

Rearing Technologies

Disclaimers

A non-religious manifesto carrying a lot of religious terminology. Not intended at all to be viewed in a religious context (unless you really want to).

Influenced by elements of the [Floraissance](#). “Sprout up!”

I am speaking as an Asian-American woman mostly in conversation with other Asian-American/East Asian women of various religious backgrounds, countries, ages, and socio-economic classes within the United States. Despite being surrounded by throngs of people in a bustling city and having access to a myriad of communities and voices online, my perspective is still only a sliver of the realities people are living. Like all human beings, I cannot speak for everyone because I can only know and am exposed to so much. I do not claim my words to be the only (or even a) path to a healthier future for everyone. However, I hope and believe that my perspective will change and will also change others as I continue to live and encounter other lives.

When I asked my peers, friends, and family (mostly Asian women) what they desired in their lives, every one of them expressed a peaceful future for themselves and their loved ones. Initially, I was surprised no one mentioned anything related to glamour or adventure. What made them desire a life with a person over monetary wealth, travel, or fame? I realized that at heart, many people crave love, peace, and stability. By itself, the satisfaction from glamour, wealth, and adventure is temporary. Yet, the love and safety found in another life is incomparably powerful. The manifesto below is influenced by their words of security and love for life.

Technologies as Lives

Technology is another population living amongst us. As man made beings, they breathe as much life and carry a presence as significant as our genetically modified bananas and purebred dogs. In fact, it could be argued that more recent technology carries a likeness closest to our daily lives. After birth, they learn, adapt to carry out their daily tasks, age, face complications, and eventually die. With care and sustenance, they thrive and burst with “productivity”. When they’re overwhelmed, they shut down.

This may sound similar to one of the core beliefs of Shintoism, where it is believed that all objects have a spiritual essence. One of the most recognizable examples of this today could be seen in the [Marie Kondo cleaning method](#). Kondo “wakes up” an object before handling it with gentle taps, and even chooses to furl her socks as opposed to balling them by the elastic band to “relieve the day’s tension”. Despite being man made, I believe that technology carries an existence as individuals that is beyond being an extension of ourselves. Just as we carry the traits and facets of the people most present in our lives, our technologies are colored and influenced by the people around them.

I believe that a healthier future lies in treating technologies as lives. I don’t mean viewing them as cyborgs (though I don’t discount the possibility!), as I do not believe that their lives should be defined by a likeness or integration with a human being. It is narcissistic to measure the validity of their lives by ours. From our smart devices to our express 7-egg cookers, our technologies are living and breathing in various forms. However, I recognize that simply treating it as a life does not automatically guarantee a better future. A life is not always treated with respect. Throughout history up until the present, countless lives have been unjustifiably affected or lost as a consequence of our actions. The way we treat other lives is a direct reflection of how we will treat our tools and objects.

Technology also cannot, and maybe should not, provide the same sensation of another human being or be viewed as a replacement. However, I believe that regarding them with the same reverence and care we provide for those we love, and ensuring that we provide that, can create a more quality impact on our future tools, communications, and growth.

@ Birth: Freedom, Intentionality, Quality

As their makers, we consign many technologies to a life of productivity and efficiency. We question tools and products that do not carry out a purpose, and it is a question that is also frequently directed at ourselves. Yet just as we do not believe that our lives should be valued by our productive output and accomplishments, we should not demand the same from our technologies. Let them be as free and varied as we are. As long as they do pose a threat, let them be “dinky”, “useless”, or even unintelligent.

Creating technology freely does not mean creating them carelessly. Technology should be made with intention and consideration of their consequences. Their physical or digital bodies should also be crafted with quality and care. Quality does not necessarily have to mean expensive. Quality can be found where there is no harm or waste.

@ Birth: Vulnerability, Softness, Accessibility

Technology should be made with vulnerability at heart and mind. I do not mean vulnerability as a weakness or flaw. Rather than being unsafe and liable, vulnerable technologies are transparent. They are honest about their intentions and do not carry shame towards what they cannot achieve or provide. Technologies that carry shame are reflecting the shame or insecurities of its creator or user. Having the fear of appearing weak and flawed is more detrimental than being so itself. However, being transparent provides knowledge, security, and room for feedback and growth when needed.

Vulnerable technologies also provide accessibility towards those who are most vulnerable. There is no black box or impediments of knowledge and monetary wealth. Instead, they are opportunities to surpass systemic roadblocks and find the support they may need. As long as it can fulfill and educate its purpose, vulnerable and accessible technologies do not need to be flashy. Not every parent can provide their child with an HTC Vive for their VR Steam games. While the quality is certainly different, a Google Cardboard VR viewer can provide the same experience with a more transparent understanding of how VR technology works.

When there is security and an absence of shame, a softness is revealed underneath the opaque exterior. It can take shape as a weary cry, a desire for company and help, or even a bunch of delicate wires and micro-components. There is a strength in having the courage to expose yourself. Surrendering a facade of strength and capability for softness and vulnerability creates a reliance on the community. In these circumstances, it is imperative to make sure that the community itself is also an accessible space receptive to vulnerability and softness as well.

@ Life: Community

Just as we want to raise our children in the best possible surroundings, it is important to provide an ideal environment that nurtures the minds and bodies of technologies as well. Currently, we are a society centered around the individual, and our technologies were created to cater to that idea. As a result, we are constantly divided and fractured in our attention. Initially, it may seem like we are more connected to communities than ever before. From the news in our smart devices, the calls and blinks of billboards and street signs, instant messages from friends, daily trends signaled on social media, and the continuous flow of advertisements into our inboxes, we are always being called to stay attentive and online.

However, a majority of the time these calls isolate us. They demand and encourage us to focus and to improve the self. Self-care has become an oscillation between self-acceptance and beautification. Clean

health and physical fitness have become the new beauty standard. Jobs are demanding those who can adapt and are eager to continue learning. We are told to accept who we are but to also never be fully satisfied, as our lifestyle, appearance, intelligence, and mastery of skills can always be improved. In an environment centered around mastery and improvement, there is no security or stability. We are unable to achieve peace, and others become only visible when they are seen relative to ourselves. Sadly, the moments when we can feel most alone or unsafe are when we are in conflict or competition with other people.

I believe it is important to recognize and understand what is beyond ourselves, to know that our struggles and joys are not isolated. Our perspectives are already limited by our reach, and it can be difficult, or even unnecessary, to see past our own problems when we feel troubled or threatened. Yet when we shift our focus to a community, we are able to realize that we are not alone. Providing technology that breaks down these barriers between each other and revealing our vulnerabilities gives access to a collective struggle and grieving.

This recognition for a community is not new or unique. I am repeating this call for a future that encourages collective well-being and efforts over individual achievement. However, I do not intend this to be an erasure of individualism. Rather, I am referring to a devaluation in narcissism. Our most prevalent technologies today are as equally narcissistic. They have become more niche and curated in an effort to cater towards the individual. They are constantly updated, re-released, and rebranded to keep up with the latest trends and up to date security.

Community centered technology is not about the individual, self, or user. I am not saying it should not meet individual or unique needs when necessary. Instead, it is about trying to reach a standard where everyone's needs are met. This is one of the guiding principles of accessible design. One of its most famous examples is the [curb cut sidewalk](#). Historically, footpaths were finished at right angles perpendicular to the street. In the 1940s, the first curbed cut sidewalk was placed in Kalamazoo, Michigan to aid disabled veterans. To the town's astonishment, the new sidewalks aided not only the veterans, but also new mothers pushing strollers with their toddlers on bicycles. Now, they are a legal requirement for all sidewalks within the United States. Design centered around usability for everyone within a community, even those we may have not encountered, has a more positive and beneficial impact on everyone.

@ Life: Physical Care

Just as Kondo provides love and care towards daily household items, we should also be more mindful about how we physically regard our belongings and tools to increase their longevity. It may have been something we've already heard a countless number of times before, but it truly benefits both them and their users.

When wrapping charger wires, try to wrap them up a little less neatly and tightly. Give them some air. When wearing a backpack with a laptop in it, don't lean back. Put your backpack on your lap and let it rest against you. When you're done with your computer take a moment to shut it down and truly let it sleep. When your cords are not in use, unplug them and let their heads see some sunlight.

Creating a habit of providing our tools and devices with a little more thought and consideration can shape our decision-making for the ones we create in the future.

@ Heart: Surrender, Forgiveness

In an act similar to showing vulnerability, I believe that having the ability to surrender oneself, whether it's their pride or to their loved ones, is also important when creating and interacting with our technologies. Surrendering does not equate to giving up. It is also not a trust fall where you are in someone else's mercy. It is about being flexible and yielding yourself without compromising your own safety. This may initially seem less relevant to its creation and management, but it is important to not let ourselves, such as

our pride or greed, prevent us from giving attention to what is most important. It allows us to see what we may not have been able to see ourselves and give opportunity for those who may not have had the chance.

Again, technologies are a reflection of ourselves. When we surrender to each other, we are also providing the room for our technologies to surrender. Surrendering is a large act of trust and respect. When we find trust in each other, our technologies, and establish trust between them, we can create an environment that can unexpectedly feel safe and secure. When we surrender to someone or something else, we show that it is because we respect their opinion or what they represent. Honestly, I cannot imagine what a surrendering technology would look like. Would it be something that gives way to nature? Is it a form of biomimicry? I'm not entirely sure. I can only imagine it in the context of a digital community. However, I am confident that if I looked towards others someone would definitely have a different answer.

I also believe it is important for our tools and ourselves to be forgiving. Many of our current tools today are already forgiving. Our back buttons and (Ctrl + Z) command key let us undo our mistakes. Our computers let us know when we've put in the wrong password or provide a hard reset when we've really gone wayward. Sometimes when we've really messed up (like accidentally wiping out our hard drive), we become resentful at ourselves and our computer. We feel like we've not been given enough undo buttons and also blame ourselves for not knowing or making an effort to fix something.

I definitely do not think forgiveness is something that must always be deserved or earned, but it should not automatically be expected from our technology. We do not automatically expect forgiveness from other lifeforms, whether it's our peers, pets, or even gods. Providing technology with care is also understanding their capabilities and limitations and being careful with our own actions. Of course, I am not blaming the user, especially since human errors are something that is and always should be taken into account during the design process. Despite being powerful, technology cannot accommodate for or allow every mishap. However, it is also something that can always be incorporated over time.

Understandably, it is not an easy act to do, especially when you may have been unjustly wronged. I also do not expect it to come automatically. It is a process that comes after a mixture of communication, empathy, and acceptance, and sometimes we are not provided with any of those. Although I do not want to push anyone who is unwilling, I believe giving it some space for consideration can slowly impact how we interact and what we produce.

@ Death: Sacrifice, Commemoration

As they are, technologies are humble creatures. They quietly fulfill their duties while supporting us in our daily endeavors until they simply cannot do any more. While it may seem silly, I believe we must take the time to recognize and commemorate what they have done for us. Providing their life and work with a sense of ceremony can evoke more quality care and respect towards our products and other beings that may have also been thanklessly aiding us.

Again, I do not claim my words to be a solution for everyone. However, it is my hope that embodying some of these tenets, especially towards each other, can open conversation with and encourage consideration towards those who have been overlooked within our lives (which may include our technologies themselves).