

# Technoromanticism as an Aesthetic Regime: The Simulation of Withdrawal and Ego-Oriented Ontology

*This article proposes the concept of technoromanticism to describe a contemporary aesthetic regime defined by the convergence of: (1) a formal grammar of scenic emptiness, polished surfaces, and metallic and dark chromatic palettes; (2) its necessary structural compatibility with the platform-image and the sequential circulation of the feed; and (3) an ontological function in which opacity and distance operate as consumable qualities. Against the thesis of the “return of the object,” the article argues that, under conditions of interface and visibility economy, this regime tends to produce a simulation of withdrawal: the excess of the object is translated into experiential depth without effective ontological friction. To name the resulting regime, the concept of Ego-Oriented Ontology (EOO) is introduced, understood not as a form of moral psychologism, but as an epistemological and infrastructural effect in which objects appear as interfaces of self-inscription, intensifying the self rather than interrupting it. From this perspective, the article identifies a reintroduction of Romanticism as an epistemology of subjective intensification through alterity, and defines technoromanticism as its contemporary technical formalization. It further advances the hypothesis of an emerging political-affective turn—expressed through the “silver mirror” and the “world too clean” as forms of elitist suppression of the fissure. Finally, the article proposes an operative, critical, and productive exit from technoromanticism, articulated through temporal and technical criteria such as duration, friction, non-identical repetition, and cosmotechnics.*

**Keywords:** *Aesthetic theory, Contemporary art, Technoromanticism, Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), Interface / platform aesthetics, Cosmotechnics*

## Introduction

In recent decades, a significant strand of contemporary philosophy—and aesthetic theory in particular—has reactivated the question of the object and of materiality against paradigms centered on representation, the sign, and the symbolic construction of experience. This turn has coincided with a parallel shift in art: its primary task is no longer to intervene at the discursive level, but to materially reconfigure the conditions of appearance, access, and inhabitation of the sensible. In this context, so-called speculative realism and, in a particularly influential way, Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) have insisted on a decisive thesis: no object is exhausted by its relations, manifestations, or uses; every object preserves an irreducible dimension that does not amount to an epistemological deficit on the human side, but rather to a general ontological condition of the relation between entities.

It is precisely in the wake of this reorientation that an aesthetic regime consolidates which appears—at first glance alone—to be compatible with that rehabilitation of the object: empty or nearly empty scenes, polished surfaces,

1 dark chromatic palettes, precise lighting control, and an atmosphere often  
 2 perceived as post-human or dystopian in an elegant register. This regime  
 3 circulates intensely on image platforms and in exhibition devices where space is  
 4 presented as a purified, legible, and self-sufficient stage. The interpretive  
 5 temptation is immediate: if these aesthetics emphasize opacity, distance, and  
 6 autonomy, are we not witnessing a return of the object, or even an aesthetics  
 7 naturally aligned with ontological realism?

8 This article argues, however, that such an alignment is misleading. The  
 9 decisive question is not whether the object “returns,” but what ontological status  
 10 it acquires within this regime of appearance: whether it operates as an excess  
 11 that resists experience, or whether, instead, its apparent opacity is integrated as  
 12 a consumable and circutable quality within a regime of visibility. The central  
 13 hypothesis is that an important part of this contemporary sensibility does not  
 14 produce an ontological return of the object in the sense intended by speculative  
 15 realism, but rather a simulation of withdrawal: an aestheticization of excess as  
 16 available experience. This simulation prepares what I will call *Ego-Oriented*  
 17 *Ontology* (EOO), understood not as a form of moral psychologism, but as a  
 18 practical ontological regime in which objects appear primarily as interfaces of  
 19 subjective self-inscription, intensifying the self rather than interrupting it.

20 To name this phenomenon, I propose the term technoromanticism. The term  
 21 is used here in a strictly conceptual sense: it designates the convergence of a  
 22 recognizable formal grammar, its structural compatibility with the platform-  
 23 image, and an implicit ontological function in which opacity, distance, and depth  
 24 operate as available aesthetic qualities. The *techno-* does not merely indicate a  
 25 modernization of Romanticism, but its infrastructural formalization; Romanticism,  
 26 for its part, names an epistemological structure of subjective intensification  
 27 through alterity. From this perspective, the article pursues three aims: to define  
 28 technoromanticism as a contemporary aesthetic regime, to show why its promise  
 29 of depth constitutes a simulation of withdrawal, and to propose a non-moralizing  
 30 way out through the notion of operative withdrawal, articulated by means of  
 31 relational, temporal, and technical criteria. The following section describes  
 32 technoromanticism as an aesthetic regime; it then analyzes its ontological  
 33 dimension and, finally, sketches the conditions of an operative withdrawal.

### 36 **Technoromanticism: Definition and Phenomenology of an Aesthetic Regime**

38 The term technoromanticism is used here not as a broad stylistic label nor  
 39 as the name of an identifiable artistic school, but as the designation of a  
 40 distributed aesthetic regime, recognizable through the convergence of a series of  
 41 formal traits, conditions of circulation, and effects of meaning that recur with  
 42 notable stability in contemporary exhibition contexts and, with particular  
 43 intensity, in their translation into the platform-image. The aim of this section is  
 44 to establish an operative definition of the concept and to describe its  
 45 phenomenological functioning without yet advancing a conclusive ontological  
 46 judgment.

1 In this article, I define technoromanticism as the convergence of three layers  
2 operating simultaneously:

- 3
- 4 • a formal layer, composed of a recognizable visual grammar;
- 5 • a circulatory layer, linked to the platform-image and to the logic of the
- 6 *feed*;
- 7 • and a layer of implicit ontological function, in which opacity and depth
- 8 appear as available and consumable aesthetic qualities, rather than as
- 9 effective excess.

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11 From a formal point of view, technoromanticism is identified by a series of  
12 recurrent traits: polished surfaces—metal, glass, lacquered finishes—scenic  
13 emptiness, dark chromatic palettes (black, silver, graphite, muted browns),  
14 symmetry or pseudo-symmetry, precise lighting control, and an atmosphere  
15 frequently described as post-human. In some of its modulations, this grammar is  
16 softened through cool cream tones, muted beiges, or pastel details that introduce  
17 an attenuated delicacy, an artificial calm that at moments borders on the “post-  
18 apocalyptic cute.”

19 These elements do not appear as singular gestures, but rather form a  
20 coherent visual grammar capable of producing immediate recognition. The  
21 technoromantic scene presents itself as clean, closed, and self-sufficient: despite  
22 the force and laboriousness of its artifices, it does not refer to an environment  
23 traversed by use, friction, or practice, but to a stage arranged for the gaze and  
24 one that seems to push to the limit the sensation of wanting to belong. This  
25 grammar is usually accompanied by an ambiguous temporality: the scene  
26 appears to inscribe itself in a futuristic trajectory while simultaneously referring  
27 to a past that never existed as such. What emerges is a kind of nostalgia without  
28 object, an affective anachrony that situates these compositions somewhere  
29 between the clinical and the ominous, between extreme cleanliness and a liminal  
30 unease. Yet this atmosphere does not decenter the subject or open up a  
31 conflictual relation with alterity; rather, it functions as a sensible refinement of  
32 an experience oriented toward its own intensification.

33 Phenomenologically, this formal grammar produces a decisive  
34 displacement: experience is no longer organized around the lived world, but  
35 around the display. Space ceases to appear as a medium of action or transit and  
36 becomes a legible surface, prepared to be seen, framed, and captured. Emptiness  
37 does not function here as openness or indeterminacy directed toward experience;  
38 it functions as a reduction of contingency. By eliminating bodies, secondary  
39 objects, and signs of use, space stabilizes itself as scene, optimizing perceptual  
40 clarity and concentration of attention.

41 This substitution of world by stage does not imply, however, the  
42 disappearance of the subject. Quite the contrary: technoromanticism intensifies  
43 the centrality of the observer precisely through that apparent absence. The  
44 human figure rarely appears represented, yet the scene presupposes at every  
45 moment an ideal perceptual position: frontal, silent, contemplative, compatible  
46 with the photographic gaze—almost an implicit version of a transcendental

1 subject. The world appears “with no one there,” but always for someone. One  
 2 does not participate through action or conflict, but through the perceptual  
 3 recognition of an appropriate scene.

4 Materiality plays a central role in this regime. Technoromanticism  
 5 privileges materials culturally associated with technics and with a strong  
 6 objecthood—metal, glass, industrial structures, modular components—which  
 7 suggests, at first glance, an affirmation of the presence of the object over against  
 8 the image. At the same time, this preference for metal, glass, and technical  
 9 components orients the scene toward a horizon of inorganic exteriority: a  
 10 futurized, de-biologized world in which matter seems to promise a reality  
 11 beyond metabolism, everyday use, or organic “imperfection.” Yet the concrete  
 12 manner in which these materials are presented is decisive. Surfaces almost  
 13 always appear entirely finished: smooth, polished, impeccable. They do not  
 14 display traces of process, wear, or prolonged labor.

15 In this sense, technoromantic materiality operates less as experience than as  
 16 sign. Metal is valued not for its effective temperature or opacity, but for its  
 17 capacity to signify coldness, seriousness, or futurity; glass introduces neither risk  
 18 nor fragility, but separation and control. Matter does not address the body of the  
 19 spectator in its power or incapacity; it offers itself to view as the bearer of a  
 20 culturally stabilized meaning. This transformation of materiality into code makes  
 21 it possible to produce a sensation of depth without activating a conflictual  
 22 relation with the real.

23 This coded materiality unfolds spatially in atmospheres of emptiness:  
 24 worldless scenes, uninhabited spaces—smooth interiors, corridors, rooms  
 25 without bodies—with lighting designed to eliminate contingency, where  
 26 emptiness does not function as neutrality but as prepared scenography. The  
 27 absence of human figures does not eliminate the subject; on the contrary, it  
 28 intensifies an implicit presence, because the scene is arranged for a gaze that  
 29 captures or consumes, consistent with a platform logic in which the image is  
 30 inseparable from its circulation and social legibility. In this sense, the operation  
 31 may be formulated, with Rancière, as a redistribution of the sensible: a regime  
 32 of visibility that delimits what counts as presence and what—and who—counts  
 33 as noise, who may appear and in what form.

34 Although technoromanticism is described here primarily through its  
 35 presence in artistic and exhibition contexts, much of its grammar seems to have  
 36 sedimented earlier—or at least in parallel—in fields such as architecture, design,  
 37 and the visual presentation of fashion. These are domains in which spatial  
 38 cleanliness, polished materiality, atmospheric control, and highly legible  
 39 objecthood became early vectors of prestige and desire. Technoromanticism  
 40 inherits, to a large extent, this economy of the *display*. In this sense,  
 41 contemporary art is not so much the exclusive origin of this sensibility as one of  
 42 the spaces in which that grammar finds a particularly visible and reflexive  
 43 formalization. For that reason, technoromanticism should be understood as a  
 44 distributed regime of presentation. The same sensibility migrates toward  
 45 exhibition space, the photography of objects and environments, and, most  
 46 evidently, toward fashion—not only as clothing, but as a visual regime:

lookbooks, campaigns, minimal-dystopian scenographies, and bodies treated as surfaces of inscription. What circulates among these fields is a veritable cultural infrastructure of appearance.

If the first of these layers allows us to recognize the formal consistency of this aesthetic regime and its transversal expansion, the second concerns its conditions of circulation, which do not designate an external or subsequent phase of diffusion, but a condition that already intervenes in the way the object is disposed to be seen, captured, and recognized. The formal features of technoromanticism display a marked compatibility with contemporary regimes of visibility: chromatic economy, immediate legibility, stylistic recognizability, and repetition of motifs. In the context of platforms such as Instagram, aesthetics no longer operates merely as individual expression but as a shared social language, capable of organizing belonging, narrative continuity of the self, and communal recognition.<sup>1</sup> This aesthetics thus functions as a socially available grammar of “appearing profound.”

In Baudrillardian terms, this signifies more than a simple adaptation to new supports: the scene ceases to refer to an outside or an absent depth and tends instead to function as an operational surface. What is decisive is no longer emptiness as theme, but the mutation from a space of scene and mirror to a space of screen and network, in which even distance appears already integrated into the logic of availability. This compatibility explains why its scenes are so easily translated—or seek to be translated—into circulating images. Empty space, polished matter, and dark atmosphere do not obstruct visibility; they optimize it. The scene appears already conceived—or at least perfectly translatable—as an isolable image, integrable into broader visual sequences and recognizable without context. The object does not require duration or progressive learning; it is exhausted in the act of appearing.

It is in the articulation between these two layers—formal and circulatory—that a third, more problematic dimension emerges, one that concerns its implicit ontological function. Technoromanticism does not merely organize the visible; it proposes a certain relation to the idea of depth. Opacity appears as a consumable aesthetic quality; distance as atmosphere; the autonomy of the object as a visual effect. Depth does not hide or resist; it presents itself. Frequently, moreover, it does so under the form of plenitude of finish joined to a certain functional indeterminacy. Objects appear completely resolved at the level of their surface—polished, closed, impeccable—yet as if something were missing in them, not in the order of form but in that of purpose or use. Yet that incompleteness does not open an effective alterity of the object; rather, it turns the object into a support of projection for a subject who recognizes himself as sensitive observer, connoisseur, or appreciator. The world thus offers itself as a beautiful, melancholy, and seamless scene, less to be inhabited conflictually than to be confirmed in the gaze that contemplates it.

This logic generates a fundamental tension. On the one hand, technoromanticism seems to restore prominence to the object, to matter, and to the scene; on the other, it does so under conditions that keep that presence fully

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<sup>1</sup>Lev Manovich, *Instagram and Contemporary Image* (2017).

legible, available, and exhaustible in its appearing. Withdrawal—in the philosophical sense to be developed later—does not disappear entirely, but is suggested as an aesthetic quality rather than as effective excess. In regimes of accelerated circulation even opacity can become an accessible value and an accelerator of visibility<sup>2</sup>: darkness does not block access, it attracts; distance does not interrupt, it optimizes the gesture of capture.

More concretely, within this same grammar one can recognize several recurrent modulations: at times it adopts a “curatorial-select” inflection, in which minimalism and impeccable finish function as signs of distinction; at others, an “attenuated sublime,” based on cold monumentality and threat without risk; a “melancholic-nocturnal” tonality, in which darkness operates as an intimate, easily circulable mood; and a “techno-gnostic” modulation, in which technical materiality seems to promise access to a hidden or superior order. These modulations do not constitute exclusive categories nor do they exhaust the phenomenon; they can nonetheless help to show how one and the same aesthetic grammar may vary symbolically and affectively without abandoning its structural compatibility with visibility, circulation, and recognition.

Taken together, what this section establishes is a firm point:

technoromanticism constitutes a coherent aesthetic regime that restores centrality to matter and to the object, but does so under conditions that neutralize friction, duration, and effective alterity. The question that remains open—and that will be addressed in the sections that follow—is not whether the object is present, but what kind of presence is produced when depth is already offered as image and opacity becomes style.

### **Withdrawal, Simulation, and Ego-Oriented Ontology**

The central image of technoromanticism may be formulated as follows: to restore ontological density to the world where contemporary culture seems to have reduced it to flow. In a context of accelerated visibility and an experience increasingly mediated by interfaces, this aesthetics insists on materiality, distance, silence, and opacity as signs of a possible restitution of the object. Yet that promise cannot be assessed in purely formal or stylistic terms. The decisive question is not whether the object appears—or whether it appears with aura—but how it appears and what kind of excess it preserves. At this point, ontology—and not taste—becomes indispensable, because what is at stake is not a repertoire of visual resources, but a regime of access: a stable way of making something count as real, profound, or significant.

This shift becomes clearer when viewed in relation to the contemporary materialist turn, often invoked as the tacit background of technoromantic sensibility. Part of the interest of that turn lay in abandoning the modern image of matter as passive and inert, insisting instead on the vitality of the material and

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<sup>2</sup>Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” *e-flux Journal* 10 (2009).

on forms of agency not reducible to the subject.<sup>3</sup> But precisely for that reason, it becomes necessary to ask whether technoromanticism extends that decentering or, on the contrary, reabsorbs its signs into an aesthetic regime with no effective ontological relevance. In other words: technoromanticism may adopt the signs of “material density” and “object autonomy” and yet operate as a technology of experience that neutralizes precisely what the materialist turn seeks to safeguard: the capacity of the nonhuman to exceed the conditions of the subject’s legibility and availability. This mechanism will first be specified as a simulation of withdrawal and then as an ego-oriented ontology.

### *Ontological Withdrawal, Aesthetic Opacity, and the Simulation of Withdrawal*

Within OOO, the notion of withdrawal occupies a structural place. As Harman formulates it, withdrawal does not refer to a human limitation of knowledge or to a subjective experience of mystery, but to a general ontological condition: no object is exhausted by any of its relations. Every object exceeds its manifestation, its use, and its appearing.<sup>4</sup> In *The Quadruple Object*, this thesis is further articulated as a critique of two symmetrical reductionisms: reducing the object “downward” to the sum of its components (undermining), or “upward” to the totality of its relations and effects (overmining). In both cases, the object is ontologically exhausted by an explanatory destiny; withdrawal names precisely its non-coincidence with any of those destinies. In this sense, one may speak—following the image of the “third table” useful in Harman—of a kind of object irreducible both to the table of physics and to the table of manifest use.

From this follows a decisive theoretical demand: to distinguish rigorously between ontological withdrawal and aesthetic opacity. Opacity belongs to the order of the sensible, the formal, and the experiential; it can be intensified, modulated, stylized, and turned into a mark. Withdrawal, by contrast, admits neither gradation nor aesthetic production: it is not a hidden content revealed through a privileged form, but the very structure that prevents the object from being reduced to phenomenon, function, or sign. To confuse the two is to commit a category mistake: to mistake for a perceptual effect what in fact constitutes a real limit to every relation. In this sense, disjunction does not name a “stylistic darkness,” but a form of resistance: the object or material assemblage does not fully fit within the framework of comprehension without thereby becoming pure mystery. Such resistance is not produced by adding opacity, but by sustaining a real friction between materiality and legibility.

This distinction allows us to locate the technoromantic mechanism with precision. Technoromanticism is situated exactly in the confusion between withdrawal and opacity: its aesthetics of distance—hard materials, empty scenes,

<sup>3</sup>Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). Diana Coole, “Rethinking Agency: A Phenomenological Approach to Embodiment and Agentic Capacities,” *Political Studies* 53, no. 1 (2005). Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup>Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011).

1 silent atmospheres—seems aligned with an ontology of the autonomous object,  
 2 but that autonomy does not translate into ontological resistance; it translates into  
 3 managed opacity. Withdrawal ceases to operate as a limit that interrupts or  
 4 destabilizes experience and becomes instead a quality that intensifies experience  
 5 without putting it into crisis. In terms of a regime of access, the scene is not  
 6 designed to sustain the object’s excess but to calibrate an experience of “depth”  
 7 compatible with recognition, circulation, and control.

8 This point also explains the conceptual pertinence of the term  
 9 technoromanticism. It is not a metaphorical label combining the “romantic” and  
 10 the “technological,” but rather the reactivation—and even infrastructural  
 11 formalization—of a Romantic structure: exteriority as a scene of subjective  
 12 intensification. In historical Romanticism, nature does not so much appear as an  
 13 indifferent alterity resisting the subject as a privileged scenario of interiorization;  
 14 the infinite, the night, or the ruin often function not as limits that break the self,  
 15 but as reflective surfaces that deepen it. Under contemporary technical  
 16 conditions, technoromanticism substitutes interface for nature: metal, blackness,  
 17 emptiness, polish, design. In both cases, exteriority functions less as ontological  
 18 excess than as a scene of intensified self-experience. The techno- prefix therefore  
 19 does not indicate a break with the Romantic logic, but rather its operative  
 20 stabilization: subjective intensification ceases to be episodic and becomes  
 21 reproducible and circutable in platform environments.

22 From here, the concept of simulation of withdrawal can be defined more  
 23 precisely. Simulation of withdrawal is not understood in moral or psychological  
 24 terms, but as a structural operation: that which, at the ontological level, functions  
 25 as the impossibility of exhausting the object in its manifestation or relations  
 26 appears, at the aesthetic level, as distance, silence, and opacity fully compatible  
 27 with immediate experience, cultural circulation, and the economy of visibility.  
 28 Rather than operating as a real limit to relation, simulated withdrawal operates  
 29 as a quality that intensifies relation without interrupting it.

30 The phenomenology of this simulation is specific. The object appears  
 31 distant, serious, autonomous, yet not unsettling. It may suggest an unknown or  
 32 suspended function, but that suspension generates no resistance. In a certain  
 33 sense, the object is unfinished at the level of use, but completely finished at the  
 34 formal level: clean, polished, impeccable. The scene presents itself as  
 35 uninhabited, post-human, or dystopian, but rarely as disorienting; rather, as a  
 36 desirable form of world. The result is an experience of intensity without friction:  
 37 everything seems deep, but nothing weighs; everything seems excessive, but  
 38 nothing overflows; there is no loss of frame, only inhabitable solemnity. Excess  
 39 is not experienced as interruption, but as a background that enhances the subject.  
 40 In other words, depth appears not as the impossibility of access, but as a refined  
 41 mode of access.

42 This structure may be described as an attenuated sublime. In the classical  
 43 architecture of the sublime, displeasure is not an accident but a condition:  
 44 imagination fails before magnitude or power, and that failure opens a reference

1 to the supersensible.<sup>5</sup> In technoromanticism, by contrast, the promise of grandeur  
 2 or threat is administered as mood: displeasure is neutralized through formal  
 3 control and the curation of surface—emptiness, polish, lighting, reduction of  
 4 contingency—so that distance intensifies the subject without demanding  
 5 transformation. The difference is not one of aesthetic degree, but of function: the  
 6 Kantian sublime entails an internal rupture of the faculties; the technoromantic  
 7 sublime turns rupture into pose.

8 Along the same lines, Han offers an especially precise diagnosis when  
 9 describing the contemporary aesthetics of the smooth and the polished, in which  
 10 beauty loses effective negativity and becomes available, pleasant, and  
 11 consumable surface. The smooth does not wound, does not cut, does not resist;  
 12 it “adapts itself to the observer and elicits a ‘like’”<sup>6</sup>, inviting contact without  
 13 risk. Applied to technoromanticism, this framework helps explain why the gleam  
 14 of materials, the asepsis of spaces, and the visual softness of the environment do  
 15 not produce effective alterity, but rather a stylized form of intensification. Depth  
 16 ceases to be that which exceeds experience and becomes instead a pleasant  
 17 experience of density. Opacity becomes seductive. No surface confronts the  
 18 observer epistemologically; threat is polished away and distance offers a  
 19 habitable place. In this sense, technoromantic logic radicalizes what Han also  
 20 detects in his reading of the sublime: “the sublime is not a feeling of the object,  
 21 but of the subject: an autoerotic feeling of the self”<sup>7</sup>.

22 This regime of administered depth is neither ethically nor politically  
 23 innocent. Smoothness, the absence of friction, material asepsis, and the  
 24 inhabitability of shadow project an imagined world in which conflict, visible  
 25 inequality, ugliness, and wear appear as impurities to be eliminated. The result  
 26 is a scene of purified, almost clinical futurity in which everything seems  
 27 reconciled upon an impeccable surface. In this sense, technoromanticism does  
 28 not merely aestheticize distance: it renders desirable a hygienized environment  
 29 whose logic of purification borders, at its limit, on a systematic exclusion of what  
 30 is inadequate, unpolished, or non-integrable. For this reason, its operation  
 31 approaches what Marcuse called affirmative culture: a form of sensible elevation  
 32 that does not transform real contradiction, but compensates for it and reconciles  
 33 it within the subject’s experience.

34 This imaginary may be ethically and politically dangerous, and even  
 35 epistemologically unreal. Yet its efficacy lies not so much in presenting itself as  
 36 an effectively habitable horizon as in functioning as an image of inscription: a  
 37 cool, stylized, mediatized surface for belonging, influence, and identification.  
 38 Even where it adopts a melancholic or “emo” tonality, that sadness appears  
 39 already purified, converted into affective code rather than real wound. One does  
 40 not desire to inhabit that world in its full materiality; one desires to appear within  
 41 it and to be recognized there.

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<sup>5</sup>Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard, 2nd ed., rev. (London: Macmillan, 1914) [Originally written in 1790].

<sup>6</sup>Byung-Chul Han, *La salvación de lo bello* (Barcelona: Herder, 2015), [18]

<sup>7</sup>Han, *La Salvación de lo Bello*.

Technoromanticism thus generates a paradoxical form of dark transparency: everything remains available, though under the appearance of distance and depth. Negativity ceases to operate as effective negativity; it loses its capacity to wound or question. Shadow ceases to interrupt and instead comes to sustain a desired, domesticated, easily inscribable affectivity. Withdrawal ceases to operate as a limit and becomes atmosphere. In sum, the simulation of withdrawal is not simply a matter of “seeming profound,” but a form of depth without ontological risk: the subject experiences itself in relation to something that appears to exceed it, but that excess is calibrated so as not to demand any reorganization of the framework of experience. This displacement prepares the emergence of a broader phenomenon: a correlationism that is no longer merely philosophical, but infrastructurally designed.

### *Structural Psychologism, Designed Correlationism, and the Emergence of EOO*

From the preceding phenomenology, one can specify what is here called structural psychologism. It should be stressed from the outset that this does not refer to an individual pathology or a moral reproach directed at the contemporary subject. Structural psychologism designates an epistemological effect of a regime of access: in the simulation of withdrawal, the real appears only insofar as it intensifies the experience of the subject. The object does not appear as that which disorganizes the perceptual frame, but as that which confirms the subject as bearer of depth, distance, or critique.

At this point, it becomes necessary to clarify more rigorously what is meant here by correlationism. In a sense close to that formulated by Meillassoux, correlationism names the thesis according to which we never access the object as such, but only the object insofar as it is given for an experience, a relation, or an instance of thought. Put differently: being appears only within the conditions under which it can appear for a subject or for a subject–world correlation.<sup>8</sup> Precisely against that closure, much of the initial impulse of speculative realism and Object-Oriented Ontology defined itself: the demand to admit that there is a dimension of reality not exhausted by the way it appears to us, together with the search for modes of approach to the real that exceed the modern epistemology centered on the subject.<sup>9</sup> At the aesthetic level, this closure may be thought as a form of theatricality: the work appears already configured for a subject, a situation of reception, and an instance of recognition.<sup>10</sup> Yet OOO immediately complicates this scene, since no privileged access or full transparency exists between subject and object. Even that relation may constitute, in Harmanian terms, an autonomous unit, a third object, abstracted from its immediate context and not fully reducible either to subject or to object in isolation; its internal relations therefore remain in part alien.

<sup>8</sup>Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>9</sup>Meillassoux, *After Finitude*; Graham Harman, *Art and Objects* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020).

<sup>10</sup>Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), [Originally written in 1967]; Harman, *Art and Objects*.

1       What is decisive here is that, in the technoromantic regime, the object's  
 2       irreducibility is no longer affirmed: it is administered and converted into an  
 3       infrastructure of appearance. Instead of encountering an object that exceeds our  
 4       conditions of access, we are offered an excess already translated into experience,  
 5       already configured for the subject. Hence the notion of designed correlationism:  
 6       a form of organization of appearance in which the object is preformatted so as  
 7       to be compatible with a subjectivity seeking intensification, recognition, and  
 8       continuity of the self. The real is not denied; it is coded in advance in a regime  
 9       of access that always returns it to the self.

10       At this point, I propose the concept of Ego-Oriented Ontology (EOO). EOO  
 11       is not a strong metaphysical ontology nor an idealist reduction of the real to the  
 12       subject. It is an analytical concept designating a practical ontological regime: the  
 13       stabilized form in which objects today appear as world. In EOO, objects function  
 14       primarily as interfaces of self-inscription: not as that which exceeds the subject  
 15       and demands reorganization, but as that by means of which the subject  
 16       recognizes itself as profound, distant, or critical. Alterity does not disappear, but  
 17       is reconfigured as a condition of subjective intensification.

18       EOO also has a concrete cultural phenomenology. It manifests itself in the  
 19       proliferation of scenes without residue, without wear, without the everyday, as  
 20       if social reality were an impurity to be removed. This "world too clean" functions  
 21       as an ontological filter: it selects not only what appears, but also under what  
 22       conditions something becomes desirable as world. Scenic emptiness ceases to be  
 23       a merely formal preference and becomes a politics of appearance. The result is  
 24       a reconciled surface where negativity does not disappear entirely, but is  
 25       integrated under a stylized, habitable, and socially recognizable form.

26       In this sense, EOO does not simply produce an aesthetics of the self, but a  
 27       fantasy of world suited to the self. Depth remains present, but no longer as wound  
 28       or as demand for transformation; rather, as a medium of refined self-affirmation.  
 29       Even where melancholy, shadow, or distance appear, they no longer operate as  
 30       effective negativity, but as components of a desired affectivity. This is where  
 31       technoromanticism reveals its most problematic ethical-political dimension: not  
 32       because it overtly proposes a closure of the world, but because it renders  
 33       desirable a depurated, hygienized, frictionless environment in which what is  
 34       inadequate, ugly, or non-integrable appears as residue to be excluded.

35       At this point it is worth recalling a decisive warning from speculative  
 36       realism: realism does not justify itself as consolation. Brassier explicitly rejects  
 37       the idea that philosophy should repair the narcissistic wound of the subject or  
 38       restore a reconciliation between humanity and world; on the contrary, it demands  
 39       that the indifference of the real be assumed without being translated into  
 40       experiential consolation.<sup>11</sup> This reminder matters here because  
 41       technoromanticism does exactly the opposite: it transforms the object's excess  
 42       into a lived experience of the self and restores depth as aesthetic compensation.  
 43       The ontological indifference of the real becomes meaningful experience.

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<sup>11</sup>Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), x-xi.

Something analogous occurs with Meillassoux. His critique of correlationism insists that modern thought absolutizes relation and turns the correlation between subject and world into the unsurpassable horizon of being.<sup>12</sup> In the EOO regime, that absolutization ceases to be a philosophical thesis and becomes a form of cultural engineering: depth coincides with the technical conditions of its appearing, and the object no longer appears except as already translated into experience. Correlationism becomes design.

The possible way out is already implicit. If the simulation of withdrawal consists in intensive variations of the same regime—more black, more silence, more emptiness—then operative withdrawal would require conditions under which something fails to fit, under which the object cannot be translated without remainder into immediate experience or interface. From Hui's perspective, contemporary practical ontology must be understood as the expression of a dominant technics: the universalization of a certain form of access also amounts to the universalization of a certain metaphysics of appearance.<sup>13</sup> To think operative withdrawal therefore requires other technical, temporal, and practical operations capable of introducing real excess into the regime of the available world.

In sum, EOO does not eliminate the object: it reinscribes it as administered depth, such that withdrawal becomes an aesthetic parameter and negativity a circulable value. The problem, therefore, cannot be solved by “more opacity” or by further intensifications of the same regime, since intensive variation is precisely the habitual mode of capture. The question becomes what conditions allow something not to fit, not to be translated without remainder into interface, and to begin operating again as effective excess. This demand shifts analysis from appearance toward temporality and practice: toward the modes of repetition, sedimentation, and habit through which regimes of access are stabilized—or fractured.

### **Operative Withdrawal: Relation, Habit, and Cosmotechnics**

The formulation of ego-oriented ontology and of the simulation of withdrawal allows us to specify a problem that is no longer aesthetic in the narrow sense, but properly ontological. At this point, the question emerges: can ontological withdrawal be produced as a formal effect? Or, more concretely, if we are to make use of the promised possibilities of the regime under discussion here: under what conditions can a technoromantic aesthetics operate together with the excess of the real?

The first displacement must consist in abandoning the idea that ontological radicality is achieved through intensification. More opacity, more distance, or greater formal complexity are not enough to produce excess; on the contrary, such a logic reproduces the very regime it seeks to criticize, because it treats depth as a gradable and consumable value. Withdrawal does not occur when

<sup>12</sup>Meillassoux, *After Finitude*.

<sup>13</sup>Yuk Hui, “Cosmotechnics as Cosmopolitics,” *e-flux Journal* 86 (2017).

1 experience “feels more,” but when it ceases to coincide with itself; not when the  
 2 object appears darker or more solemn, but when the relation to it does not  
 3 immediately close as identification. At this point, the modern debate on  
 4 theatricality and absorption remains useful. Fried shows that a work may exist  
 5 for an observer, in a given situation and duration, and that this dependence  
 6 constitutes precisely its theatricality.<sup>14</sup> The later notion of absorption, by  
 7 contrast, allows one to think of a work not organized to return the spectator to  
 8 themselves, but sufficiently closed within its own dynamic so as not to offer itself  
 9 immediately to recognition.<sup>15</sup> Yet this opposition remains insufficient when  
 10 thought from the perspective of Object-Oriented Ontology: there is no privileged  
 11 access or full transparency in the relation between work and spectator either.  
 12 Even that relation may constitute a third object, an autonomous and “strange”  
 13 unit, irreducible both to the subject and to the isolated work.<sup>16</sup> The issue is  
 14 therefore no longer to choose between a work wholly closed upon itself and a  
 15 work delivered over to the spectator, but to think conditions under which the  
 16 relation itself is not exhausted by reception as self-inscription.

17 At this point, Rebentisch’s revision becomes decisive: mediation is not the  
 18 problem; its identitarian closure is. Operative withdrawal does not require  
 19 suppressing the relation to the observer, but preventing that relation from being  
 20 preformatted as recognition, inscription, or the consumption of experience.<sup>17</sup> In  
 21 the same direction, one of the shared impulses of OOO and new materialism  
 22 consisted precisely in deactivating the centrality of the receiving subject and in  
 23 attending to forms of efficacy not reducible to the human appropriation of  
 24 meaning.<sup>18</sup>

25 This displacement becomes more productive with Deleuze. The problem  
 26 can no longer be formulated solely in terms of visible form, but rather in terms  
 27 of the problematic field from which that form emerges. In *Difference and*  
 28 *Repetition*, the object does not appear as a self-sufficient unity, but as the always  
 29 partial resolution of a process of individuation linked to differences of intensity  
 30 and differential relations.<sup>19</sup> Repetition does not amount to reiterating the same,  
 31 but to actualizing a difference that recognition cannot fully anticipate. Here a  
 32 decisive path opens for our argument: the object’s excess does not reappear as  
 33 “more” sensible intensity, but as a problematic depth that exceeds the already-  
 34 formed image. This logic reaches an especially operative formulation in  
 35 Deleuze’s *Francis Bacon*, where art ceases to matter as representation of the  
 36 visible and instead matters through its capacity to render forces visible. The  
 37 diagram names precisely that region prior to the figure: a field of strokes, smears,  
 38 gestures, and as-signifying relations that disorganizes the cliché and opens the

<sup>14</sup>Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup>Fried, *Art and Objecthood*.

<sup>16</sup>Harman, *Art and Objects*, 32.

<sup>17</sup>Juliane Rebentisch, *Estética de la Instalación*, trans. G. Calderón (Buenos Aires: Caja Negra, 2018).

<sup>18</sup>Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Coole, *Rethinking Agency*; Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

<sup>19</sup>Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), [Originally published in 1968].

possibility of a new form.<sup>20</sup> The diagram is not yet the figure, but the intensive depth that makes it possible.

From this perspective, habit—or, in your formulation, *habitus*—acquires a decisive value. Not as routine or simple automatism, but as the operation by which a practice contracts, reorganizes, and once again traverses that intensive field without exhausting it. To repeat does not mean to conserve a prior form, but to specialize, refine, and differentiate it.<sup>21</sup> At this point, non-identical repetition, care, repair, maintenance, and return cease to be secondary figures of aesthetic experience and become central operations. The point is not to romanticize a pre-digital past, but to think situations in which the object is not resolved once and for all as an available surface. Craft becomes especially valuable here not as nostalgia for authenticity, but as an index of a practice in which form is gestated: touchable and close, yet never entirely available; open in its fissures, marked by times of elaboration, drying, correction, and delay. In such contexts, the object imposes its own time and resistance. For this reason, the Deleuzian figures of the blind hand and haptic vision also gain force: a hand that gropes and reconfigures without executing a fully pre-given plan, and a vision that touches without reducing the object to transparency. Here one may think a form of technoromanticism distinct from administered surface: not the polished object that returns the subject to itself, but a worked, gestated form still close to the diagram from which it proceeds.

Thought in this way, operative withdrawal does not oppose technics; it opposes technics when technics is reduced to optimized access. It is here that Yuk Hui's notion of cosmotechnics allows the problem to be situated within a broader framework. If the ego-oriented ontology described above is not merely a cultural effect, but a form of world coherent with a dominant technics, then the way out cannot consist in seeking a pure exterior to technics or in recovering a pre-technical past. It must consist, rather, in thinking a technodiversity capable of pluralizing the modes through which the world appears.<sup>22</sup> Operative withdrawal may thus be conceived as the effect of a cosmotechnical disjunction: wherever a practice, a temporality, or an object cannot be integrated without remainder into the circuit of access, circulation, and subjective intensification. Not because such objects or practices are “darker” or “more complex” in the abstract, but because they introduce a functional incompatibility into the dominant regime of appearance.

The distinction between simulation of withdrawal and operative withdrawal thus allows the article's arc to be closed by definitively shifting the discussion from the plane of form to that of ontological operation. The problem with technoromanticism is not that it misrepresents withdrawal, but that it functions too well within a technical-temporal regime that structurally neutralizes excess: it turns the limit into value, disjunction into atmosphere, and negativity into

<sup>20</sup>Gilles Deleuze, *Pintura: El concepto de diagrama* (Buenos Aires: Cactus, 2007), [Originally published in 1981]

<sup>21</sup>Alex B. Pablos, “La categoría estética de *habitus*: el acto de diferenciación,” *Dialektika: Revista de investigación filosófica y teoría social* 7 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.51528/dk.vol7.id205>.

<sup>22</sup>Hui, *Cosmotechnics as Cosmopolitics*.

circulable style. To think operative withdrawal implies relinquishing the illusion of a redemptive aesthetics and assuming that ontological alterity can only reappear where experience ceases to coincide with itself: where there is non-exhausted relation, non-identical repetition, delay, friction, and conflict with the conditions of access. In this sense, withdrawal is not something that is shown, but something that makes world precisely by refusing immediate consumption. It is in this operative resistance—and not in aesthetic intensification—that the possibility of thinking a non-ego-centered ontology of appearance is at stake.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that technoromanticism is less a style than a regime of appearance: a grammar of scenic emptiness, technical polish, calibrated darkness, and the silencing of the everyday that stabilizes itself and circulates with particular efficiency in platform environments. What is decisive is not that the object “returns,” but how it returns: as an impeccable, legible presence translatable into immediate experience, where the promise of depth demands no friction.

The central ontological criterion has been the distinction between ontological withdrawal and aesthetic opacity. In OOO, withdrawal is not a sensible effect or a formal strategy, but a general condition: no object is exhausted by its relations or manifestations. Applied to the aesthetic field, this criterion makes it possible to show that technoromanticism does not produce a return of the object in any strong sense, but rather a simulation of withdrawal: distance, opacity, and autonomy appear as consumable qualities, compatible with access, circulation, and recognition, rather than as excess that interrupts appearance.

From this point onward, the article has proposed the concept of Ego-Oriented Ontology (EOO) as a diagnosis of the resulting regime. EOO does not designate a metaphysics of the self, but a stabilized form in which objects appear primarily as interfaces of self-inscription. The real counts insofar as it intensifies the subject’s experience, and alterity is reconfigured as an affective and aesthetic resource of that experience. In this sense, technoromanticism not only administers a depth without risk; it also produces a world without fissures, a world “too clean,” in which residue, wear, and everyday conflict appear as noise to be suppressed. This aesthetics is not politically innocent: it suppresses negativity not through explicit censorship, but through a perceptual economy that renders desirable a hygienized, reconciled, and frictionless environment.

The metaphor of the *silver mirror* allows one to name the affective phenomenology of this regime with precision: not the black mirror of an external threat, but the silvered mirror that returns the self as an elevated, beautiful, and “authentic” image, precisely because the world has been cleansed of conflict. Technoromantic depth is safe: it offers distance without wounding and alterity without interruption. For that reason, its problem cannot be resolved with “more

opacity” or with further intensifications of the same regime. Such gestures can themselves be reabsorbed as look within the very same economy of visibility.

The opening that emerges, therefore, is not stylistic but operative.

Reintroducing the object’s excess requires relational, temporal, and technical conditions in which experience ceases to coincide with itself: non-exhausted relation, non-identical repetition, delay, friction, maintenance, disjunction. Within that horizon, operative withdrawal does not designate a new aesthetics of depth, but a modification of the conditions of appearance. The problem with technoromanticism is not that it misrepresents withdrawal, but that it structurally neutralizes excess by turning the limit into value, disjunction into atmosphere, and negativity into circulable style. To think a non-ego-centered ontology of appearance therefore requires less aesthetic administration of depth and more attention to the concrete operations that allow something not to be consumed immediately.

### Critical Position Note (Disclaimer)

This work does not seek to issue moral judgments on artists, institutions, or scenes, nor does it ignore the material and economic conditions of contemporary artistic production. The critique is directed at an aesthetic regime, not at individual intentions. The aim is to open a space for debate and self-critique regarding the possible structural dangers of certain grammars of appearance, understanding critique as a form of care: care for art and for its potential.

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