

# Editorial – “Art Ontologies of Silicon Valley”

01/02

Tech is never simply technology. It never appears in the abstract, any more than the characters “H2O” appear anywhere on water. Tech is always specific. How old should someone be when they first have sex? How old before they get their first cell phone? This sequence unsettles us because it is hard to think about either inevitability. Sex and technology are instruments of desire, the objects and system of adult unfreedom. Children at play are so analog. Young is life before text. We clutched love letters, in the past, when we couldn’t clutch each other. Now our phones get warm and vibrate. Eventually, they die. As a proxy for a body, technology is never better than the next best thing. Too often, it’s the only one. Today the image of the beloved appears most against the canvas of the phone, carved into polymer, inscribed onto text messages, recorded in electronic memory. Our relationships with our phones are our relationships, most of the time.

Any ontology of Silicon Valley must include this new technics of reproduction, considered in this issue by Lee Mackinnon in “Love Machines and the Tinder Bot Bildungsroman.” After all, the moniker “Silicon Valley” signifies more than the source of our immediate gizmos of desire. It also serves as a desirable object in its own right. In “Asynchronous! On the Sublime Administration of the Everyday,” Mike Pepi details how the appeal of non-linear processing has birthed a raft of new management techniques named like sports drinks: Agile and Lean. In the ascendant project of technocracy, these new philosophies represent new techniques of governance. In “The Artist-in-Consultance: Welcome to the New Management,” Elvia Wilk compares the role of resident corporate artists to management consultants. Both are exogenous scolds, enlisted to shame and discipline communities and to anticipate their weaknesses.

In “Light Industry: Toxic Waste and Pastoral Capitalism,” Ingrid Burrington examines the material history of Silicon Valley, both above and below ground. Santa Clara County is a place, distinguished not only by its geographical location but by its historical one as well. It is not all technology, all the time: it is this technology, here and now.

Is the Valley interested in art? Even if today we bathe in high-tech culture, what is high tech-culture? Does it exist? “They have no culture!” the colonizer shouts upon seeing the natives. But they do. They are engineers. They are mathematicians and quants. They are venture capitalists. They are concerned with community, with sharing ideas and with the odd proof-of-concept slice of machine expressionism. Perhaps they don’t have the time or the vanity for the art market. In “What If There Is No Next Big Thing?” Doug Coupland presents the radical

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possibility that tech *itself* is the next vanguard of art, that the two strains of high art and high technology have finally become indistinguishable. In “Jodi’s Infrastructure,” Alexander Galloway takes up the work of Jodi.org to illustrate the vanishing difference between working in the digital, and working on it. Zach Blas offers a “dildotectonics of the internet” in order to parse out the difference between the network’s sudden death at the hands of nationalist dictators, and its slow evaporation into the background of the lifeworld.

What becomes of the artist in this new arrangement? Andrew Norman Wilson, in “The Artist Leaving the Googleplex,” narrates his journey from corporate video artisan to rising star in “the cottage industry of critical art.” Finally, in “No Man’s Space: On Russian Cosmism” Marina Simakova examines artwork orbiting around an earlier faith in technology’s ability to redeem the infrastructure of beauty amidst the unfolding revolution.

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