

# Midterm Document - Theory

## Introduction

In a period of existential thinking (dread) during the Digital Craft Minor 22/23 I stepped into the world of science fiction and discovered Solarpunk: A utopian, sustainable future; an alternative reality; an opposition to the dystopian Cyberpunk science-factual world we currently live in. My own design practices went on becoming a product of said corporate-centred treadmill, exchanging money for my soul (or 3D-animated shoe advertisements).

My encounter to the wor(l)d (of) *Permacomputing* came at the right time when Aymeric Mansoux gave us an introduction in a guest lecture. It was eye-opening when he changed the slide to a sloppy handwritten text on a purple background saying 'mesmerizing aesthetics'. Right after came a talk on the power of imagery, exemplified by a picture of Google's *Deepdream*, and how the aesthetics of AI imagery has taken the world's attention in a glimpse. Fascinating for me was his alternative teaching-method: Instead of trying to make aware of new tools for the artist's palette, he instead made aware the idea of problematization. Uncovering the problems arising of blindly following maximalist aesthetics, like the environmental damage that is happening and hidden behind a wall of virtualism<sup>1</sup>.

This trap of mesmerizing aesthetics was happening to me in my photorealistic CG creations: I became entranced of the techno-aesthetic pleasures I created — from a visual sense and in the process of making (sense).

From my first experiments with *downgraded* low-poly graphics came the following first version of a research question:

**How can you define an eco-conscious techno-aesthetics in computer graphics based on Permacomputing design principles?**

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<sup>1</sup> Heikkilä., Ville-Matias. "Digital Esthetics, Environmental Change and the Subcultures of Computer Art." Viznut.Fi, 6 June 2021, viznut.fi/texts-en/digital\_esthetics.html.

## Reflection

In a near vengeful tone Mansoux et al. strip apart the term of maximalist techno-aesthetics<sup>2</sup> in their essay on *Permacomputing Aesthetics*<sup>3</sup>. They criticize the consumerist strategies enforced by Big Tech companies and the maximalist idea that growth is a form of progress.

Now comes the question of what exactly are *correct*, contemporary techno-aesthetics: “Unlike Simondon’s techno-aesthetics, which may eventually iteratively find a pleasing equilibrium between functional technique and aesthetics, permacomputing’s techno-aesthetics are much more perilous because a third component is forced in: an informed and contextualised intention to address the social, cultural, environmental and economic externalities of maximalist computer and network technologies.”

That means that today’s techno-aesthetics does not only entail how things are looking, but rather how we are looking at things. Jack Burnham already pointed out this paradigm shift in 1968 with his essay on ‘System Esthetics’: “We are now in transition from an object-oriented to a systems-oriented culture. Here change emanates, not from things, but from the way things are done.”<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, such a shift in perspective is hard to obtain if the contemporary socio-cultural state is based on such maximalist ignorance.

As Permacomputing is a practical critique on today’s ICT culture, how am I able to transform my discipline and establish techno-minimalist work that enters an ethico-political realm?

“So, what would it mean to address the urgency to the point of completely reconfiguring a practice? Is it dilettantism? Virtue signalling? Activism? Or just a symbolic gesture?”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Simondon, Gilbert. “ON TECHNO-AESTHETICS.” PARRHESIA, no. 14, 2012, pp. 1–8.  
[http://parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia14/parrhesia14\\_simondon.pdf](http://parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia14/parrhesia14_simondon.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Mansoux, Aymeric, et al. “Permacomputing aesthetics: Potential and limits of constraints in computational art, design and culture.” Ninth Computing within Limits 2023, June 2023,  
<https://doi.org/10.21428/bf6fb269.6690fc2e>.

<sup>4</sup> Burnham, Jack. “Systems Esthetics.” Artforum, Artforum, 26 Sept. 2023,  
[www.artforum.com/features/systems-esthetics-201372/](http://www.artforum.com/features/systems-esthetics-201372/).