalist discourses (echoed in the statements of figures such as Elon Musk) recast reproduction and the whole future of humanity as a technocratic problem to be solved, reserving for themselves the role of the problem solvers. One of the tasks of these self appointed custodians of humanity's future is to ensure that 'high IQ' people become the evolutionary vanguard, using the same loaded tests used in the first wave of eugenics to identify 'defectives' and the 'feeble-minded' (Gebru and Torres, 2024).

Building on Gebru and Torres, Benjamin (2024) shows how the AI industry reproduces eugenic logics through algorithmic systems that embed racism, classism, ableism, and sexism, all wrapped in the language of 'safety' and 'human benefit'. She argues that AI evangelists cloak their self-interest in humanistic concern, positioning themselves as a narrow, predominantly white, male "artificial intelligentsia" capable of guiding humanity's future. In this framing, technology far from a tool of liberation operates as a mechanism for deciding who counts as human, who is worthy of evolution, and who may be left behind.

While technocracy and meritocracy recast as eugenics 2.0 can be taken to correspond to the far right's principles of authoritarianism and white supremacy, state platform capitalism can be seen as corresponding to technonationalism and the shift towards economic

protectionism. In particular, Rolf and Schindler (2023) describe state platform capitalism as the new geopolitical order in which global superpowers and digital platforms form interdependent systems of control. Seen as part of the global capitalist restructuring following the financial crisis of 2008 and the ascendance of China as an emerging superpower, state platform capitalism is not so much a retreat from globalized capitalism but its imperialist consolidation. Digital platforms such as Google, Amazon, or Microsoft advance the geostrategic interests of the U.S., while the U.S. in turn protects and promotes the global dominance of its domestic tech industries. Building on Alami and Dixon's (2021) conception of state capitalism as the third stage of neoliberalism, in which states become active agents of capitalist accumulation rather than its regulators, state platform capitalism represents a new symbiosis between corporate and governmental power. This arrangement allows a powerful state such as the U.S. to deploy the infrastructural, financial, and data-generating capacities of platforms as tools for its geopolitical influence, while platforms rely on U.S. state protection, military contracts, and international trade agreements to expand their reach.

From this perspective, state platform capitalism mirrors the economic nationalism characteristic of the far right although it operates from an explicitly imperialist position. Whereas far right protectionism seeks to defend national industries from global competition, U.S. state platform capitalism mobilises the rhetoric of open markets, innovation and technological freedom to extend and secure American imperial power. As Rolf and Schindler (2023) argue, the global digital order is reorganised into competing imperial 'stacks', one anchored in the U.S. and the other in China, and non-platform-owning states are compelled to integrate as subordinate nodes. In this global digital order, digital infrastructures become instruments of imperial control and accumulation, consolidating the political, military, and economic dominance of platform-owning states. In this sense, state platform capitalism fuses the far right's logic of economic nationalism with the global ambitions of technological empire, transforming digital capitalism into a vehicle for sustaining U.S. hegemony. The convergence of U.S. capital, state interests, and technological infrastructure extends Silicon Valley's ideology from market utopianism to imperial technonationalism. This convergence of platforms and the U.S. state appears to be the inevitable outcome of the post-2008 restructuring, which saw the ascendance of platforms. As major drivers of the U.S. economy, the U.S. needs platforms while for platforms to continue enjoying unfettered access to global markets they need the U.S.'s imperial protection.

We have seen that technocracy, meritocracy-as-eugenics, and state platform capitalism overlap with, and mirror, far right authoritarianism, white supremacy and economic nationalism. While these ideas are part of Silicon Valley's mainstream, it is worth examining the Silicon Valley vanguard as they anticipate or intensify the trajectory of the digital future, testing the limits of what might later be normalized. The next section therefore focuses on accelerationism and neo-reactionary thought as part of the technological vanguard that may (or may not) become the future hegemony.

5 Accelerationism and Neo-Reactionary Thought

In the context of this article, I take the Silicon Valley vanguard to represent the ideological frontier where its chief logics of technocracy and meritocracy are taken to their most radical conclusions and where the balance of power represented in the state platform capitalism model shifts more towards platforms. In particular, within state platform capitalism, the state and platforms operate symbiotically: the state depends on platforms for technological sovereignty and data infrastructure, while platforms rely on state protection, military contracts, and geopolitical backing. However, for a growing set of thinkers and actors on Silicon Valley's fringes, this collaboration is not the end point but the prelude to something more extreme. In discussing vanguard of digital capitalism I explore here two main strands: accelerationism and neo-reactionary thought, while also discussing Peter Thiel's approach, which draws on both, arguing that this vanguard transforms the Californian Ideology's faith in intelligence, hierarchy, and technological destiny into a programme of civilisational redesign. Where technocracy and meritocracy already imply rule by the few who 'know best', these vanguard ideologies push further: they imagine forms of governance, or post-governance, beyond democracy itself. In Thiel's seasteading projects, the ideal of entrepreneurial autonomy culminates in the literal abolition of the state, as the innovative elite detach from territorial politics to build sovereign techno-utopias at sea (Klein and Taylor, 2025). In accelerationism, the logic of efficiency and innovation becomes nihilistic: the only path forward is to intensify capitalism's collapse and hasten the emergence of a post-human order. And in neo-reactionary thought (NRx), the technocratic belief in competence mutates into an explicitly authoritarian vision of rule by an enlightened few, where democracy is dismissed as an obstacle to progress. Taken together, these currents represent the vanguard of Silicon Valley, which can be considered as an ideological laboratory in which the principles of technocracy, meritocracy, and state platform capitalism lose their liberal veneer and pursued to their logical end: a post-democratic, post-human, and post-state future, governed by those who aim to engineer humanity itself.

To begin with, accelerationism radicalises the technocratic faith in progress by removing any moral or political restraint. If technocracy aims to optimise society through reason and efficiency, accelerationism insists that these same forces should be unleashed without limit, even to the point of destroying the social order that sustains them. Originating in the work of Nick Land and the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) in the 1990s, right accelerationism embraces capitalism's self-destructive momentum as an emancipatory force: the faster the circuits of innovation, automation, and computation intensify, the sooner humanity will be transcended by the machinic intelligence it has created. Drawing from Nick Land's various works, accelerationists view capitalism as an autonomous intelligence that should be allowed to evolve beyond human and moral constraints. Land and his followers argue that regulation or ethical limits merely slow the inevitable convergence of humanity and technology. In his essay "Meltdown" (1994)[4], Land describes capital as a system whose only imperative is to intensify itself through ever-faster circuits of information, innovation, and exchange. Attempts to humanise, regulate, or restrain this process are, in his view, futile: regulation is not only impossible but counterproductive, since any effort to slow capital's acceleration merely condemns societies to obsolescence. As Land later formulated in his position of unconditional accelerationism (U/Acc)[5], there can be no moral or political steering of the process: no regulation, no ethical constraint, and no appeal to human values. The only rational course for Land is to 'ride the melt': to let capitalism, technology, and artificial intelligence accelerate toward a post-human future. As

[4] See http://www.ccru.net/swarm1/1_melt.htm
[5] See https://ia800800.us.archive.org/29/items/nick_land_writings/LAND%2C%20Nick%20-%20A%20Quick%20and%20Dirty%20Introduction%20to%20Accelerationism.pdf

he put it "Nothing human makes it out of the near-future" (Land, 1994: np). In this view, governance, ethics, and even human agency are obstacles to technological evolution. The accelerationist vanguard thus transforms the technocratic drive for optimisation into a post-human eschatology, one in which the collapse of society is a necessary step toward a higher, technocratic digital order.

Land's vision depends on a recursive relationship between capitalism and technology, where capitalism's demand for speed, efficiency, and innovation drives the development of new technologies, such as AI, automation, networks etc, that in turn intensify capitalism itself, generating new markets while destroying obsolete structures. Each advance increases the system's capacity for further acceleration, indicating what Land (2014) calls teleoplexy[6]: a feedback loop in which capitalism and technology have fused into a system that evolves beyond human control, and which is cybernetically controlled, continuously learning through computation, data, innovation and so on[7].

Contemporary technocapitalist movements echo these ideas. The Extropian and early transhumanist currents described by Gebru and Torres (2024) share the same commitment to boundless expansion, self-transformation, and 'intelligent' technology as the path to overcoming human limitation – Silicon Valley's focus on AGI is a case in point. Figures such as Guillaume Verdon (Extropic) (who used the pseudonym Beff Jezos) popularised 'effective accelerationism' (e/Acc), repackaging Land's anti-humanist ontology into the idiom of innovation and entrepreneurialism. E/Acc is essentially a movement to remove all barriers (legal, ethical, political) in the development of artificial intelligence and to gallop ahead in the quest for AGI. Verdon's views have clearly resonated in Silicon Valley with figures such as Marc Andreessen putting e/Acc in their profiles. In all these iterations, capitalism and technology are treated as autonomous evolutionary forces, and humanity's role is merely to observe.

The nihilism inherent in accelerationism reflects, as Hui (2025) notes, a broader disillusionment with Western modernity and liberal democracy, for some due to its inability to hold on to its imperial power and supremacy but also because of the financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath. The formulation of this critique is found in Land's Dark Enlightenment (2012)[8] in which Land argues that democracy is incompatible with intelligence, order, and progress. He frames liberal egalitarianism as a form of civilizational decay, claiming that democratic politics inevitably expands the state, reduces everything to mediocrity and is the enemy of excellence. For Land, democracy's promise of equality leads not to freedom but to entropy, a gradual decline into disorder or a form of 'civilizational dysgenesis'. It is here that Land's writings become jointed with the neoreactionary strand of thought associated with Curtis Yarvin, initially known through his blogger pseudonym Mencius Moldbug. Against the liberal orthodoxy, Land proposes a Dark Enlightenment, which he conceives as a counter-movement that abandons the egalitarian ideals of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and reasserts hierarchy, order, and private sovereignty.

Land's critique borrows explicitly from Yarvin and his neoreactionary position (NRx[9]) where he articulates his critique of democracy as decay: it expands state power while rewarding short-term populism, corruption, and mediocrity. In Yarvin's view, democratic politics incentivises politicians to pursue immediate popularity over long-term stability, producing what he calls a degenerative dynamic of governance. To explain this pathology,

[6] https://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/2118354/b390e4336afaec0f023cb1198bed3691.pdf?1525169195
[7] There are direct lines connecting accelerationism to the proto-fascist Italian Futurism movement associated with Tomasso Marinetti (with thanks to Paloma Viejo Otero for making this connection).
[8] https://keithanyan.github.io/TheDarkEnlightenment.epub/TheDarkEnlightenment.pdf
[9] See https://www.unqualified-reservations.org/

Yarvin uses the concept of the Cathedral: a network of institutions (the media, universities, the judiciary, and public administration) that together manufacture and enforce the liberal consensus. To counter the Cathedral, Yarvin's solution is the re-establishment of an authoritarian, corporate order governed by competent elites. He advocates replacing democracy with a CEO-state, a polity run like a privately held company revolving around efficiency and optimisation and where authority rests on ownership and expertise. Yarvin's NRx project mirrors technocracy's core faith in rational rule but removes its democratic pretence. In Yarvin's line of thought the problem is inefficiency and disorder.

Yarvin's proposal of states as corporations, referred to as neo-cameralism[10], revolves around the idea of running states as joint-stock corporations, with citizens having essentially three options: to be shareholders, to be customers, or to exit that state-corporation. The sovereign ruler will the state's CEO, whose legitimacy derives from performance. Although Yarvin does not specify who will be the shareholders, it is likely that they will be selected on the basis of either capital they possess or expertise. The rest of us will be the state-corporation's customers with no power to influence or shape decisions. If we don't like what the state CEO has to offer we can 'exit' and presumably go to another state-corporation. In this manner, neo-cameralism abolishes democratic politics in favour of a combination of the technocratic vision of rational government with the authoritarian structure of corporate capitalism.

Both Land and Yarvin's ideas would remain fringe were they not taken seriously by prominent figures in Silicon Valley, such as Elon Musk, Marc Andreessen and Peter Thiel. In fact, Elon Musk's brief collaboration with the Trump administration in 2025 can be seen as a realization of some of Yarvin's ideas around small public state and technocracy against bureaucracy. But it is in Peter Thiel's techno-libertarianism that we find the most clearly articulated pragmatic synthesis of the two anti-democratic currents represented by Nick Land and Curtis Yarvin. Like Land, Thiel rejects the idea that technological and economic progress can or should be governed by democratic processes; like Yarvin, he believes that political authority must ultimately rest in the hands of a capable elite. He explicitly views democracy and freedom as incompatible: as he wrote in *The Education of a Libertarian* (2009: np), "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible". What distinguishes Thiel is his effort to translate these abstract philosophical impulses into a concrete geopolitical and economic project: a form of techno-sovereignty rooted in the belief that technological innovation should determine the trajectory of civilization. Thiel's investments and writings express this worldview: from Palantir's business of surveillance, data analytics, and state security, to his involvement in seasteading, longevity biotechnology, and AI research, Thiel's enterprises are united by a commitment to building autonomous zones of 'innovation', free from the constraints of political regulation or moral oversight. At the same time, Thiel's businesses, especially Palantir, reflect a deep integration with state apparatuses, especially in the domains of health and security, including military defence. Echoing Yarvin, his vision is one in which power should be concentrated in the hands of those most capable of using it effectively, i.e. entrepreneurs, engineers, and visionaries who, in his view, embody the evolutionary vanguard of humanity. In some ways, given Thiel's prominence and capital, his techno-libertarianism represents the vanguard's most pragmatic political articulation: a post-democratic order in which governance is outsourced to technocrats and technologists, and sovereignty resides in platforms, data, and capital.

This vanguard can be understood as a particular configuration of pioneer communities (Hepp, 2016). While in the original formulation, these communities are seen to prefigure

[10] Cameralism was an 18th century German economic theory and state administration that proposed the rational economic management of society by expert administrators (Tribe, 2016)

future societal change through innovation and experimentation, the accelerationist and neo-reactionary milieus surrounding contemporary technocapitalism suggest a different dynamic. They do not foreshadow transformation but actively seek to steer technological development toward post-democratic and hierarchical ends, mobilising infrastructures, capital, and ideology to normalise authoritarian governance as the logical horizon of digital progress. In this sense, reactionary pioneering communities function as strategic sites in which the direction of mediatised social change is contested and increasingly aligned with technocratic domination.

Moreover, as I argue below, the tech vanguard of Silicon Valley is linked to the emergence of a new technological metaphysics. As the logic of optimisation and control exhausts its rational foundations[11], it begins to mutate into something more mystical: a vision of technology as destiny. What was once framed in terms of efficiency and innovation increasingly takes on the language of salvation, transcendence, and apocalypse. In this manner, the rationality that sustained the Californian Ideology gives way to an eschatological imagination, where the end of politics is recast as the end of history, and figures such as Thiel become its prophets.

6 The Eschatology of Silicon Valley

In her work on Silicon Valley's Theranos and 23and Me, Susi Geiger (2020) argues that they mobilized eschatological elements to justify their actions and, crucially, to ensure venture capital. These elements use disruption as a signal for the 'end of times' and beginning of a new, 'prefect' state of affairs: in terms of the companies studied by Geiger, the classic healthcare paradigm will have to die so that a new personalized, data and algorithmically driven form of healthcare can emerge. But importantly, Geiger argues that the temporal order is reversed: first the perfect digital future is imagined and then these companies work backwards to make it happen. In these terms, Theranos imagined perfect digital healthcare to be one in which a drop of blood can lead to the diagnosis and eventual cure of all conditions, and then sought to acquire the means to accomplish this. Of course we all now know that Theranos was nothing more than a con, defrauding investors and customers, but it nevertheless worked because "In the neoliberal land of make-believe, if you can sell it, then it must a fortiori be legitimate" (Mirowski 2012: 290 quoted in Geiger, 2020: 169). Geiger's work shows how the belief in technological futures ends up acquiring a religious-like faith-based character, which she calls eschatological because these narratives envision the end of the current state of affairs and the rise of a perfect new (technological) future. In doing so, they foreclose all other possibilities (for example, investment in the current form of healthcare), giving technological elites the license to act with no accountability. These high tech eschatologies posit a final, inevitable state in which technology delivers societal redemption. By invoking an end state of a high tech future with all problems solved, tech leaders justify their actions as morally and politically necessary steps toward progress, closing off debate and alternative visions of the future. Geiger argues that such endgame thinking gives Silicon Valley firms quasi-religious authority and raises the question of "what end game they sell" (Geiger, 2020: 180). As we saw above

[11] It is beyond the scope of this article to include a critique of optimisation but some issues include: the view that optimisation processes that work for mathematics can be applied in the same way for complex and dynamic social systems (Carissimo and Korecki, 2023); the reduction and absorption of humanity and human lives into these abstract optimized processes equating the good with the efficient (Marcuse, 1964); and the collapse of means into ends (Winner, 1977; Agamben, 1996). Such problems make inevitable the implosion of optimisation into absurdity.

the 'endgame' sold by at least the tech vanguard is technological authoritarianism which for some has become technofascism (McElroy, 2024; Farkas and Mondon, 2025).

In recent months, some of Silicon Valley's influential technocrats have embraced religious and apocalyptic language, explicitly mobilising eschatological techno-theology. Peter Thiel's off-the-record San Francisco lecture series on 'The Antichrist' revealed a worldview where attempts to regulate or slow technological innovation, particularly in AI, climate science, or global governance, are recast as instruments of a one-world tyranny[12]. In these lectures he speculates on the figure of Antichrist, positing that its modern iteration will take the form of someone manipulating fear of existential threats to impose global control and halt progress. For example, he refers to Greta Thunberg as a potential Antichrist, because of her activism against climate change. The religious aspects of these lectures lend a metaphysical aura to reactionary technofuturism, and explicitly mobilise eschatological themes such as the figure of the Antichrist to warn against attempts to control or push back against this kind of technofuturism.

In parallel to Thiel's theological turn, the former Intel CEO Pat Gelsinger seems to have also jumped to the religious bandwagon[13]. His move to the faith-tech firm Gloo paints a narrative of AI as a Christianised accelerator of salvation: Gelsinger asserts that the Church must harness AI to translate the Bible into thousands of languages and "hasten Jesus's return". A Vanity Fair article (Bernard, 2025) refers to other prominent Silicon Valley figures, such as Garry Tan from the Y Combinator and Trae Stephens, a venture capitalist, participating in the shift towards conservative Christianity. For Bernard, this shift is entangled with a disillusionment with progressive, 'woke' ideology while on the other hand it offers a set of moral values, which ostensibly guide the actions of these entrepreneurs. At the same time, it allows these technologists to find meaning in creating new tech, imagining that these products they are building are part of a divine calling. Christianity, in these terms, is another way for legitimizing the hierarchies they are building and for controlling the actions of others. As Bernard (2025) notes, the rise of Christianity in Silicon Valley may be more about finding a transcendent language to sanctify ambition rather than a spiritual awakening.

Together, these developments illustrate a new logic: technology is not merely a tool for governance or commerce but a vehicle for redemption, an instrument of divine will. As such, its advance is inevitable and only a figure like the Antichrist will try to stop it. In this light, the technocratic faith in efficiency, expertise, and optimization mutates into a technofascist eschatology, in which the platforms and algorithms of Silicon Valley are vested with the aura of inevitability and salvation. The stakes are no longer merely regulatory or market-driven but become metaphysical. The rational veneer of technocracy gives way to religious certitude: the end of history is nigh, and only the technologically enlightened will govern, evolve, or survive. Meanwhile, those seen as resisting are painted as evil transgressors.

These ideas should be understood as the logical culmination of the Californian Ideology. Despite the shift from the liberal counterculture and psychedelics to Christian conservatism, the continuity is there. From the outset, the Californian fusion of libertarian economics and countercultural individualism contained a tension: freedom was defined not collectively or politically, but as the absence of constraints for the capable, creative, and enterprising individual. For this to happen, all other freedoms need to be pushed aside. As Barbrook and Cameron (1996) observed, this ideology sanctified the free market as the ultimate expression of liberty while framing technological progress as inherently

[12] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/oct/10/peter-thiel-lectures-antichrist
[13] https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/oct/28/patrick-gelsinger-christian-ai-gloo-silicon-valley

emancipatory. The result was a worldview in which hierarchy was recoded as merit and domination as efficiency. The vanguard ideologies of Land, Yarvin, and Thiel merely strip away the liberal veneer, exposing the authoritarian and eugenic impulses already embedded in this logic. Their projects, whether the accelerationist escape from politics, the neo-reactionary restoration of order, or the technolibertarian secession of the elite, extend the Californian faith in innovation and intelligence to its endpoint: the replacement of democracy by technocracy and of equality by optimisation. In this sense, Silicon Valley eschatology does not betray the ideals of digital innovation and disruption: it completes them by transforming them into a new ideology of post-democratic control, where technological destiny substitutes for political choice and individual freedom takes the form of spiritual salvation.

7 Conclusion: Liberal Failures

Just as the Californian Ideology is in continuity with contemporary Silicon Valley's reactionary ideas, they are also nested within the liberal mainstream. This is because on the one hand it is the liberal mainstream that enabled materially the emergence of these technological monopolies and the disproportionate power they yield; and on the other because of the liberal failures to let go or at least moderate the stronghold of neoliberal ideology. In this final and concluding section, I examine in more detail what made possible the rise of this form of techno-eschatology in both political economic and ideological terms.

The rise of Silicon Valley's technological hegemony must be situated within the broader political economy of globalised capitalism that enabled the concentration of power in a handful of gigantic digital oligopolies (Smyrnaios, 2018). These firms, and in particular Google, Apple, Meta, Amazon, and Microsoft, emerged from systemic conditions that privileged scale, data accumulation, and financialisation, producing a new regime of informational monopoly. In doing so, they further undermined a public sphere already weakened by earlier waves of media consolidation (Mosco, 2009), replacing spaces of civic deliberation with algorithmically governed platforms driven by profit and surveillance. Moreover, since around 2008 or so, platforms converged with infrastructures in a move that deepened and increased their power over almost all aspects of life (Plantin and Punathambekar, 2019).

This process unfolded against the backdrop of a post-democratic turn (Crouch, 2004; Rancière, 2007), in which while formal democratic institutions persist, substantive political choice is effectively removed by neoliberal orthodoxy. The resulting order, incapable of transcending the dogma of the free market even in the face of ecological collapse or social disintegration, ceded both moral and political authority to the logic of capital. At this juncture, the material interests and ideological projects of Silicon Valley converge: the end of politics envisions a world where the free market governs directly, without mediation, contestation, or the need for a political system at all.

These developments are described by some authors as technofascism (McElroy, 2024; Farkas and Mondon, 2025): the convergence of technological power and authoritarian politics into a new, reactionary oligarchy. This formation arises from liberalism's own failures: its inability or refusal to confront inequality, racism, and imperialism, and its dogmatic faith in the free market as the ultimate arbiter of social order (McElroy, 2024). McElroy notes that rather than thinking of technofascism as some futuristic dystopian society, it is actually currently imposed on countries and areas where neoliberalism has been allowed to strip away any form of social protection and democratic accountability, such as for example some parts of Eastern Europe (McElory's own work is in Romania) or indeed Silicon

Valley itself. In these cases, people only have two choices: to submit or to emigrate. McElroy refers to Clara Zetkin (1923) who argued that fascism emerges not as an aberration but as a reactionary instrument of the capitalist class, born from the crises of imperialist war and capitalist collapse to suppress revolutionary movements. Similarly, McElroy quotes W.E.B. Du Bois who exposed the structural affinity between fascism and colonialism, both of which mobilise race and nationalism to enrich elites while subordinating oppressed populations. Today, the same practices are realised through digital infrastructures and data economies: a reactionary tech oligarchy that enacts economic domination with technological control. In the absence of any revolutionary horizon, we witness the coexistence of an explicitly anti-democratic ideology propagated by technological elites and a bottom-up populist resentment that shares their contempt for democratic institutions. Liberalism's suppression, or co-optation through identity politics, of anticolonial and anti-capitalist politics has cleared the ground for this alliance.

Read through Hepp's concept of pioneering communities, the contemporary Silicon Valley vanguard emerges as a historically situated formation through which specific mediatised futures are strategically produced. If pioneering communities traditionally signal innovation and social transformation, the reactionary configurations analysed here demonstrate their capacity to channel technological development towards authoritarian ends. In this light, techno-eschatology functions as a mechanism for stabilising post-democratic power through controlling mediatised digital infrastructures.

In short, the political-economic concentration of power in Silicon Valley's oligopolies emerges from the long crisis of liberal capitalism, a system that proved incapable of regulating capital, curbing inequality, or confronting its own entanglement with fascism, racism, and colonialism. As liberal democracy slides into post-democracy, its faith in the free market has became dogma, making even the most destructive consequences of capitalism, including environmental collapse, the breakdown of social solidarity, imperial violence and genocide, appear unavoidable. Within this vacuum of political will, Silicon Valley's tech giants consolidated unprecedented control over the infrastructures of communication, economy, and knowledge. Having achieved dominance within this post-democratic order, they now present their rule not as contingent or political but as the inevitable outcome of history's culmination in technological rationality. In this context, technological eschatologies function to legitimise Silicon Valley's rule much as divine right once sanctified the authority of absolute monarchs.

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