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Green Magic: On Technologies of Enchantment at Apple's Corporate Headquarters [1]

Christo Sims

In September 2017, the multinational corporation Apple Inc. invited select members of the media to be among the first non-Apple employees to visit the company's new corporate headquarters, dubbed "Apple Park," in Cupertino, California. Apple had invited these journalists to attend the latest of the company's fabled product launch jamborees that late co-founder and former chief executive Steve Jobs made famous. From a product perspective, the main protagonist of the day was the iPhone X, which Apple unveiled with a hitherto unheard-of sticker price of $999 for a smartphone. However, for many in attendance the main attraction was the campus: a one hundred seventy-six acre tract of rolling parklands ensconcing a massive 2.8-million-square-foot office building shaped like a ring.

Television crews arrived early to set up equipment on risers in front of the Steve Jobs Theater, a subterrain amphitheater accessed from a hilltop in the southeastern corner of the campus. Later, more journalists and guests arrived and mingled in and around the theater's above-ground lobby. As the main event approached, Apple employees led almost a thousand guests on a descent into the theater where they witnessed an elaborate ritual of corporate propaganda that journalists then translated into news stories for their publics.

An example of this reporting from Emily Chang, host of the television show *Bloomberg Technology*, to Charlie Rose on PBS (fig. 1):

"Charlie, I have to say it was pretty powerful. I mean you can see the Steve Jobs Theater behind me and the sight of it is breathtaking. You have the multistory glass walls, the spinning elevators, you walk down four stories deep into the theater itself, and they open today's presentation with the voice of Steve Jobs."[2]

Other reporters expressed similar enthusiasm. As Lucy Kafanov reported to Matt Lauer on NBC's *Today* show, "This is our first ever look at Apple's incredible new campus envisioned by

[1] I thank the following people for providing helpful commentary on earlier drafts of this essay: Christina Dunbar-Hester, Erica Robles-Anderson, Paloma Checa-Gismero, and two anonymous reviewers. The article was written while I was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ, and I am grateful that IAS provided me with time to work on this article as well as the feedback from the following IAS faculty and members: Didier Fassin, Joy Rohde, Diana Graizbord, Leslie Paik, Sonja van Wichelen, Jacob G. Foster, Florence Jany-Catrice, Waqar Zaidi, and Emmanuel Henry.
[2] "Apple's 2017 Product Launch," *The Charlie Rose Show*, September 12, 2017.

Steve Jobs to fit seamlessly with nature. It sprawls across 175-acres and is completely powered by renewable energy."[3]

Apple's new campus had received extensive attention from journalists, fans, local officials and residents, and from critics, practitioners, and students of architecture and urban planning since Jobs first revealed plans for the new Apple headquarters at a Cupertino City Council meeting in June 2011. Jobs's presentation included a slide show that presented the campus as not only high-tech and futuristic – Jobs told the council that the giant ring building looked "like a spaceship landed" – but also as an act of ecological restoration. Jobs noted that the proposed site, which had been a Hewlett-Packard office park before Apple bought the property, was mostly "a big asphalt parking lot," whereas Apple's new campus would dedicate about 80 percent of the site to parklands populated with indigenous flora and fruit orchards that reminded Jobs of the Santa Clara Valley of his youth. Additionally, Jobs noted that the campus would generate most of the energy it used from renewable sources on site.

As with the September 2017 unveiling of the Steve Jobs Theater, many people who witnessed Jobs's 2011 presentation appeared charmed. "Now that we've seen your plans, the word spectacular would be an understatement," Council Member Orrin Mahoney remarked. "I think everybody is going to appreciate what is clearly going to be the most elegant headquarters, at least in the US, that I've seen," he elaborated.[4]

In the years since, many journalists and fans have struck a similarly reverential tone as they enumerated the campus' many marvels: the gargantuan size of the ring building (the courtyard "could surround St. Peter's Square in Rome" Walter Isaacson (2011, 536) reported); the rumored cost of $5 billion; the three thousand person café with four-story-tall sliding glass doors, each weighing four hundred forty thousand pounds; the campus' extensive use of renewable energy technologies and natural ventilation; the more than nine thousand trees that Apple planted; the exacting, even obsessive, care that went into the design and manufacture of every detail, from door handles and railings to light fixtures and even custom-designed pizza boxes.[5]

However, experts in architectural history and urban planning were far less effusive. They pointed out that behind the campus' futuristic green gleam was a retrograde approach to corporate architecture. Apple's new campus resurrected the dreams of mid-twentieth century US business executives who constructed massive "corporate estates," to borrow a phrase from the design historian Louise Mozingo (2011, 101-47). As Mozingo documented, after the Second World War, executives began building corporate headquarters, often designed by famous architects, in pastoral settings beyond the urban fringe, thus severing ties with economically and racially diverse cities and further fueling the growth of car-dependent, middle-class, and predominantly white suburbs. In addition to being socially separatist, planning experts pointed out that Apple Park and other suburban corporate campuses were ecologically injurious. As Christopher Hawthorne, architecture critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, put it, "though Apple has touted the

[3] "Apple unveils three new iPhones including its most high-end device," *NBC's Today Show*, September 13, 2017.
[4] "Steve Jobs Presents to the Cupertino City Council," Internet Archive, accessed June 14, 2018, archive.org/details/Steve_Jobs_Presents_to_the_Cupertino_City_Council_6_7_11
[5] Perhaps the two most visible examples of this reporting are Levy (2017) and Passariello (2017).

new campus as green, its sprawling form and dependence on the car make a different argument."[6]

At a time when Silicon Valley was grievously unequal, choked with traffic, and suffering from one of the worst affordable housing crises in the US, Apple spent $5 billion on a campus that was walled off from the public, isolated from public transit, and included parking for nearly eleven thousand cars but no new housing.[7] But the point of this essay is not to diagnose how Apple has contributed to the ruination of the San Francisco Bay Area and the world beyond, as others have done (cf. Walker 2018; Chan, Selden, and Ngai 2020; Maxwell and Miller 2020). Rather, the essay examines how Apple Park – as a space of situated practices and as an object of media representation – does mythogenic work in the sullied aftermath of neoliberalism's triumphalist moment, a period that, as Nancy Fraser (2021, 95) observes, is increasingly defined by not just a crisis of ecology but also a crisis of hegemony. The propositions that the essay aims to establish are as follows. First, that Apple Park is at the vanguard of a broader trend in which the dominant US-based multinationals in the digital technology sector are increasingly investing in the old-fashioned but enduringly efficacious pomp of spectacular, awe-inspiring architecture. Second, from a hegemonic perspective, these extravagant "green" development projects are potentially efficacious politically in so far as they manage to enchant those who encounter and report on them while also addressing growing anxieties and sorrows about climate catastrophe and other social and ecological desecrations. Finally, the essay argues that Silicon Valley's techniques of enchantment are becoming ever more extravagant, fantastical, and, ironically, not so focused on computers as the gap between technocapitalist hype and the lived reality of many becomes ever wider. The essay first establishes a more general anthropological analytic for examining how some artifacts and built environments manage to enchant those who encounter them before turning to the case of Apple Park to illustrate and develop the argument.

From Enchanting Computers to Enchanting Environments

Just over ten years before Apple invited select journalists to visit Apple Park for the first time, Steve Jobs unveiled the first iPhone at the Moscone Convention Center in San Francisco. In the interim, Apple sold over 1.2 billion iPhones worldwide, captured an estimated 70 percent or more of profits in the global smartphone industry despite accounting for less than 15 percent of market share, was deemed the world's most valuable brand by *Forbes* magazine for seven years running, and became the world's most valuable company by market capitalization.[8] Apple rose

[6] Christopher Hawthorne, "Apple's new campus will be a retrograde cocoon," *The Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 2011. articles.latimes.com/print/2011/sep/10/entertainment/la-ca-applehq-20110911.

[7] On parking, see "How not to create traffic jams, pollution and urban sprawl," *The Economist*, April 8, 2017, www.economist.com/briefing/2017/04/08/how-not-to-create-traffic-jams-pollution-and-urban-sprawl. After public pushback, Apple contributed about $5 million in a housing mitigation fee to Cupertino, a paltry amount for a $5 billion project and in a city where the median house price was nearly $2 million dollars at the time; see, Adam Rogers, "If you care about cities, Apple's new campus sucks," *Wired,* June 2017.

[8] Chance Miller, "Apple announces it has now sold over 1.2 billion iPhones," *9 to 5 Mac*, August 1, 2017, 9to5mac.com/2017/08/01/apple-announces-it-has-now-sold-over-1-2-billion-iphones/;

to the pinnacle of global capitalism during these years even though the company's subsequent improvements on yesterday's digital novelties became increasingly marginal, and even though Apple branded products became more-or-less functionally equivalent with less expensive substitutes.[9] Nevertheless, Apple managed to persuade many consumers to enter or stay within the company's ecosystem of Apple branded products and services and to replace their Apple gadgets every few years. Apple's success in recruiting and holding onto these customers has not only allowed Apple to charge much higher premiums than its direct competitors but also to "own the consumer" (Montgomerie and Roscoe 2013) and, thus, to exploit its dominant position in the long and geographically dispersed supply chains that produce Apple branded products and services.[10]

I propose that Apple's ability to stir and sustain this consumer fealty has depended to a significant degree on its sophistication with a realm of human techne that the late anthropologist Alfred Gell referred to as "the technology of enchantment" (cf. Gell 1992, 44-46; Gell 1998). For Gell, the technology of enchantment encompasses "all those technical strategies… which human beings employ in order to secure the acquiescence of other people in their intentions or projects" (Gell 1988, 7). Examples of Gell's technology of enchantment are manifold. In addition to art, which was Gell's focus, scholars have long identified affinities between the enchanting techniques in the modern arts of advertising, propaganda, and mass publicity (cf. Malinowski 1935; Gell 1988, 9; Williams 1980; Mazzarella 2018; Moeran and de Waal Malefyt 2018). In a related vein, social scientists and humanists who study science and technology have long documented how the social introduction of novel technologies often beguiles boosters and critics alike (cf. Marx 1964; Marvin 1988; Nye 1994; Stahl 1995; Winner 1998; Mosco 2004; Turner 2006; Dourish and Bell 2011; Sims 2017; Ames 2019; Vinsel and Russell 2020).

Gell's account offers an anthropologically derived explanation for how designed artifacts and environments objects come to be enchanting. Gell argued that those who encounter them are unable to fathom the technical processes by which the object was brought into existence, an observation that has much in common with the notion of "black boxing" in Science and Technology Studies (cf. Pinch 1992; Winner 1993) as well as Karl Marx's ([1867] 1976, 163-77) notions of mystification and commodity fetishism. According to Gell, when people are unable to fathom the technical processes that led to a dazzling object's creation, they often interpret the psychological disturbances they experience as indexical evidence that an agent with a supra-

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Chuck Jones, "No Surprise that Apple's iPhone Dominates Smartphone Profits," *Forbes*, November 20, 2017; Team Counterpoint, "Global Smartphone Shipments Share – Last Eight Years of Winners & Losers," *Counterpoint*, February 14, 2021, www.counterpointresearch.com/global-smartphone-shipments-share-last-eight-years-of-winners-losers/; Kurt Badenhuasen, "The World's Most Valuable Brands 2017: By the Numbers," *Forbes*, May 23, 2017.

[9] See "The maturing of the smartphone industry is cause for celebration," *The Economist,* January 12, 2019. www.economist.com/leaders/2019/01/12/the-maturing-of-the-smartphone-industry-is-cause-for-celebration. See also, Maxwell and Miller (2020, 4).

[10] Apple has much in common with luxury or aspirational brands in fashion in terms of business models and a tendency to exploit and disrupt the livelihoods and ecologies dispersed along their shifting commodity chains. For comparison, see Tsing (2009).

human, even magical, kind of agency created or commissioned the object. It is this non-demonstrative indexical inference of supersized powers that makes some technically produced artifacts and environments enchanting.[11]

Silicon Valley's boosters have long trafficked in "the technology of enchantment" as part of their efforts to sell wares, legitimize their expertise, recruit and motivate employees, and fend off regulatory scrutiny (cf. Stahl 1995; Winner 1998; Turner 2006; Ames 2015; Ames 2019; Vinsel and Russell 2020). Both Apple and Steve Jobs have been exemplars in this regard. They have foregrounded the seemingly magical powers of their latest digital products and services and, relatedly, figured Silicon Valley firms, engineers, and entrepreneurs in mythical-heroic terms. More recently, however, many dominant digital technology multinationals have added spectacular architecture to their arsenals of enchanting technologies.

Apple has been at the vanguard of this trend, initially with retail stores, which the company began opening in 2001, and more recently with the development of Apple Park and other office buildings. Alongside the acquisition of prime real estate, Apple hired the high-profile architect, or "starchitect," Norman Foster to design Apple Park and nineteen of Apple's flagship stores. Each of the dominant US-based digital technology multinationals has followed their lead. Microsoft attempted, but failed, to emulate Apple's successful retail stores. Google hired the firms of European starchitects Bjarke Ingles and Thomas Heatherwick to design eye-catching new office buildings in Silicon Valley and London. And Facebook hired Frank Gehry to design an extension of its corporate headquarters in Menlo Park, California. In doing so, the biggest digital technology multinationals not only put their wealth and power on display, they also present themselves as ecologically virtuous. They emphasized the "green" character of new signature buildings in terms of environmental impacts and through the prominence given to plants, parks, water, and other "natural" elements in their designs.[12] Being "green" increasingly signifies a form of universal moral goodness (Angelo 2021), and in a historical moment when anxieties about ecological catastrophes are thankfully spreading, such performances of green benevolence are potentially quite seductive.

Silicon Valley's turn towards green architectural pomp marks a departure from the dominant mythologization of spaces of innovation: namely, the pedestrian spaces of garages, dorm rooms, tilt-ups, office parks, and so forth (fig. 2). This shift in the mythos of Silicon Valley's tectonics occurs as the digital technology sector's astounding concentrations of wealth and power have become widely recognized – and, thus, harder to performatively temper with modest buildings – but also as its techno-utopian promises have fallen short and as publicly visible evidence of awe-inspiring innovations has abated. The dominant digital technology multinationals have turned to starchitecture alongside their growing recognition as global powers that rival other nexuses of state, cultural, and corporate power, and having few public benefits to show for it. These are ripe

[11] For a Weberian perspective on technology and enchantment, see Morgan Ames's (2015; 2019) work on "charismatic technology."

[12] Architects working for the tech companies refer to the latter as "biophilia," a term originally developed in the field of sociobiology by Edward O. Wilson that has since been translated into a design approach (cf. Wilson 1984; Kellert, Heerwagen, and Mador 2008).

conditions for the development and deployment of ever more extravagant technologies of enchantment.

Given the industry claims to be in the business of future making, one irony about its growing embrace of architectural pomp is how old-fashioned its techniques of enchantment are (Mozingo 2011). As cultural historian Erica Robles-Anderson observed, Apple's retail stores deploy many of the same techniques of enchantment as those used in cathedrals and churches: large and heavy doors, vertically compressed thresholds that open into bright spaces with high ceilings, and other spatial techniques that make people feel small in relation to their environment (cf. Robles-Anderson 2012; Laskow 2015). Indeed, configuring the built environment in enchanting ways is one of the oldest and most enduring means of seduction, and it has not been displaced by the modern arts of advertising and mass publicity. If anything, the former has become a powerful agent for the latter – whether as set pieces for advertisements, television shows, movies, political and celebrity pageants, and social media posts, or as the protagonist of books, magazine articles, blogs, documentaries, and social media accounts – and vice versa, with the techniques of mass publicity being incorporated into churches and other sacralized spaces (Robles-Anderson 2012). As we will see, and like the Crystal Cathedral that Robles-Anderson analyzed, Apple Park has been designed with this combination of in situ and mass-mediated modes of collective enchantment in mind.

Spectacular environments endure as a technology of enchantment in part because of their unique powers of inducement. As Chandra Mukerji (1997) observed in her study of Versailles, designed environments persuade and compel not through language and debate but through display and demonstration, modes of persuasion long used by scientists, technologists, and political, corporate, and religious authorities who aim to secure acquiescence for their positions and projects (Rosental 2013). Dazzling designed environments can disguise their capacities to operate as such not just because they do not rely on language, but also because they offer opportunities for participation. As Mukerji (2012) noted, skillfully designed environments often invite people to imaginatively "take on" various roles, subjectivities, and social relations that are as satisfying to the enchanted as they are beneficial to the enchanter. In an age of social media, these incitements have taken on additional valence and reach as designers fashion environments to encourage visitors to take and share photos and videos online.

With these ideas in mind, let us examine how Apple Park has been designed to enchant visitors. To do so in a way that avoids casting these visitors as dupes, allow me to indulge in a short thought experiment. Suppose you are invited to an event at the Steve Jobs Theater. For the moment, we can forgo the ritualized theatrics that will take place inside the theater and focus instead on your journey to the theater. The following details how your route has been scripted by Apple Park's designers. It is assembled from my own field work and a close reading of architectural documentation, media reports, and user-generated media of other people's visits to Apple Park. As we take this fictive journey, imagine what you might perceive, feel, and infer, and consider how the design of the campus has ensnared so many visitors – some of whom are skeptical of Apple and its promotional tricks – in its mystique.

Visiting Apple Park

Most Apple Park visitors arrive by car, so you likely begin your voyage by navigating through miles of congested freeways and side streets that blanket the low-density suburban sprawl of the greater San Francisco Bay Area. The rather disenchanting postindustrial landscape (fig. 3) – a banal repetition of highways, parking lots, housing tracts, apartment buildings, shopping malls, fast-food restaurants, and office parks – is, in the words of Langdon Winner, "the quintessential example of new California urbanism – a vast suburb with no central city to give it meaning and focus" (1992, 33).

You exit the I-280 freeway, navigate several blocks of gas stations, strip malls, condos, and office buildings, and cross back over the ten-lane freeway. As you reach the apex of the overpass, the perceptual choreography of Apple Park begins. Most of what you can see of the campus is an abundance of green set against an expansive California sky. There are a series of minimalist rectangular office buildings paralleling the sides of the roadway ahead, their glass facades gently mirroring the sky and adjacent trees. In the distance, barely discernible, are shards of the "spaceship" building's roof peeping through sentineled redwoods and pines (fig. 4). Equally notable is what you can no longer see: evidence of the suburban sprawl you just finished traversing.

After you descend from the overpass, the road levels and runs through a corridor of green trees with an understory of high grasses. Apple Park is on the left and the Steve Jobs Theater is about one hundred meters therein. But if you were to look in that direction, all you would see is a ribbon of tall grasses leading into a motley thicket. Further down the road, shards of the ring building's black roof and white louvres flicker through the arboreal canopy, but the colossal structure remains almost entirely veiled (fig. 5).

You reach the visitor center, a stand-alone building with glass walls and a rooftop observation deck, where you are directed to parking lots tucked out-of-sight behind and under the building. Electric vehicle charging stations line the entrance of the parking lot. A sign reminds Apple Park "residents" (i.e. employees) to park at the main campus parking structures, which you already passed but likely did not see because they are located under the giant ring building and in an enormous parking garage that is occluded by foliage and terraformed hills that match or exceed the height of the structure by a few feet.[13]

Upon leaving your car and moving towards the visitor center, you pass a small grove of olive trees underlaid with tall golden and green grasses (fig. 6). As an invited guest, you are allowed past the visitor center and through a security checkpoint that modulates access to the main campus. After you pass the checkpoint, the berms on your left and right recede to reveal a forked pathway. To the right, you glimpse the ring building's façade peeping through the trees and hills. Some visitors have stopped to take photos of the building from this vantage point. But employees

[13] The top of the parking structure sits two hundred fifteen feet above sea level. The structure is separated from the main campus by an undulating human-made ridge, the peaks of which vary from a low of 214'-6" to a high of 221'-6". See, page six of "Apple's Updated Proposal Documents - Submitted September 2013: Site Plan & Landscaping – Part 1," accessed on June 14, 2018, www.cupertino.org/our-city/departments/community-development/planning/major-projects/apple-park.

are directing you and the other guests to take the path to your left, which leads away from the ring building.

The path gradually winds and ascends between two berms that are studded with trees and shrubs. After about sixty meters the trail curves to the right. As you climb, portions of the Steve Jobs Theater lobby are slowly revealed from behind the tree covered berm that runs along the left side of the path. Some guests have again stopped to take photos of their first glimpse of the building. As you approach the top of the hill the berm and foliage on the right side of the path taper off to reveal a more extensive, but still occluded, view of the giant ring building in the distance. Some people again stop to take pictures of the partially unveiled building. The path now curves slightly to the left, which places the lobby directly in front of you. For the first time, you can see it in an unobstructed way (fig. 7). Some visitors again stop for photos, many of which will circulate on social media. The lobby is a glass cylinder about forty meters in diameter, seven meters tall, and capped with what appears from this vantage point to be a razor-thin circular roof that extends beyond the glass façade by several meters. The roof is entirely supported by the glass façade; there are no other walls or columns in the above-ground structure, which creates the illusion that the metallic-colored roof is almost floating.

You approach the theater lobby and cross onto the white stone patio that skirts the building. Hundreds of people have already assembled, many of whom congregate to the right of the theater lobby's entrance, where they face away from the building and hold up phones and cameras to take pictures of the vista to the north (fig. 8). For the first time you can see the ring building without landscaping obstructing your sight. A two hundred meter descent of gently rolling savanna separates you from the ring building. Oak trees line ridges that slope and converge toward the structure in the distance, veiling the building's bottom two stories as well as its left and right sides. In the daylight, the ring building's glass walls and white louvres reflect the landscaping and sky, an effect that tempers the visual contrast between the structure and its surroundings. Despite this distance, shrouding, and blending, the grandeur of the building is unmistakable (fig. 9). The visible portion is so large and panoramic that your eyes can only focus on a fraction of it at once. You cannot tell where the building ends because its curved façade disappears behind tree covered berms on both sides. Objects that are familiar at human scale, such as oak trees, are placed next to the building, but they are dwarfed by the building's magnitude, appearing like mere shrubs.

Let us pause here, on the patio of the Steve Jobs Theater and reflect on a perceptual choreography replete with affective and indexical potentials that allow designed artifacts and environments to operate as technologies of enchantment. Apple Park is an environment configured to orchestrate carefully planned "scripts" for programs of action (Akrich 1992; Latour 1992): the roads and pathways invite certain trajectories of movement while the berms and landscaping discourage others. These scripts do more than just encourage certain programs of action; they curate carefully planned sequences of perceptual opportunities, or "sightlines," to unfold temporally as sequences of perceptions-in-action.[14]

[14] For similar phenomenological accounts of how perception is always a situated activity, see Lave (1988, 180-2), Ingold (2000), and Nöe (2004).

We began in the familiar scenery of banal postindustrial congestion and then transitioned to a differently configured environment with different affective potentials whose salience was heightened by purposeful contrast with the landscape we left. As we first glimpsed Apple Park and subsequently entered its verdant landscape, we may have begun to feel a release of the feelings that accompanied our commute. We might have felt a mounting sense of specialness and excitement as we entered the exclusive campus, neared our destination, and caught glimpses of the famous "spaceship" building through the trees. Landscaping foretold dramatic revelations to come, and the perceptual teasing of revealing and concealing heightened a sense of mystique and suspense.[15] This tension broke at the apex of our climb and the landscape revealed Apple Park's buildings more fully. At this point, the affective potentials of the landscape were no longer just serene and seductive, they were also awe-inspiring and even intimidating.[16]

Here, for example, is how journalist Farhad Manjoo described their first journey to the Steve Jobs Theater in the *New York Times*: "It is, unsurprisingly, very pretty… but its beauty comes with a deliberate touch of fright. Nothing here is to human scale, and the overall impression is one of being overwhelmed by Apple's sheer might."[17] Manjoo's recount echoes what cultural historians and media scholars have referred to as the "American technological sublime," an affectively charged response to grand feats of technical prowess such as railroads and dramatic engineering projects – the Hoover Dam, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Empire State Building, and the massive automobile factories of the Ford Motor Company (Marx 1964; Nye 1994; Mosco 2004). The sublime tends to be associated with a powerful and curiously pleasing mixture of awe, astonishment, and fear, what Edmund Burke referred to as an experience of "delightful horror" ([1757] 1990, 67). In the romantic tradition of Western aesthetics, the sublime was rendered as individuals overwhelmed in awe by an untamed and greater-than-human natural setting, such as a jagged mountain peak or a tumultuous sea. In the nineteenth century US, this romantic aesthetic tradition morphed to include technical marvels. The affective experiences activated by such encounters can be so strong that they momentarily overpower other thoughts and feelings, as evinced by Manjoo's account of overwhelm. What is more, people communicate with others about their extraordinary experiences, which is one reason why sublime

[15] Sketches by the project's lead architect, Norman Foster, suggest that this landscape/building dialog was deliberate. Next to one of Foster's sketches that depicts the buildings of Apple Park from the perspective of the gardens, Foster wrote, "glimpses of the building… vignettes… a hint here & there… appears around a corner… discreet in the landscape… an incident… a gentle intervention." Norman Foster notes for Apple Park, 2017, Norman Foster Sketchbooks, SB01136, Norman Foster Foundation, Madrid, Spain (hereafter cited as Foster Sketchbooks). Ellipses in original.

[16] This slow revelation of monumental structures is an old trick, deployed by designers of not just churches, with their vertically compressed entryways opening to high vaulted ceilings (Robles-Anderson quoted in Laskow 2015), and country homes, with their long and meandering driveways, but also mid-twentieth century corporate estates (Mozingo 2011). I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to the use of this trick in the design of country estates.

[17] Farhad Manjoo, "Apple's new corporate campus is a sight to behold," *The New York Times*, September 12, 2017. Manjoo requests to be referred to by the pronouns they/them/their.

environments have been widely represented and shared through various media for centuries, a tendency that continues today on both mass-media and social media platforms.

But there is also political consequence to Apple Park's capacity to evoke awe and a battery of other religious affects. If, following Gell, people often interpret dazzling objects and environments as indexes of an outsized, even supra-human, agency, then sublime experiences tend to be associated with evaluations of respect, admiration, and even reverence for whatever people indexically infer to be the agent(s) that brought the sublime object into being or who now deploy it. Sublime experiences, in other words, can help produce a relation of deference to and often pride for an authority and those who claim to represent it. For example, in the tradition of the natural sublime, awe inspiring encounters with nonhuman nature were often interpreted as indexes of the hand of God or some other supernatural being. Similarly, in cases of the American technological sublime during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, encounters with awe inspiring feats of engineering were often interpreted patriotically as evidence of the nation's divine might, a construction that continues to help animate and justify US practices of settler colonialism, imperialism, and other hegemonic schemes (cf. Marx 1964; Adas 1989; Nye 1994; Adas 2006).

With Apple Park, however, the technological sublime does not so much attempt to appeal to patriotic sentiments as demonstrate Apple Inc.'s capacities as a benevolent corporate sovereign, one that may make decisions in secret with little democratic accountability, but that does so with extraordinary skill and for the benefit of humanity. In this regard, Apple Park has much in common with the uses of the technological sublime developed and deployed by corporations at the 1939 World's Fair in New York (Nye 1994, 199-224).[18] The technical prowess on display is that of a corporately organized elite that can lead the world out of dark times: the Great Depression and the Second World War of the 1930s and the conjoined breakdowns of neoliberalism and climate catastrophe in our current moment. Like the 1939 World's Fair, Apple Park may be working its magic despite a chorus of critics pointing out the campus' contradictions and shortcomings.

In keeping with how spectacular architecture conferred authority to political, religious, and economic elites in previous historical moments, many contemporary journalists, elected officials, Apple fans, and tourists responded to the spectacle of Apple Park by making indexical inferences to a superhuman agency. For example, Manjoo attributed their strong affective experience of Apple Park to "Apple's sheer might." In other journalists' accounts, a supersized agency is attributed to not just Apple Inc. but also Apple's famed figureheads, lieutenants, and design condottiere – Steve Jobs, Jony Ive, Norman Foster – all white men who have been widely lionized as exceptionally creative and skilled technicians, "masterminds" and the like (cf. Levy

[18] According to Nye (1994), this genre of the technological sublime synthesizes perceivable technical marvels with exhibits extoling technical features that would otherwise be imperceivable to visitors. At Apple Park, an "augmented reality" model located in the campus visitor's center does much of the work of making the campus' imperceivable technical feats – such as its natural ventilation and renewable energy systems – visible to tourists. Apple press releases and spokespeople do similar work for journalists.

2017; Passariello 2017).[19] It is by way of this capacity to evoke religiously themed affects and indexical inferences of superhuman agencies that Apple Park has been able to act as a potentially potent political technology, one that can help shore up the company's claims to be a singularly innovative, adroit, and virtuous agent of sociotechnical progress, a power, in other words, that possibly deserves its enormous riches and outsized influence over people's lives, a force, in short, that is worthy of respect and perhaps even reverence.

However, using monumental architecture to evoke sublime resonances is a tricky matter. Environments designed to elicit awe and reverence can also elicit horror, repulsion, and disgust, in which case the indexicality points not towards a benevolent wizard but a malevolent sorcerer. At Apple Park, this unwanted possibility is tempered in part by the campus' extensive use of cultural forms, styles, and values plucked from 1960s and 1970s neo-avant-gardes (Bürger 1984), especially minimalism's theatricality (Fried 1967) and the romantically inclined and cybernetically influenced New Communalists faction of the counterculture (cf. Barbrook and Cameron 1996; Tuner 2006; Streeter 2011; Streeter 2015). As Fred Turner (2006) documented, for decades Apple and other Silicon Valley boosters have drawn on post-war bohemian traditions to propagate a techno-utopian vision of a future society, one that they claim will be egalitarian, composed of expressive and interconnected individuals, freed from the strictures of institutional hierarchies, living in harmony with nature, and "all watched over by machines of loving grace," to quote Turner's reading of Richard Brautigan's influential 1967 poem (ibid, 38-39).[20]

In many ways, Apple Park renders this utopian vision as enclosed miniature, as a variation on a theme-park (Sorkin 1992), which is to say, as a highly artificial, detached, and tightly controlled fantasyland. Like other fantasylands, the political efficacy of Apple Park depends less on the truths or lies it tells and more on its capacity to stoke and spread dreams, passions, and myths. In this regard, Apple Park may be more successful as a political technology than its critics tend to acknowledge. The buildings of Apple Park – with their primitive and minimalist geometries, smooth surfaces, and see-through glass facades – all give the impression of a transparent, non-threatening, and nonhierarchical unity, a unity that the New Communalists of the 1960s and 1970s also aimed to create when they left bourgeoise society to move back to the land.[21] Even the much commented upon association of the ring building with a spaceship – the parallels with the space station in *2001* (dir. Stanley Kubrick; 1968) are striking – is surprisingly disarming in a nostalgic and kitschy sort of way.[22] The extensive use of glass gives the impression of a

[19] As Lily Irani (2018) notes, these all-too-common mythologizations of Silicon Valley exceptionalism often recapitulate a white supremacist and patriarchal "great white men" narrative of both technological and historical progress.

[20] I thank Christina Dunbar-Hester for reminding me of this reference.

[21] In a note in one of Norman Foster's sketchbooks, Foster quotes Steve Jobs from a 2009 meeting, writing that Jobs wanted the design of the new campus to be "not hierarchical – egalitarian." Foster Sketchbooks, SB01136.

[22] The distinction between avant-garde and kitsch, which Clement Greenberg (1961) associated with modernism, is routinely muddled at Apple Park. While the campus draws on many cultural tropes from 1960s and 1970s art and bohemian movements and aspires to "great architecture," it deploys these tropes so unironically, uncritically, and nostalgically that Apple Park can come across to cultural historians and critics as the overwrought pastiche theorized by Jameson (1991). Yet, this pastiche may help explain why Apple Park captured such extensive popular attention

harmonious relation between humans and the natural world, a wall that "evaporates the barrier" between inside and outside, as Norman Foster put it.[23] This impression of human-nature harmony is further buttressed by verdant landscaping, which works to veil the scale of the buildings and make them appear peeping out of, rather than as imposed upon, a tranquil scene.

These attempts to use "greening" to temper potential anxieties about the company's power and to demonstrate the company's ecological – and, thus, moral – benevolence resuscitate another longstanding cultural trope, that of "the machine in the garden" (Marx 1964). Central to this trope, which proliferated in nineteenth century literature and visual art, is an attempt to reconcile a tension at the heart of mythologies of US exceptionalism: on the one hand, America as an Edenic promised land, as exemplified in Thomas Jefferson's pastoral ideal; on the other, as a world leader of modern industry. While attempts to realize the latter have repeatedly threatened to tarnish idealizations of the former, purveyors of the machine in the garden trope have routinely – and often successfully – figured the machinery of capitalist industry as existing in a harmonious relation with idealized US landscapes. At Apple Park, the garden side of this trope is articulated as not just the familiar pastoral ideal but also as the recovery of a sacred, but lost, California landscape, one that, in the words of Norman Foster, had become "a sea of parked cars."[24] "The idea is to bring California back to Cupertino," Apple's main arborist for the project, David Muffly, told reporters (Koetsier 2013). Thus, at Apple the famous trope identified by Leo Marx is inverted: the campus attempts to incorporate the Edenic garden into the machinery of capitalist production rather than the other way around, a reversal that is well timed for a moment when concerns about a depleted and receding nature abound. This is a garden, in other words, that not only attempts to temper Apple's supersized buildings and assert a "green" benevolence; it also attempts to address and assuage the anxieties, angers, and sorrows that arise alongside recognizing that one is living in a desecrated world.

A Lot of Hooey?

Yet skeptics of Apple Park and Apple Inc. remain. Even some commentators who otherwise appear willing to attribute outsized powers to Apple nevertheless harbor doubts about whether the company still possesses its magic. "The iPhone is, I think, a unique product in that it's a huge impact on the world. It's… huge on profitability," Henry Blodget, a business journalist and CEO of the online publication *Business Insider,* shared on the Charlie Rose television program on the evening of the 2017 event that opened this essay. "The idea that Apple would just pull another rabbit out of the hat like that, I think is dreaming."[25]

What Blodget's skepticism reveals, I propose, is not so much an enlightened eye seeing through the magician's tricks – as was the case with many architectural and planning experts who assessed Apple Park – as further anthropological evidence that doubt is an integral feature of

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even as it was widely panned by professional critics. I thank the anonymous reviewers for helping develop this line of thought.

[23] Quoted from Foster Sketchbooks, SB01191.

[24] Foster Sketchbooks, SB01136.

[25] "Apple's 2017 Product Launch," *Charlie Rose Show*.

efficacious magic. As Michael Taussig observed, "faith seems to require that one be taken in by what one professes while at the same time suspecting it is a lot of hooey" (Taussig 2016, 455). Taussig observes that neither magicians nor their patients blindly believe in magic. In fact, most claim to believe that much of it is fraud even as they partake in magical rites. This ambivalence, Taussig argues, puts the occult technician in the bind of having to manage a volatile mixture of faith and doubt in themselves and their targets alike. They do so by refining their techniques, which Taussig encapsulates as "the skilled revelation of skilled concealment" (2016, 455).

I can think of no better description of how Apple Park works as a technology of enchantment than this conception of magic proposed by Taussig. It is also a fitting description of how professional marketers, brand strategists, and public relations specialists attempt to advance the interests of powerful organizations and individuals (cf. Ewen 1996; Banet-Weiser 2012), techniques that have also been adopted and adapted by the entrepreneurial subjects, influencers, and microcelebrities of social media (Marwick 2013; Duffy and Hund 2015).[26] Both Apple's famous product launch jamborees and the design of Apple Park adhere to this logic. After all, Apple's product launch events are carefully choreographed rituals in which some of the most famed occult technicians of Silicon Valley momentarily depart their cloisters to reveal their works. To the skeptical eye, these events are publicity stunts meant to hype and sell Apple products and to reassure investors.[27] They are also networking events that allow members of the technorati to cultivate their social capital. This much is obvious, and Apple executives and the journalists and social media influencers who cover them likely suspect as much. Yet, like Taussig's skeptics of magic who nevertheless partake in magical rites, most everyone goes along with the program, treats Apple's highly staged events with some degree of seriousness, and, by day's end, scores of journalists and social media accounts have faithfully aided and abetted the world's most valuable company circulate unpaid – and, thus, seemingly credible – corporate propaganda.

Clearly there is something more important going on than just the announcement of new products and services. What makes Apple Park and the product launch events that it hosts such unique foci of public intrigue, I propose, is that they partially reveal what Apple has so skillfully concealed, namely: how the company manages to accumulate such incredible wealth, whether it will continue to be able to do so, and, in the last instance, what all of this means for the fate of "innovation," that ultimate magical keyword in the name of which so much of contemporary life has been organized and upon which so many hopes for the future have been placed.

Apple is notoriously secretive about what happens inside the company, about what its cadres actually do, about protecting its trade secrets. Even Apple employees are mostly kept in the dark about what is happening in other parts of the company. Like other powerful institutions that skillfully conceal their work – the Vatican and the US Supreme Court come to mind – this opacity fuels rather feverish desires for revelation, which, if skillfully done, can further strengthen Apple's magic. Apple answers these desires not by revealing so much about the

[26]There are striking parallels between Taussig's account of magic and Banet-Weiser's (2012, 211-22) notion of "ambivalence" in contemporary brand cultures: in both, doubt is not counter but integral to efficacious magic/branding.

[27] To my knowledge, the most insightful analysis of the performativity of these events is Cornfeld (2017).

techniques by which it commercializes technoscience and accumulates capital – techniques that are not so innovative in the histories of capitalism – but, rather, by revealing new evidence that those concealed techniques do in fact entail incredible, even magical, powers. And, following Taussig, each new round of skilled revelation of skilled concealment provokes further ambivalences, further desires for greater revelation, and, hence, ever more elaborate attempts by Apple to shore up the strength of its magic.

All this skilled revelation of skilled concealment is on display at Apple Park itself. Apple Park is a site of production that has been designed to be publicly displayed as a site of production, a site of production with transparent glass walls and a visitor center with a rooftop observation deck, a site of production that puts on view the excesses of the company's inconceivable wealth (each of the thousand chairs in the Steve Jobs Theater cost $14,000, numerous journalists reported), its purported engineering prowess (doors weighing four hundred forty thousand pounds), and its fabled design magnificence (even the pizza boxes!). To those who may doubt whether Apple still possesses incomprehensible powers for conjuring wealth, or to those who question whether the company deserves its astounding riches and influence, Apple Park answers affirmatively but silently. And, by weaponizing the tendency of people to make indexical inferences, the campus reveals next to nothing about the actual techniques through which the company accumulates capital and exercises power: about the hazardous conditions or grueling labor of those working in the mines, factories, and warehouses that bring gadgets to our hands; about the ecological damages caused at and by these other sites of production; about the greenhouse gasses emitted during the mining, manufacture, transport, and use of Apple products; about the dumps of electronic waste, much of it toxic to humans and other species, where outmoded devices eventually accumulate; about the state-sponsored research that developed the technologies Apple has commercialized; about the taxes Apple skillfully avoids and the public infrastructures and institutions upon which the company and its workers depend in order to sustain themselves and their kin.[28] Instead, the sought-after revelations always lie around another corner, as peeks through the canopy, as an unapproachable power on the other side of an uncrossable savanna.

Epilogue

What can be approached is the Apple Park visitor center, a gleaming glass-walled building across the street from Apple's clandestine campus (fig. 10). It is here that regular people can directly participate in the mythos of Apple Park's splendor. The visitor center is, in substance, an

[28] On Apple's exploitation of labor and the environment see Chan, Selden, and Ngai (2020) and Maxwell and Miller (2020). On Apple's profiteering on public investments, see Mazzucato (2015, 93-120). In recent years, Apple has engaged in a publicity blitz to highlight the steps the company is taking to minimize its environmental impacts, which are laudable when compared to competitors in the consumer electronics sector. While the company has made advances, many of its commitments remain aspirational and, in the eyes of some, unattainable, especially since the company seems tethered to business model that depends on the rapid obsolescence of its products, as evinced by the company's ongoing efforts to prevent third-party repair of Apple devices and other practices that would prolong the life of Apple gadgets. For a review, see Jackson and Kang (2014) and Maddie Stone, "Apple's New iPhone Is Far From Green," *Debugger*, October 22, 2020, debugger.medium.com/apples-new-iphone-is-far-from-green-1803f4f9a58a.

Apple Store appended with a café, an augmented reality model of the campus across the street, and a rooftop deck from which portions of the ring building can be perceived through a verdant veil. It is here that Apple offers lay people the opportunity to not only touch but also purchase a small piece of what the enigmatic superpower across the street claims to have brought forth. It is here that you can, at one moment, hold these fetishes in your hands and, in the next, climb to the roof and snap a selfie with what Apple wants you to infer as their place of genesis in the background (fig. 11). "Designed by Apple in California," is etched into the back of these gadgets, referencing the unseen occult technicians across the way. "Assembled in China," they also read, obliquely referencing a portion of the many other unseen people who labored to make the gadget, but these ones vacated by Apple of all but the most mechanical of agencies.

At the visitor center there is no evidence of the ruinations to which Apple's production processes have contributed. Even evidence of more geographically proximate degradation has been skillfully concealed.[29] On the visitor center's observation deck, protruding vestibules bracket perception beyond the northern and southern edges, and a frosted glass wall that is translucent but not transparent runs along the entire eastern perimeter. All of this compels visitors to look westward toward the corporate Arcadia across the street while simultaneously concealing the parking lots, rows of pedestrian (yet multimillion dollar) tract homes, banal office buildings, and patchwork of strip malls that envelop Apple Park for miles in all directions.

If we are living in the ruins of neoliberalism, as Wendy Brown (2019) suggests, then they are ruins perforated with ever more extravagant enclaves of conspicuously "green" tectonics. These enclaves not only concentrate wealth and influence in a few private hands, they also often perform a magic of deliverance, a magic, as we have seen, that depends for its effects on ever more skilled revelation of skilled concealment. In Silicon Valley, one consequence of this inflationary dynamic is the further evacuation of practical and collective means with which to efficaciously negotiate life's most pressing concerns, including concerns about the future of the planet itself. It is from this void that Apple's magic emerges, and it is to this lacuna that the company's technologies of enchantment are addressed. If Apple Park is a temple for the "innovation age," then it is a temple with a gift shop where you can buy a limited-edition onesie for a baby who will inherit a decimated world. The onesie reads "A is for apple," but the word "apple" has been replaced with an illustration of a partially eaten piece of fruit, also known as Apple Inc.'s brand.

[29] On the digital technology industry's contributions to the ruination of the San Francisco Bay Area, see Walker (2018).

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