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**God, Victim, Governor: Ideological Entrepreneurs and the Claim
to Govern in the Discourse of Elon Musk and Peter Thiel**

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Overview	1
1.2 Problem Statement	1
1.3 Research Question and Case Selection	3
1.4 Structure of the Thesis	5
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	7
2.1 Entrepreneurial Identity as a Discursive Construction	7
2.2 The Political Turn in Entrepreneurship Research	10
2.3 The Two Bodies of the Entrepreneur and Analytical Tools	12
2.4 Synthesis	16
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology.....	18
3.1 Epistemological Commitments and Critical Discourse Analysis as Method	18
3.2 Case Selection	20
3.3 Data Corpus, Analytical Procedure, and Reflexivity	21
3.3.1 Corpus construction	21
3.3.2 Analytical procedure	24
3.3.3 Temporal structure	25
3.3.4 Reflexivity.....	27
Chapter 4: Analysis.....	29
4.1 Critique of Democracy and Political Institutions.....	29
Thiel: Democracy as structural inadequacy	29
Musk: Democracy as inefficiency	32
God and Victim in the critique of democracy	33
4.2 Framing of Societal Crises as Governance Failures	34
Thiel: Stagnation as civilisational death	34

Musk: Extinction and demographic collapse	36
God and Victim in crisis framing.....	38
4.3 Positioning of Entrepreneurial Actors as Superior to Existing Political Institutions...	39
Thiel: The founder as king	39
Musk: The founder as civilisational agent	41
Simultaneous occupation of the God and Victim Positions.....	42
4.4 Chapter Synthesis.....	44
Chapter 5: Discussion	45
5.1 Mechanism below ideology	45
5.2 Authority without argument.....	47
5.3 The dynamic mechanism	48
5.4 Democratic implications	50
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	52
6.1 Findings and Contributions.....	52
6.2 Limitations	54
6.3 Directions for Future Research	55
References.....	57
Appendix A – Use of AI Tools.....	63

Abstract

This thesis examines the discursive mechanisms through which prominent technology founders mobilise entrepreneurial identity to construct and legitimise visions of political governance in their public discourse. Drawing on Faircloughian Critical Discourse Analysis and the concept of ideological entrepreneurship, the study analyses a corpus of public texts produced by Peter Thiel and Elon Musk between 2007 and 2025. Grounded in social constructionism, the analysis proceeds across three thematic domains: the critique of democratic institutions, the framing of societal crises as governance failures, and the positioning of entrepreneurial actors as superior to existing political structures. The study identifies a stable, three-operation discursive mechanism through which governance claims are embedded as presuppositions rather than advanced as arguments, authority is borrowed from established cultural and intellectual traditions, and subject positions are constructed that simultaneously cast the founder as exceptional visionary and persecuted victim. A temporal dimension is further identified, distinguishing between anticipatory and performative governance discourse, wherein the Victim position intensifies as governance claims become materially consequential. The findings contribute to Critical Entrepreneurship Studies by specifying the structural form of ideological entrepreneurship and its implications for democratic accountability, while demonstrating Faircloughian CDA as a productive analytical framework for the field.

Keywords: Ideological Entrepreneurship; Entrepreneurial Identity; Critical Entrepreneurship Studies; Critical Discourse Analysis; Entrepreneurialism

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

In recent decades, entrepreneurship has increasingly moved beyond its association with new venture creation and economic innovation and has started to occupy a broader and more visible role in shaping social, technological, and institutional arrangements. While earlier generations of entrepreneurs sought market share, disruption of industries, and competitive advantage, a cohort of founders operating since roughly 2010 has addressed a different order of problem altogether: the adequacy of democratic governance, the organisational design of states, the moral foundations of civilisation, and the political arrangements appropriate to a technological species with an interplanetary future. To give a few examples, Balaji Srinivasan's book *The Network State* (2022) argues that blockchain-organised founder-communities represent the legitimate successor to the nation-state as the primary unit of political organisation. Marc Andreessen's *Techno-Optimist Manifesto* (2023) declares technology as the only legitimate force for human progress and frames regulatory governance as a form of civilisational suicide. Sam Altman, Chief Executive of OpenAI, has characterised artificial general intelligence as a transition requiring governance frameworks that no existing democratic institution is equipped to provide, with founders of the relevant companies as the de facto authors of those frameworks (Altman, 2023). What emerges through this discourse goes beyond mere lobbying positions or policy preferences. These texts increasingly constitute comprehensive visions concerning who should govern, through what institutional forms, and on what basis of authority. They are articulated by actors whose identity, credibility, and cultural resources derive from their role as entrepreneurs. A structural phenomenon is underway, requiring entrepreneurship research to examine it.

1.2 Problem Statement

Understanding what is new about this phenomenon requires situating it within the longer trajectory of how entrepreneurship scholarship has defined its central object of study. In a historical reconstruction of entrepreneurship research across three eras from the 1870s through the present, Kirsch, Wadhvani and Welter (2025) demonstrate that a distinctive sociohistorical narrative shaped each period's configuration of entrepreneurship theory. In the first era,

spanning the 1870s through the 1920s, the entrepreneur was theorised as the exceptional coordinating agent of industrial capitalism. Throughout this era, the entrepreneur was thought of as the captain of industry who marshalled capital, labour, and knowledge toward the modernisation project. In the second era, from the 1930s through the 1970s, the Schumpeterian legacy reshaped the field around innovation and institutional disruption, with entrepreneurship understood primarily as the mechanism through which stagnating economies were shocked into development. In the third era, from the 1970s to the present, the field institutionalised itself around the startup, the individual founder, and the opportunity-seeking unit of entrepreneurial action, producing the canonical paradigm crystallised by Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) definition of entrepreneurship as the discovery and exploitation of opportunities.

The third era's framework, despite its enormous productivity, carries a structural limitation that is directly relevant to the phenomenon this thesis examines. In the opportunity-recognition paradigm, political institutions, regulatory frameworks, and governance structures are treated as the environment within which entrepreneurial action occurs, not as objects that entrepreneurial action itself might contest, reconstitute, or seek to replace. This framework does not readily accommodate founders who do not seek opportunities within existing arrangements but openly challenge those arrangements and propose radical alternatives to them. Kirsch, Wadhvani and Welter (2025) identify a similar gap, pointing to the political contexts of entrepreneurship and the relationship between entrepreneurial agency and governmental authority as terrain that the field's canonical paradigm cannot see because it was designed to look elsewhere. The phenomenon this study examines is precisely that terrain: founders who mobilise entrepreneurial identity as the basis for governance claims, positioning themselves as legitimate actors in the design and exercise of political authority.

The term "governance claim" requires a definition, because it will carry analytical weight throughout this study. A governance claim is a statement that takes a position on who has the right or capacity to exercise political authority, through what institutional forms that authority should be organised, and on what basis its legitimacy rests. This distinguishes governance claims from policy preferences (views about what a government should do within its existing mandate, like lowering taxes, increasing defence spending, and regulating artificial intelligence). Policy preferences accept the existing framework of political authority and argue about its content, whereas a governance claim contests or reconfigures that framework itself. A governance claim is also different from a political opinion (a general evaluative stance on political events or figures, such as saying, "this politician is corrupt" or "that election was

unfair”). Political opinions may be critical of existing arrangements without proposing or implying any alternative structure of authority. A governance claim goes further by asserting, explicitly or implicitly, that a different configuration of political authority would be more legitimate, more capable, or more appropriate to the problems at hand.

Critical Entrepreneurship Studies (CES) has provided the intellectual resources to examine this terrain in depth. Tedmanson, Verduyn, Essers and Gartner (2012) argued that mainstream entrepreneurship research had systematically depoliticised its own object of study by treating the entrepreneur as a neutral given. Essers, Dey, Tedmanson and Verduyn (2017) extended this into a programmatic insistence that questions of power, ideology, and discourse are constitutive of entrepreneurship rather than incidental to it. More recently, Chalmers, Honecker, Johnson and Milne (2025) have introduced the concept of the ideological entrepreneur to name the specific type this study examines: an actor who strategically employs venture creation and entrepreneurial identity as vehicles for contesting and reconstituting foundational institutional arrangements. This concept organises the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 and provides the primary analytical lens for the empirical analysis.

1.3 Research Question and Case Selection

The aim of this study is to examine the discursive mechanisms through which prominent technology founders construct and legitimise visions of political governance in their public discourse, with particular attention to how entrepreneurial identity is mobilised for those governance claims. The aim is to show how a specific discursive process works, what identity resources it draws on, and what authority it produces.

The study is guided by a single research question: How do prominent technology founders mobilise entrepreneurial identity to construct and legitimise visions of political governance in their public discourse?

The study examines two case subjects: Peter Thiel and Elon Musk. Case selection follows a purposive logic of theoretical sampling (Patton, 2002; Flyvbjerg, 2006). The study does not seek statistical representativeness but analytical depth. The cases are selected because they are information-rich and analytically extreme. They represent the phenomenon under study in its most developed, sustained, and empirically accessible form. In this sense, Flyvbjerg’s (2006) rationale for extreme case selection is directly applicable. Extreme cases are not outliers to be

explained away but exemplars through which theoretical constructs become most clearly observable.

The two cases produce a uniquely extensive, publicly documented, and generically varied corpus of governance discourse. Thiel's written essays, lecture series, and long-form interviews, and Musk's social media, institutional documents, and public addresses together constitute a corpus sufficiently large and varied for systematic critical discourse analysis. This is not true of most technology founders, whose governance discourse is either too sparse, too private, or insufficiently sustained for the analytical method employed.

The two cases are not merely two instances of the same phenomenon, as they represent distinct registers of ideological entrepreneurship. Thiel operates in a theoretical-written register, producing explicit philosophical argument, while Musk operates in a performative-enacted register, advancing governance claims through institutional design and social media spectacle as much as through written argument. This contrast enables a comparative analysis that reveals how ideological entrepreneurship operates across different discursive modes, thereby producing findings with greater analytical range than single-case analysis would permit.

Moreover, unlike most entrepreneurship scholars' case subjects, Thiel and Musk are not merely rhetorical actors. Their governance discourses are materially consequential as Thiel's Palantir Technologies is integrated into multiple state surveillance infrastructures and Musk's Starlink provides satellite internet in active conflict zones and asserts jurisdictional claims over future planetary governance. DOGE, which Musk co-led, directly advised and implemented executive government decisions. The selection of these cases is therefore not merely intellectually convenient but politically urgent. Understanding how ideological entrepreneurship operates in these cases is a matter of democratic and institutional consequence.

It is important to note that the governance discourse of both founders is embedded in a specific cultural formation that predates either of them and supplies much of the historical context on which their claims draw. What Barbrook and Cameron (1996) termed the "Californian ideology" describes the dominant ideological formation of Silicon Valley. It is a hybrid of libertarian free-market economics and countercultural idealism, rooted in the Bay Area computing culture of the 1970s and 1980s and consolidated through the culture of the first dot-com boom of the 1990s. This formation treats technological development as inherently liberatory, positions entrepreneurs as the natural leaders of a new social order, and frames existing political institutions as obstacles to a future that market-driven innovation will

produce. Turner (2006) traces its genealogy through Stewart Brand and the Whole Earth Network, showing how a countercultural suspicion of institutional authority was absorbed into a celebration of entrepreneurial individualism that did not challenge capitalism but redefined it as liberation. The Californian ideology is the historical and cultural ground on which claims like those of Thiel and Musk are intelligible and authoritative. It is the backdrop that makes the assertion that a technology founder has the legitimate standing to propose alternative governance arrangements culturally legible to an audience rather than merely eccentric. Understanding the governance discourse of Thiel and Musk therefore requires attending not only to the institutional order they are contesting but to the specific cultural formation from which they are contesting it.

Thiel's governance discourse becomes analytically legible in 2007, with the publication of 'The Straussian Moment,' the first text in which he explicitly locates the entrepreneur as a legitimate actor in extra-constitutional governance arrangements. Thiel argues in this essay that Western liberal democracy is inadequate to confront civilisational threats and that ambitious people operating outside normal political channels are better placed to act. The text introduces the core propositions (the incompatibility of freedom and democracy, civilisational crisis, and the exceptional agency of the founder) that recur with increasing intensity across the following two decades. The corpus for Thiel therefore begins in 2007 and extends to 2025.

Musk's governance discourse emerges discernibly from 2012, when his public addresses at TED and in technology media began to articulate the Mars colonisation programme in explicitly governance-relevant terms, framing extraterrestrial settlement as a civilisational insurance policy against existential risk and as a form of jurisdictional exit that extends beyond technical ambition into questions of political authority. The corpus for Musk therefore begins in 2012 and extends to 2025.

Given this extended temporal span, the analysis remains attentive to the possibility that each founder's governance discourse may undergo structural shifts over time. Whether and when such shifts occur, and what material or institutional conditions might account for them, constitutes one of the analytical questions the empirical analysis will address.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 2 develops the theoretical framework in four sections, establishing ideological entrepreneurship as the organising concept and specifying the

identity mechanism and thematic domains through which the empirical analysis proceeds. Chapter 3 presents the methodology, justifying the critical discourse analysis approach, specifying corpus construction, describing the analytical procedure, and addressing reflexivity. Chapter 4 presents the analysis, organised around three thematic domains (critique of democracy and political institutions, framing of societal crises as governance failures, and positioning of entrepreneurial actors as superior to existing political institutions) with close textual reading of selected passages from both cases. Chapter 5 discusses the findings comparatively, examining what the two cases share at the level of discursive mechanisms, how they differ, and what the analysis reveals about ideological entrepreneurship as a governance phenomenon. Chapter 6 reflects on contributions, limitations, and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter develops the theoretical framework that guides the empirical analysis. Its organising concept is ideological entrepreneurship, understood as entrepreneurship as a vehicle for contesting and reconstituting foundational institutional arrangements (Chalmers et al., 2025). The chapter's four sections build the framework around this concept in sequence. Section 2.1 establishes the historical and ideological genealogy of the heroic entrepreneurial subject whose identity Thiel and Musk draw upon, tracing the archetype from its Schumpeterian origins through its critical revision in subsequent entrepreneurship scholarship. Section 2.2 situates ideological entrepreneurship within the broader trajectory of the field, demonstrating how Critical Entrepreneurship Studies has created the conceptual apparatus necessary to recognise governance ambitions of this kind as an entrepreneurship phenomenon rather than merely a political one. Section 2.3 specifies the identity mechanism through which ideological entrepreneurship operates discursively in the cases under examination and introduces the discourse analysis tools through which that mechanism is examined in the texts. Section 2.4 synthesises the framework.

2.1 Entrepreneurial Identity as a Discursive Construction

The entrepreneurial identity that figures like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel mobilise in their governance discourse did not originate with them, and it is not simply a reflection of who they are. It is a culturally produced subject position with a specific history, a recognisable architecture, and a set of narrative conventions that predate any individual founder who inhabits it. Understanding how that position functions, how it generates authority, confers legitimacy, and enables the extension of entrepreneurial logic into domains well beyond the market requires attending to how entrepreneurial identity is constructed in the first place.

That history begins with Schumpeter. In his foundational account of economic development, Schumpeter (1934) positioned the entrepreneur as an exceptional individual whose function was not only to allocate resources but to disrupt existing arrangements by carrying out new combinations of means of production, a dynamic he later termed creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1942). The entrepreneur in this understanding is not an ordinary economic actor, it is a heroic one. It is driven by the will to found a private kingdom, the impulse to conquer, and the joy of creating (Schumpeter, 1934). This prototype is singular, exceptional, historically decisive, and authorised to act beyond the conventions that govern ordinary agents. It

established the ideological architecture that subsequent entrepreneurship scholarship largely inherited. The dominant research tradition that followed treated exceptionalism as a descriptive feature of entrepreneurs rather than as a normative claim embedded in the discourse that produced them. Critical Entrepreneurship Studies has named this inheritance as a problem. The Schumpeterian archetype did not simply describe a type of person but constructed one, thereby naturalising a specific configuration of agency, authority, and legitimacy that founders like Thiel and Musk actively deploy and extend beyond the market into the domain of governance. Entrepreneurship research has not always understood identity in these terms. The field's dominant tradition treated the entrepreneur as a given, as a type of person defined by traits, motivations, and cognitive dispositions that explained their capacity to recognise and exploit opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000, pp. 217–218). On this account, identity is prior to action, and entrepreneurs act the way they do because of what they fundamentally are. The social constructionist challenge to this tradition reframed the question entirely. Steyaert and Katz (2004) argued that entrepreneurship, like everything else people know, is a socially constructed reality rather than a natural kind, and that the category of the entrepreneur is therefore not discovered but produced through the discursive and social processes that claim to only describe it. Steyaert's subsequent conceptualisation of “entrepreneurship” as a verb rather than a noun extended this logic, treating entrepreneurship as an ongoing relational process that displaces the stable, pre-given entrepreneurial subject and replaces it with identity as something achieved, performed, and continuously re-enacted through practice (Steyaert, 2007).

The implications of this shift are substantial. If entrepreneurial identity is produced rather than discovered, then the specific form it takes is the outcome of discursive work that could have produced different results. Critical Entrepreneurship Studies has been the tradition most committed to making this point analytically consequential. Tedmanson, Verduyn, Essers and Gartner (2012) described entrepreneurship as a complex web of intertwined socio-economic and politically framed activities and called for scholarship capable of peeling away the layers of ideological obscuration that surround the concept. What the mainstream tradition presents as a universal and neutral category (the opportunity-seeking, risk-taking, growth-oriented founder) is, on this account, a historically specific and ideologically saturated construction that reflects and reinforces particular distributions of power, value, and recognition. Ogbor (2000) demonstrated this further, showing that entrepreneurship discourse is discriminatory, gender-biased, ethnocentrically determined, and ideologically controlled, producing the heroic, white,

masculine, Western individual as the natural form of entrepreneurial agency while marginalising the entrepreneurial practices of those who do not fit the template.

What makes this construction so durable is precisely that it does not announce itself as construction. Enterprise culture, as du Gay (1996) argued in his foundational Foucauldian analysis, works by producing subjects who understand themselves through its categories (autonomous, responsible, calculating, self-directing) and who experience these as expressions of their own authentic natures rather than as effects of a discourse that preceded and shaped them. The entrepreneurial self is, in Bröckling's (2016) formulation, a real fiction: a story that supplies systems with the agents they require in order to operate, so deeply woven into the texture of contemporary life that to question it feels like questioning the self. Foucault's (2008) analysis of neoliberal governmentality traced the genealogy of this subject to specific techniques of power that extended market rationality into domains previously organised by different logics. What began as an economic category became a model of personhood, a template for the ideal citizen, and ultimately a framework for evaluating institutions, governments, and forms of collective life.

Entrepreneurial identity construction is not, however, a passive absorption of available cultural templates. Founders draw on those templates actively and strategically, shaping them through narrative to claim authority, acquire resources, and secure recognition. Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) demonstrated that entrepreneurial stories are not merely accounts of what firms do but instruments through which founders construct legitimacy, attract resources, and constitute market categories. Martens, Jennings and Jennings (2007) showed that the narrative sophistication of entrepreneurial stories predicts resource acquisition outcomes and that how founders tell their stories, not just what those stories say, determines whether they are believed and supported. Suddaby, Israelsen, Mitchell and Lim (2023) extended this argument to what they call "rhetorical history": the selective reconstruction of the past through which entrepreneurs make present visions appear as the necessary culmination of a trajectory that always existed. Navis and Glynn (2011) further demonstrated that entrepreneurial identity construction requires the achievement of what they call "legitimate distinctiveness": founders must establish themselves as recognisable members of an established category while simultaneously marking themselves as exceptional within it. Extended into the domain of governance, this names a fundamental challenge that founders like Musk and Thiel must solve: they must claim to be recognisable members of the category of exceptional technology founders while simultaneously marking themselves as exceptional even within that category,

as figures whose authority exceeds any individual venture and extends to questions of civilisational direction.

The tools through which this authority is claimed and extended are discursive. Fairclough (2003) argued that we cannot take the role of discourse in social practices for granted and it must be established through analysis. This is because what texts produce (the identities they construct, the assumptions they embed, the authorities they naturalise) is neither transparent nor innocent. Applying this framework to entrepreneurial identity and ideological entrepreneurship means attending to how specific texts perform the work of construction. That is, how they position the entrepreneur as the agent who sees what others cannot, who acts where institutions have failed, and who bears a responsibility that conventional political actors are unequal to. These are discursive productions that draw on established cultural repertoires (such as the iconography of the visionary, the sacrificial mission-bearer, the man of action in a world of talkers) and arrange them into narratives that naturalise authority and render political claims as entrepreneurial ones. It is worth noting here that these identity constructions are not merely verbal performances contained at the level of text. In Fairclough's (2003) terms, discourse operates simultaneously at the level of text (the specific language used), discursive practice (the conventions, genres, and prior discourses a text draws upon and transforms), and social practice (the institutional and ideological context in which the text is embedded and produces effects). Entrepreneurial identity claims, accordingly, are not confined to what founders say. They are shaped by the discursive traditions they draw on and by the material institutional contexts in which those claims circulate and acquire authority. The implications of this for the present study are developed methodologically in Chapter 3. The patterns identified above take a particular and distinctive shape in the discourse of Musk and Thiel, one that the existing literature has begun to name. It is to that specific structure that the following section turns.

2.2 The Political Turn in Entrepreneurship Research

The preceding section argued that entrepreneurial identity is a discursively constructed subject position rather than a natural category, and that founding a venture involves performing an identity whose cultural architecture (such as heroic, singular, mission-driven, authorised to act where institutions have stalled) is ideologically loaded in ways the field's dominant tradition has not always deeply acknowledged. For most of its history as an institutionalised academic discipline, entrepreneurship research organised itself around a functionalist core that treated political institutions, regulatory frameworks, and governance structures as the environment

within which entrepreneurial action occurs. Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) widely adopted definition positioned entrepreneurship as the scholarly examination of how, by whom, and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and exploited. The definition was enormously generative. It gave the field a clear and defensible object of study, enabled the accumulation of a substantial body of empirical work, and provided the basis for the field's legitimation within business schools and university research agendas. What it presupposed, however, was a relatively stable institutional container. It took markets, regulatory frameworks, and governance structures as the terrain across which opportunity-seeking occurs, not as objects that entrepreneurial action itself might contest, reconstitute, or seek to replace. The question of who governs, through what forms of authority, and on what basis of legitimacy was not a main question, because the field's own conceptual architecture had already mostly settled it.

Kirsch, Wadhwani and Welter (2025) offer the most thorough historical reconstruction of this limitation. Tracing entrepreneurship research across three eras from the 1870s to the present, they demonstrate that each configuration of the field was shaped by the sociohistorical moment in which its central questions were formed. The first era theorised the entrepreneur as the coordinating agent of industrial capitalism; the second centred on Schumpeterian innovation as the mechanism of economic development; the third, from the 1970s onward, institutionalised the field around the startup and the opportunity-seeking individual as its canonical objects. Kirsch, Wadhwani and Welter (2025) then identify what they call Entrepreneurship Research 4.0, a potential fourth era oriented around the ideological polarisation, digital transformation, and socioeconomic inequality that define the current moment. Critically, they name the political contexts of entrepreneurship and the relationship between entrepreneurial agency and governmental authority as the terrain that an emerging fourth era would need to address.

Critical Entrepreneurship Studies had already arrived at a version of this diagnosis from a different direction. Tedmanson, Verduyn, Essers and Gartner (2012) argued that mainstream entrepreneurship research had systematically depoliticised its own object of study by treating the entrepreneur as a neutral given rather than as a construction embedded in relations of power, ideology, and discourse. Essers, Dey, Tedmanson and Verduyn (2017) extended this into a programmatic call for sustained critical engagement with the assumptions that the field reproduces when it presents entrepreneurship as an inherently positive, value-neutral, and universally available form of agency. The CES tradition insisted that questions of power and ideology are not peripheral to entrepreneurship but constitutive of it. What CES made visible,

however, was primarily the ideological loading of the entrepreneurial subject as constructed within the market domain. The extension of that constructed subject into claims of political authority was a step the tradition had not yet taken.

The conceptual resources to take that step have arrived from two related but distinct bodies of work. The first concerns entrepreneurialism as an ideological formation at the level of culture and social organisation. Lubinski and Tucker (2025) define entrepreneurialism as an ideology that extends entrepreneurial logic into social life, directing aspirations and actions toward the relentless pursuit of entrepreneurial ideals. Crucially, they argue that entrepreneurialism is not simply a description of economic behaviour but a model for social action, one that organises collective behaviour, legitimises particular institutional norms, and frames political choices in ways that favour autonomous individual actors, equate disruption with progress, and position existing institutions as obstacles to be circumvented rather than structures with inherent social value (Lubinski & Tucker, 2025). Where this literature examines entrepreneurialism as a diffuse cultural ideology shaping how societies organise themselves and evaluate collective life, a second and more recent body of work identifies the specific actors who strategically deploy that ideology as a vehicle for political world-building. Chalmers, Honecker, Johnson and Milne (2025) extend this into the concept of the ideological entrepreneur, defined as an actor who strategically employs venture creation as a tool for political world-building, deterritorialising existing socio-technical arrangements and reterritorialising social space according to specific ideological blueprints. Their framework identifies the cases under examination as instances of right-accelerationist ideological entrepreneurship. That is, actors who seek to collapse or bypass liberal democratic oversight and reterritorialise governance into fast-moving, privately governed, or elite-sovereign systems. This concept provides the organising framework for the present thesis and positions the governance discourse of Thiel and Musk as an entrepreneurship phenomenon analysed through the field's own conceptual apparatus.

2.3 The Two Bodies of the Entrepreneur and Analytical Tools

The preceding section established that Musk and Thiel are legible as ideological entrepreneurs. That is, as actors whose venture creation and entrepreneurial identity function as vehicles for contesting and reconstituting foundational institutional arrangements. That designation does not, however, specify the discursive mechanism through which they do it. It does not explain

the particular architecture that makes their governance claims credible, urgent, and culturally authoritative. Identifying that mechanism is the task of this section.

The construction of exceptional personal authority as a basis for legitimate rule has been a central preoccupation of social and political theory for over a century. Weber's typology of legitimate domination identified charismatic authority as a distinct form in which obedience is secured not through tradition or rational-legal rules but through the recognition of extraordinary personal qualities in the leader, qualities that place them outside and above the conventions governing ordinary agents (Weber, 1922). The charismatic figure is obeyed because of who they are perceived to be, and the authority derived from that perception is, by its nature, resistant to institutional containment. The "Founder as God" position that Ibled (2025) identifies in the discourse of Musk and Thiel is legible as a contemporary instantiation of this structure in the sense that entrepreneurial exceptionalism functions as the basis for a claim to quasi-sovereign authority that exceeds democratic mandate.

Ibled's (2025) "Founder as Victim" position draws on an equally well-documented discursive tradition. The figure of the persecuted truth-teller, whose suffering at the hands of a corrupt or failing order simultaneously validates their claims and renders those claims difficult to refute through ordinary argument, recurs across religious, political, and literary discourse with enough consistency to constitute a recognisable rhetorical type. What makes this particularly significant in the present context is that Thiel himself is a self-conscious inheritor of the theoretical tradition that most precisely describes this structure. His intellectual engagement with René Girard's analysis of sacrificial mechanism and scapegoating is well documented, and scholars have noted how Girardian logic informs his political discourse (Leslie, 2025). That a founder whose governance claims rest partly on a Victim position should be a knowing participant in the theoretical architecture that explains it is analytically revealing about how deliberately these discursive resources are mobilised. Ibled's (2025) contribution is not to invent these structures but to show how they are simultaneously occupied and dynamically combined in the specific figure of the contemporary technology founder, and to aid in understanding what that combination makes possible.

Ibled (2025) provides the most precise analysis of this mechanism available in the existing literature. Examining primary sources spanning nearly two decades of public interventions by both founders, Ibled demonstrates that Thiel and Musk systematically construct the entrepreneur as an exceptional, quasi-sovereign figure whose authority to govern derives from entrepreneurial capacity rather than democratic mandate. She argues that this construction

operates through the simultaneous occupation of two subject positions: the Founder as God and the Founder as Victim, the two bodies of the entrepreneur (Ibled, 2025).

The Founder as God position constitutes the entrepreneur as a visionary whose exceptional capacity for perception, creation, and action places them categorically above ordinary political actors. In this position, the founder is the agent who sees civilisational threats that democratic institutions are structurally incapable of recognising, who acts at a scale and with a decisiveness that electoral politics cannot achieve, and whose ventures are not merely businesses but instruments of civilisational direction. The governance claims that emerge from this position are claims of superior competence and vision: the founder should govern, or should at minimum authorise governance, because their entrepreneurial perception constitutes a form of knowledge that political mandate cannot replicate.

The Founder as Victim position constitutes the entrepreneur as the target of institutional persecution, bureaucratic obstruction, and cultural hostility, as a figure whose sacrificial suffering at the hands of a failing order simultaneously validates the urgency of their governance claims and immunises those claims against critique. In this position, attacks on the founder are reframed as evidence of systemic dysfunction. If the existing order oppresses those who are trying to save it, the order itself is condemned. The governance claims that emerge from this position are claims of sacrificial legitimacy, and the founder's suffering authorises their political authority in a register that the God position alone cannot provide.

The analytical power of Ibled's framework lies in showing that these two positions are not alternatives but complements, deployed simultaneously and in dynamic tension. The God position without the Victim position risks appearing arrogant and detached. The Victim position without the God position risks appearing merely aggrieved. Together, they constitute a subject position of exceptional authority that is also exceptionally suffering: the founder who bears the unique burden of perceiving what others cannot and is persecuted for it. This combination is discursively powerful because it closes the space for critique. To attack the founder is to confirm the Victim narrative, and to doubt the founder's governance claims is to demonstrate the very blindness those claims diagnose.

This study draws on Ibled's framework but departs from it in several respects. Ibled's analysis is conducted through a psychoanalytic lens drawing on Freudian and Lacanian theory, and her central concern is with the fantasmatic structure of the founder figure and the desires and anxieties that sustain it. The present study, by contrast, employs Faircloughian Critical

Discourse Analysis and is concerned not with the psychic architecture of the founder but with how the God and Victim positions are constructed in specific texts through identifiable discursive mechanisms such as vocabulary choices, grammatical constructions, intertextual resources, and embedded assumptions. Where Ibled asks what the founder figure represents at the level of collective fantasy, this study asks how that figure is assembled in language and what institutional authority it claims. Furthermore, while Ibled treats the God and Victim positions as the primary organising structure of her analysis, the present study positions them as analytical categories that operate within a broader thematic architecture derived from the research question. As developed in the synthesis that follows, the analysis is organised around three thematic domains, and the God/Victim mechanism is examined within each of those domains rather than serving as the sole axis of the analysis. This allows the study to address a wider range of discursive work than the identity mechanism alone would capture, while still using the specificity of Ibled's framework where it is most analytically productive, that is, at the points where the two subject positions are mobilised simultaneously, constructing the founder as a figure whose authority is both visionary and sacrificially earned.

Two specific analytical tools drawn from Fairclough (2003) are particularly relevant to examining how this identity construction operates in the texts of Musk and Thiel. Intertextuality (the presence of other texts within a text) enables analysis of which cultural and intellectual resources founders draw upon to construct their distinctiveness and authority (Fairclough, 2003). When Thiel invokes Strauss, Girard, and the language of political theology, or when Musk frames his governance discourse through the narrative conventions of science fiction and civilisational epic, they are drawing on specific textual traditions that carry authority, legitimacy, and rhetorical resonance. Analysing intertextuality makes visible the cultural repertoires from which the God and Victim positions are assembled.

Assumptions, the second analytical tool, refer to the propositions that texts treat as given rather than argued. That is, the claims embedded in grammatical structure as background conditions rather than put forward as positions to be accepted or rejected (Fairclough, 2003). Analysing assumptions in governance discourse makes visible the institutional arrangements that are presupposed as natural or inevitable rather than argued for as political preferences. They reveal how the authority to govern is encoded in the deep structure of the text rather than asserted at its surface. Together, these tools allow the empirical analysis to examine how the God and Victim identity positions are constructed in the texts Musk and Thiel produce, what discursive resources they draw upon to do so, and what assumptions are embedded in that construction.

2.4 Synthesis

The framework developed in this chapter combines three components: a discursively constructed entrepreneurial identity whose heroic archetype originates in the Schumpeterian tradition (Section 2.1), the concept of ideological entrepreneurship through which that identity becomes a vehicle for contesting governance arrangements (Section 2.2), and the God/Victim identity mechanism through which governance claims acquire their discursive force (Section 2.3). Together, they identify three thematic domains in which the discursive construction of governance authority can be observed.

The first is critique of democracy and political institutions: the discursive work through which existing governance arrangements are represented as inadequate, obsolete, or structurally incapable of addressing the problems the founder has identified. The second is the framing of societal crises as governance failures: the construction of existential or civilisational threats whose urgency is attributed not to material conditions alone but to the failure of democratic or institutional responses to those conditions. The third is the positioning of entrepreneurial actors as superior to existing political institutions: the discursive moves through which the founder's entrepreneurial identity (such as their capacity for vision, decisive action, and institutional creation) is mobilised as a basis for political authority that exceeds democratic mandate. These categories are derived from the research question and from the theoretical architecture this chapter has developed.

The concepts and mechanisms introduced in this chapter are not purely textual phenomena. They operate at the level of text (in the specific vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical patterns founders use), at the level of discursive practice (in the genres, conventions, and prior discourses those texts draw upon and transform), and at the level of social practice (in the institutional and material contexts that give those texts their consequentiality). The methodological framework developed in Chapter 3 is designed to trace this operation across all three levels.

It is important to note that the God/Victim framework used throughout this thesis is not an original contribution of this study. The framework was developed by Ibled (2025) through a psychoanalytic reading of Thiel and Musk. This thesis adopts the framework as an analytical category and applies it within a different methodological and disciplinary context. The contribution of this study lies in translating Ibled's structural insight into Faircloughian Critical Discourse Analysis, using it to examine how governance claims are textually constructed and

legitimised. The novelty is therefore not the identity mechanism itself, but what becomes visible when that mechanism is examined at the level of vocabulary, grammar, intertextuality, and embedded assumptions in specific primary sources.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to justify the methodological choices that structure the empirical analysis and make the analytical procedure transparent. The chapter proceeds in three sections. Section 3.1 establishes the epistemological commitments of the study and develops Critical Discourse Analysis as the primary method. Section 3.2 justifies the selection of Elon Musk and Peter Thiel as the cases under study. Section 3.3 describes the data corpus, the criteria governing its construction, the analytical procedure, the temporal structure of the analysis, and the question of reflexivity.

3.1 Epistemological Commitments and Critical Discourse Analysis as Method

The research question asks how prominent technology founders mobilise entrepreneurial identity to construct and legitimise visions of political governance in their public discourse. This is a question about underlying discursive mechanisms. Since governance visions and the entrepreneurial identities through which they are made authoritative are produced in and through discourse, they cannot be examined adequately by methods that treat language as a transparent window onto an independently existing reality.

The epistemological position that grounds this study is social constructionism. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued, social reality is not a given but an ongoing accomplishment. If the categories through which actors make sense of their world are discursively produced, then the figure of the exceptional, visionary, politically authoritative founder is the product of discursive work that could have taken other forms. Steyaert and Katz (2004) applied this logic directly to entrepreneurship, arguing that the entrepreneur is a socially constructed reality whose apparent naturalness is itself the effect of the discursive processes that constitute it. The study also adopts a critical orientation. Critical approaches are distinguished by their concern not only with how social reality is constructed but with whose interests that construction serves, what it includes and leaves out (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000).

These commitments converge on a single methodological implication. The appropriate framework must examine language use at multiple levels simultaneously, tracing how authority is claimed, assumed, and naturalised in texts. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis provides this framework. Fairclough (1992) argued that discourse functions simultaneously in three

ways: it represents reality, enacts social relations between participants, and constitutes the identities of those who speak and are spoken about. He formalised the application into a three-dimensional model. The first dimension, textual analysis, attends to the formal properties of language. The second, discursive practice, examines how texts draw on, reproduce, or transform existing discourses. The third, social practice, situates the text within the broader institutional and ideological context in which it is embedded and through which it produces effects.

Each dimension addresses a specific problem that the research question generates. At the textual level, the question requires analysis of how particular formulations construct the identity through which governance claims are made. To give an example: Thiel's statement "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible" (2009) deploys a first-person authority marker, a past tense that transforms a position into a reasoned conclusion, and a formulation as logical incompatibility rather than a personal preference. These features perform identity work that a reading inattentive to textual detail would miss. At the level of discursive practice, the question requires examination of which prior discourses the texts draw on, such as the philosophical traditions of Strauss and Schmitt in Thiel's case, the register of civilisational crisis in Musk's, and the genres of corporate communication that both founders repurpose. At the level of social practice, the question requires situating those discursive moves within ideological entrepreneurship as described by Chalmers et al. (2025).

Within this model, there are two specific tools that serve as key instruments of textual analysis. The first is intertextuality, defined by Fairclough (2003) as the presence within a text of other texts. Applied to the governance discourse of Musk and Thiel, intertextual analysis makes visible which cultural and intellectual resources are used to construct the founders as a legitimate political authority. Ibled (2025) demonstrated that this authority derives from the simultaneous construction of two subject positions: the visionary founder elevated by exceptional perception and the sacrificial founder validated by endurance. Intertextuality traces the resources recruited to construct each position.

The second instrument is the analysis of assumptions. Fairclough (2003) identifies three types of propositions that texts embed as taken for granted: existential, propositional, and value assumptions. Propositional and value assumptions are the most analytically productive for this study because they are the mechanisms through which governance visions are normalised. For example, when a text assumes, without arguing, that democratic deliberation is structurally too slow for the crises the world faces, that assumption does more ideological work than any

explicit argument against democracy, precisely because it is presupposed as background rather than put forward as a position to be discussed.

Prior scholarship has applied Faircloughian CDA to entrepreneurship discourse. Da Costa and Saraiva (2012) used CDA to identify the orders of discourse through which entrepreneurship functions as an ideological mechanism reproducing capital. Ainsworth and Hardy (2004) demonstrated that CDA contributes to the study of identity specifically by making visible how particular identity constructions are linked to the reproduction of institutional structures. Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2004) established the broader framework connecting discourse, institutions, and action. The present study extends this tradition to the governance claims of ideological entrepreneurs, a domain that the tradition has not yet systematically addressed.

3.2 Case Selection

The case selection logic has been introduced in Section 1.3. This section adds the methodological dimension of that justification and explains why these two cases are appropriate for the analytical method employed.

Critical Discourse Analysis requires a corpus of sufficient textual richness and depth to support close and multi-level reading. This shapes the field of possible cases. Founders whose governance discourse is too sparse, too private, or insufficiently sustained cannot support the analytical procedure outlined above. Thiel's governance discourse spans nearly two decades, from 'The Straussian Moment' (2007) through to his 2025 Financial Times essay. It is philosophically organised, internally consistent, and self-referential, making it exceptionally productive for CDA. Musk's discourse is different from Thiel's but it is complementary. It is episodic and enacted through institutional action as much as through language. The Starlink Terms of Service clause asserting that no Earth-based government has authority over Martian activities (Starlink, 2022), the DOGE operation framed as start-up governance (Musk & Ramaswamy, 2024), and the Twitter acquisition announced as "the bird is freed" (Musk, 2022c) are governance claims enacted through legal instruments, executive appointments, and commercial transactions. Magalhães, Keller and Gorwa (2026) have characterised this transformation as an unprecedented fusion of a social media corporation and authoritarian politics.

This comparative logic of the dual-case design strengthens the analysis. Thiel operates in a more theoretical register, producing explicit philosophical arguments, while Musk operates in

a performative register, advancing governance claims through institutional design and spectacle. Analysing both makes it possible to identify what is structurally invariant across modes and what is mode-specific. While a single case would produce a richer account of one mode, the dual-case design produces an account of the phenomenon with greater analytical range.

3.3 Data Corpus, Analytical Procedure, and Reflexivity

3.3.1 Corpus construction

Three criteria governed the selection of primary sources. The first is governance relevance. A text qualifies for inclusion when it substantively addresses the adequacy or legitimacy of existing political institutions, proposes alternative arrangements for organising collective authority, or positions technological actors as relevant to the exercise of political authority. The second is discursive variation. The corpus spans distinct formats (authored essays, published lecture notes, an interview, a commercial book, a conference presentation, commencement speeches, social media posts, an op-ed, and a legal governance document) to reveal how governance claims operate across different registers. The third is temporal variation. The corpus spans 2007 to 2025, covering both phases of each founder’s governance discourse as identified in Section 3.3.3.

The corpus is organised into core and supplementary sources. Core sources are texts in which governance discourse is most substantial. For Thiel, the core texts are: ‘The Straussian Moment’ (2007), ‘The Education of a Libertarian’ (2009), ‘The End of the Future’ (2011), the Stanford CS183 Class 18 lecture notes (Thiel & Masters, 2012a), *Zero to One* (Thiel & Masters, 2014), the Republican National Convention speech (2016), the Rubin Report interview (2018), the Oxford Union address (2023a), and ‘A time for truth and reconciliation’ (2025). For Musk, the core texts are: the Caltech commencement address (2012), ‘Making Humans a Multiplanetary Species’ (2017), the Starlink Terms of Service (2022), ‘Dear Twitter Advertisers’ (2022b), the DOGE op-ed (Musk & Ramaswamy, 2024), and the cluster of social media posts addressing governance and population collapse (2023–2024). Tables 1 and 2 provide the full primary source inventories.

Table 1. Primary source inventory — Peter Thiel (core corpus)

Citation	Format	Governance relevance	Phase	Analytical theme(s)	God/Victim dominant?
Thiel (2007)	Essay	Parliamentary democracy inadequate; case for non-constitutional governance; Straussian framework	Phase 1	1, 3	God dominant; Victim emergent
Thiel (2009)	Essay	Freedom and democracy incompatible; entrepreneurial exit from democratic politics	Phase 1	1 (Critique of democracy)	God dominant
Thiel (2011)	Essay	Technological stagnation as civilisational crisis; acceleration as governance imperative	Phase 1	2 (Crisis as governance failure)	God dominant
Thiel & Masters (2012a)	Lecture notes	Founder as quasi-monarchical ruler and sacrificial scapegoat; start-up monarchy	Phase 1	3 (Entrepreneurial superiority)	Simultaneous: God and Victim
Thiel & Masters (2012b)	Lecture notes	Technological singularity vs. stagnation; obsessional devotion to innovation	Phase 1	2	God dominant
Thiel & Masters (2014)	Book	Founder as visionary creator; start-up monopoly as superior to democratic competition	Phase 1	1, 3	Simultaneous: God and Victim
Thiel (2016)	Speech	Builder/politician opposition; democratic discourse as trivial; stagnation condensed into political performance	Phase 2	1, 2, 3	God dominant; Victim emergent
Thiel (2018)	Interview	Ayn Rand intellectual genealogy; ‘builder’ as Randian entrepreneur; ideological lineage made explicit	Phase 2	3	God dominant
Thiel & Robinson (2020)	Conference address	China as systemic threat; founder exceptionalism in geopolitical competition	Phase 2	2, 3	God dominant; Victim emergent
Thiel (2023a)	Speech	UN as proto-totalitarian; technocratic world governance as threat; eschatological framing	Phase 2	1, 2	Simultaneous: God and Victim
Thiel (2023b)	Lecture	University ‘wokeism’ as civilisational stagnation; Nietzschean cultural critique	Phase 2	2	Victim dominant
Thiel (2025)	Essay	Apokalypsis as unveiling of ancien régime’s secrets; DISC critique; freedom/democracy incompatibility renewed	Phase 2	1, 2, 3	Simultaneous: God and Victim

Table 2. Primary source inventory — Elon Musk (core corpus)

Citation	Format	Governance relevance	Phase	Analytical theme(s)	God/Victim dominant?
Musk (2012)	Commencement speech	Founder as civilisational agent; existential crisis as entrepreneurial driver	Phase 1	2, 3	God dominant
Musk (2017)	Conference presentation	Mars colonisation as existential necessity; corporate rather than democratic governance	Phase 1	2, 3	God dominant
Musk (2021)	Social media post	Wealth accumulation legitimised by civilisational mission	Phase 1	3	God dominant
Musk (2022a)	Social media post	Mars colony framing; exit from earthly governance; multiplanetary imperative	Phase 2	1, 3	God dominant
Musk (2022b)	Social media post	Twitter as ‘common digital town square’; free speech as digital governance claim	Phase 2	1, 3	Simultaneous: God and Victim
Musk (2022c)	Social media post	Twitter acquisition as liberation; sovereignty claim over public digital space	Phase 2	1, 3	Simultaneous: God and Victim
Musk (2023a)	Social media post	Population crisis and immigration; demographic governance claim	Phase 2	2	God dominant; Victim emergent
Musk (2023b)	Social media post	Demographic decline as existential threat; natalist governance framing	Phase 2	2	God dominant
Musk (2024a/b/c)	Social media posts	Population collapse as governance failure of democratic welfare states	Phase 2	1, 2	Simultaneous: God and Victim
Musk & Ramaswamy (2024)	Op-ed	Federal bureaucracy as ‘existential threat to our republic’; ‘We are entrepreneurs, not politicians’; ‘antidemocratic’ inversion; anticipation of ‘onslaught from entrenched interests’	Phase 2	1, 3	Simultaneous: God and Victim
Starlink (2022)	Legal document	Mars as ‘free planet’; no Earth-based government authority; self-governing principles for dispute resolution	Phase 2	1, 3	God dominant

Within each source, the analysis proceeds by close reading of selected passages. The selection of passages was governed by three criteria intended to make the procedure transparent. The first criterion is governance-claim density. This refers to the degree to which a passage substantively addresses the legitimacy of existing institutions, the authority of entrepreneurial

actors, or the proposition of alternative governance arrangements. The second is intertextual richness, meaning the visibility within a passage of the cultural and intellectual traditions the discourse is drawing upon, since these are the discursive resources the analytical framework is designed to identify. The third is cross-source recurrence, meaning that the textual features identified in a given passage are observable in other passages across the corpus, so that the analysis traces patterns rather than isolated formulations. The aim is not to demonstrate that every utterance by either founder conforms to the mechanism but to demonstrate that the mechanism is a stable structural feature of their governance discourse, observable across formats, registers, and years. Supplementary sources are used as contextualising materials to verify attributed quotations, contextualise statements, and establish the institutional circumstances in which particular texts were produced. The principal supplementary sources are Vance's (2016) biography of Musk and Chafkin's (2021) biography of Thiel.

3.3.2 Analytical procedure

The analytical procedure is organised around the three thematic categories established in the theoretical framework (Section 2.4): critique of democracy and political institutions; framing of societal crises as governance failures; and positioning of entrepreneurial actors as superior to existing political institutions. In the first stage of the procedure, all primary sources are organised chronologically by case and assigned to their respective temporal phase on the basis of the rupture points identified in Section 3.3.3. Within each phase, sources are grouped by thematic category. A given source may be relevant to more than one category, and such overlaps are documented in the coding columns added to the corpus tables (Tables 1 and 2).

In the second stage, the organised corpus is subjected to Faircloughian CDA. For each thematic category and each case, the analysis proceeds through three movements: first, describing what the text does at the level of vocabulary, grammar, and textual organisation. Second, interpreting how the text draws on, reproduces, or transforms existing discourses. Third, identifying the assumptions that are embedded in the text. The movement from textual evidence to analytical claim is made explicit so that the interpretive reasoning is visible to the reader.

Within each thematic section, the analysis attends to how the God and Victim identity positions identified by Ibled (2025) are constructed and deployed. Particular attention is given to passages where the two positions are mobilised simultaneously, where the discursive loading is heaviest, and where the intersection of identity construction and governance claims is most

analytically productive. The analysis is selective rather than exhaustive, and the aim is depth of reading on the richest passages and not coverage of the entire corpus.

Identifying whether a passage is operating in the God position, the Victim position, or both requires attention to specific textual features. The God position is marked by a set of recurring discursive patterns. These include assertions of civilisational-scale perception stated as fact rather than opinion, the categorical exclusion of alternative actors from the capacity to solve the identified problem, the use of vocabulary that places the speaker outside the ordinary bounds of political life (words like “species,” “civilisation,” “extinction,” and “multiplanetary”), and the systematic absence of epistemic hedging in contexts where that hedging would conventionally be expected. A speaker claiming to know what democratic institutions “cannot” perceive, stated in direct declarative syntax with no qualification, is constructing God-position authority through grammatical form as much as through content. The Victim position is identifiable through a different cluster of patterns such as persecution vocabulary that positions opposition as systemic rather than individual (bureaucracies, elites, the media, the political class as collective antagonists rather than specific critics), the framing of attacks on the speaker as evidence of the attacker’s corruption or blindness, and the invocation of sacrifice as a source of authority (suffering for what is right, bearing a burden others refuse to carry). The simultaneous occupation of both positions is readable when these two clusters appear within the same passage or even within the same sentence. For example, the structure “I am the only one who sees this clearly, and they are trying to destroy me for saying it” performs both the God claim (exceptional perception) and the Victim claim (sacrificial persecution) in a single move.

3.3.3 Temporal structure

The analysis is organised into two temporal phases for each founder, separated by a rupture point. A rupture point, as used in this analysis, refers to a specific moment at which the institutional conditions of a founder’s discourse shift in ways that alter the strategic function of that discourse and not merely its content. A rupture is identified when the founder’s relationship to the institutions they are critiquing changes structurally, so that the same identity resources and propositions are now being deployed from a different position and to a different effect. For example, before a rupture point, a founder may describe governance problems from a position of relative exteriority to those problems. After it, they are operating from inside the structures they once critiqued, and the discourse shifts function accordingly. The test to identify

a rupture point, therefore, asks if there is a moment at which the founder's position in relation to existing political institutions changes in ways that transform what their governance discourse is doing, not just what it is saying.

For Thiel, this rupture point is 2016. Across Phase 1 (2007 to 2016), Thiel's governance discourse operates from a position of explicit exteriority. He diagnoses the inadequacy of democratic institutions, theorises the case for exceptional founder authority, and articulates the incompatibility of freedom and democracy, but does so from a position that is philosophically detached from the political structures under critique. He is writing about politics from outside the arena of political performance. The 2016 Republican National Convention speech marks a structural break from this position. It is not simply that the language becomes more urgent, though it does. It is that Thiel is now performing political authority within the very institutions he had previously theorised as inadequate. He is on a stage, in a hall, at a party convention, endorsing a presidential candidate. The discourse no longer describes governance from outside, it enacts a position within it. Phase 2 (2016 to 2025) is characterised by this shift from diagnosis to performance. The same core propositions recur, but now embedded in a register of political action rather than political critique. The 2016 speech is the boundary between these two functions.

For Musk, the rupture point is 2022. Across Phase 1 (2012 to 2022), Musk's governance discourse is characterised by what this analysis terms apolitical universalism. Governance claims are advanced through civilisational and technical framing that positions the speaker as above and beyond ordinary politics. In this phase, Mars colonisation, for example, is communicated as a species-level imperative. The authority it claims is existential rather than partisan. During this phase, Musk explicitly distances himself from conventional political categories. The Twitter acquisition in October 2022 is the rupture point by the criterion established above. Taking ownership of a platform that functions as a public communication architecture, making explicit arguments about its role as a "digital town square," and immediately exercising editorial and algorithmic authority over public discourse constitutes a structural shift from describing governance to enacting it. Phase 2 (2022 to 2025) follows from this position. Musk's discourse is now produced from inside the structures, which transforms the function of every claim he makes about democratic inadequacy, free speech, and institutional reform.

Through this temporal structure, the study can examine both what is invariant across phases and what changes between them (evidence that the discourse is responsive to its institutional context). Table 3 summarises the temporal structure.

Table 3. Temporal structure of the analysis: phases, registers, and rupture points

Founder	Phase	Period	Register and dominant mode	Rupture point / transition
Thiel	Phase 1	2007–2016	Philosophical critique from outside existing political structures. Diagnostic, theoretical. Core propositions established.	2016: Republican National Convention speech. Crosses from theorising exteriority to performing political interiority.
Thiel	Phase 2	2016–2025	Political mobilisation from within existing structures. Eschatological intensification: apocalypse as unveiling, ancien régime language, conspiratorial framing.	
Musk	Phase 1	2012–2022	Apolitical universalism. Governance claims embedded in civilisational and technical framing. Authority claimed as existential, not partisan.	2022: Twitter/X acquisition. Structural shift from describing governance to enacting it directly.
Musk	Phase 2	2022–2025	Partisan enactment. Governance discourse becomes explicit, urgent, and institutionally performed. DOGE as culmination: founder as direct state actor.	

3.3.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity in qualitative research refers to accounting for the researcher’s own position in relation to the object of study (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). In critical discourse analysis specifically, reflexivity is a methodological commitment. Fairclough (2003) is explicit that CDA is politically engaged scholarship, positioned against the naturalisation of power relations in discourse, and that the analyst’s interpretive choices are therefore never neutral. This does not make the analysis arbitrary, but it does require transparency about the conditions under which interpretive decisions are made.

The present study examines the governance discourse of two politically polarising figures. Peter Thiel and Elon Musk provoke strong reactions across the political spectrum, and a study that takes their discourse as its object risks being read as either an endorsement or a condemnation. However, the analytical motivation for selecting these cases is neither. As established in Sections 1.3 and 3.2, the selection is driven by the analytical richness, public accessibility, and sustained character of the governance discourse these figures produce. They

are chosen because they are the most developed instances of the phenomenon the research question addresses (founders who mobilise entrepreneurial identity to construct governance claims) and not because the study takes a position on the political desirability of those claims.

My own position as a researcher is that of a master's student in entrepreneurship, interpreting public texts produced by public figures for public audiences. I do not have a personal relationship with the subject matter in the way that an ethnographer embedded in a community would. The texts I analyse are published essays, speeches, social media posts, legal documents, and op-eds. They are available to anyone, and the interpretations I offer are grounded in the textual evidence the method makes visible. At the same time, I am making interpretive choices about which passages to foreground, which assumptions to name, and which intertextual connections to trace, and those choices are shaped by the critical orientation of the study. The framework developed in Chapter 2 directs attention to the ideological work that discourse performs: what it naturalises, what it authorises, and whose interests that naturalisation serves. This orientation does not predetermine the findings, but it does determine the questions that the findings are asked to answer. The analytical framework provides instruments for discovering what is in the texts and the critical orientation determines what the analysis does with what it discovers.

The interpretive labour the analysis depends upon should also be made explicit. The decision about what counts as a governance claim, about whether a given passage is operating in the God position, the Victim position, or both, and about where the rupture point in each case can be located, are decisions I made on the basis of the criteria specified in this chapter. Those criteria were developed iteratively in dialogue with the corpus and the framework, and they have been stated so that the reader can evaluate them rather than only the conclusions they produce.

Chapter 4: Analysis

The research question asks how entrepreneurial identity is mobilised to construct and legitimise governance claims, and the analysis is organised to answer that question through close reading of specific texts. The chapter proceeds thematically: Section 4.1 examines the critique of democracy and political institutions, Section 4.2 the framing of societal crises as governance failures, and Section 4.3 the construction of entrepreneurial actors as superior to existing political institutions. Within each thematic section, the texts are read through the analytical instruments specified in Section 3.1, with particular attention to vocabulary, grammatical construction, embedded assumptions, intertextual reference, and the God/Victim subject positions identified by Ibled (2025).

One of the central contributions of the thesis is that the analysis identifies a stable set of discursive operations that recurs across both founders, across the three thematic domains, and across the two temporal phases. These operations are not specified at this point because they are identified through the textual analysis. This discursive mechanism is elaborated on in Section 4.4, and its analytical and democratic implications are developed in Chapter 5.

4.1 Critique of Democracy and Political Institutions

The most direct governance claims in the corpus are those that address existing democratic institutions. Both Thiel and Musk produce texts in which democratic governance is represented as structurally incapable of addressing the problems the founders have identified.

Thiel: Democracy as structural inadequacy

The critique of democracy is most explicit and most sustained in Thiel's discourse, where it constitutes a core proposition that recurs across nearly two decades. In 'The Education of a Libertarian,' published in *Cato Unbound* in April 2009, Thiel writes: "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible" (Thiel, 2009). This sentence has received considerable attention in secondary literature, but its discursive architecture warrants close examination. At the textual level, the formulation deploys a first-person authority marker ("I") combined with a temporal shift ("no longer") that transforms the claim from a theoretical position into a personal conclusion reached through experience and reflection. The word "believe" locates the statement in the register of conviction rather than argument, placing it beyond the reach of the ordinary political debate it is rejecting. The formulation "freedom and democracy" presents

two concepts that in mainstream liberal discourse are treated as complementary (even as mutually constitutive) and asserts their incompatibility as a matter of settled judgement rather than a proposition to be defended. The grammatical structure of the sentence does not invite disagreement, it announces a conclusion.

At the level of discursive practice, the essay is embedded in a specific intellectual and institutional context. The *Cato Unbound* issue in which it appeared was titled ‘From Scratch,’ and its lead essay, by Patri Friedman, advocated creating libertarian enclaves outside the framework of normal democracy through a concept that would come to be known as “competitive governance” (Chafkin, 2021). Thiel’s contribution draws on this tradition but is, as Chafkin notes, “more pointed and seemed calibrated to cause a reaction” (2021, p. 140). The essay situates the incompatibility thesis in a historical narrative in which the 1920s were “the last decade in American history in which one could be genuinely optimistic about politics,” after which “the vast increase in welfare beneficiaries and the extension of the franchise to women” rendered “the notion of ‘capitalist democracy’ into an oxymoron” (Thiel, 2009). This historical narrative performs a particular kind of intellectual authority: it recasts the expansion of democratic participation (such as women’s suffrage and welfare provision) as the cause of democratic collapse rather than the fulfilment of democratic promise.

The essay’s proposed solution is exit rather than reform. Thiel argues that “the great task for libertarians is to find an escape from politics in all its forms” and identifies three “technological frontiers” through which this escape might be achieved: cyberspace, outer space, and seasteading (Thiel, 2009). The assumption embedded in this formulation is that freedom is a more fundamental value than collective self-governance, and that where the two conflict, democratic procedures are the expendable ones. This is not argued from first principles, it is assumed. The effect of this assumption is to reframe democracy as an obstacle to freedom, and thereby to establish the conceptual ground on which alternative governance arrangements become necessary. The essay concludes with a framing that is revealing for the God position: “The fate of our world may depend on the effort of a single person who builds or propagates the machinery of freedom that makes the world safe for capitalism” (Thiel, 2009). The singular individual whose effort determines the fate of the world is a direct articulation of the God position as described by Ibled (2025), the founder whose exceptional perception authorises governance claims that exceed democratic mandate.

A similar proposition appears in intensified form in Thiel’s 2025 *Financial Times* essay ‘A time for Truth and Reconciliation.’ The essay opens by recalling that President Obama told his

staff after Trump's 2016 victory that it was "not the apocalypse," and then redefines this term: "But understood in the original sense of the Greek word *apokálypsis*, meaning 'unveiling', Obama could not give the same reassurance in 2025" (Thiel, 2025). This etymological operation is a specific discursive move. Rather than accepting the conventional meaning of "apocalypse" as catastrophe, Thiel reclaims the Greek original and applies it to the collapse of the pre-Trump governing establishment. The *apokálypsis* is revelation: "Trump's return to the White House augurs the *apokálypsis* of the *ancien régime's* secrets" (Thiel, 2025). The vocabulary choice is revealing. "*Ancien régime*," borrowed from the historiography of the French Revolution, refers specifically to the political order that was overthrown and replaced. By applying it to contemporary democratic institutions, Thiel positions those institutions as historically exhausted, as structures whose time has passed and whose displacement is already underway.

The essay names the institutional actors whose governance it is critiquing through a concept Thiel attributes to his colleague Eric Weinstein. This concept, the "Distributed Idea Suppression Complex (DISC)," is defined as "the media organisations, bureaucracies, universities and government-funded NGOs that traditionally delimited public conversation" (Thiel, 2025). The essay then describes "the internet" as having "already begun our liberation from the DISC prison" (Thiel, 2025). The language of "prison" and "liberation" constructs the pre-Trump institutional order as a regime of active suppression, and positions the internet, whose major commercial architectures Thiel helped build, as the instrument of that liberation. The God and Victim positions are operative simultaneously. The speaker is both the liberator (God) and someone who has been imprisoned (Victim) by the institutional order he is now describing as collapsing.

The essay's closing paragraphs return to the stagnation thesis that Thiel has advanced since 2011, citing "the 50-year slowdown in scientific and technological progress" as one of the "deepest questions" the *ancien régime* "barely acknowledged, let alone answered" (Thiel, 2025). The essay concludes: "Perhaps an exceptional country could have continued to ignore such questions, but as Trump understood in 2016, America is not an exceptional country. It is no longer even a great one" (Thiel, 2025). This formulation performs a declinist narrative in which the speaker's willingness to state what others will not is itself an act of governance. The speaker positions himself as the truth-teller whose perception the *ancien régime* has suppressed, and whose truth can now be spoken because the regime is collapsing.

Musk: Democracy as inefficiency

Musk's critique of democratic institutions operates through a different register but arrives at a structurally similar destination. While Thiel argues that democracy is philosophically inadequate, Musk performs this critique through institutional action and through the vocabulary of entrepreneurial efficiency.

The DOGE op-ed, co-authored with Vivek Ramaswamy and published in the Wall Street Journal in November 2024, opens with a democratic legitimacy claim before inverting it: "Our nation was founded on the basic idea that the people we elect run the government. That isn't how America functions today" (Musk & Ramaswamy, 2024). The text then constructs the federal bureaucracy as a betrayal of the founding vision: "Most legal edicts aren't laws enacted by Congress but 'rules and regulations' promulgated by unelected bureaucrats" (Musk & Ramaswamy, 2024). The op-ed then describes this bureaucracy as "an existential threat to our republic" and arrives at a striking formulation: "This is antidemocratic and antithetical to the Founders' vision" (Musk & Ramaswamy, 2024). The discursive move is notable: the entrepreneurs calling the existing democratic state "antidemocratic" perform an inversion in which the entrepreneurial intervention (DOGE) is positioned as the restoration of democracy rather than its circumvention. The op-ed makes the identity claim explicit: "We are entrepreneurs, not politicians" (Musk & Ramaswamy, 2024). The assumption embedded in this framing is that the true democratic principle resides not in the institutions that democratic processes have actually produced but in a founding ideal that only non-institutional actors can now restore.

The Twitter acquisition in October 2022 enacts a related critique through commercial rather than argumentative means. Musk's first communication following the acquisition was the statement "the bird is freed" (Musk, 2022c). The brevity of the statement is itself a discursive performance as it does not argue for any proposition but assumes that the audience will recognise who was holding the bird captive and what "freedom" means in this context. In his open letter to advertisers, Musk described Twitter as "the common digital town square" and framed the acquisition as a rescue of public discourse from institutional gatekeeping (Musk, 2022b). The term "town square" draws on the vocabulary of democratic participation, evoking the physical spaces of direct democracy. The claim being made, however, is that the town square is better governed by a founder-owner than by either democratic institutions or the platform's previous structure.

The Starlink Terms of Service extend this critique to its jurisdictional limit. Under a section titled ‘Governing Law,’ the document stipulates that while services on Earth and the Moon follow California state law, Mars is treated differently: “the parties recognize Mars as a free planet and that no Earth-based government has authority or sovereignty over Martian activities. Accordingly, Disputes will be settled through self-governing principles, established in good faith, at the time of Martian settlement” (Starlink, 2022). The discursive significance of this passage is that it embeds a sovereignty claim in a commercial terms of service document, a genre ordinarily understood as a contract between a company and its customers, not as a constitutional instrument. The phrase “recognize Mars as a free planet” requires the user to assent to a governance proposition as a condition of receiving services. The assumption is that the entrepreneur’s commercial activity generates a legitimate basis for governance that is not derived from any prior political authority and does not require democratic consent.

God and Victim in the critique of democracy

Both cases advance the critique of democracy primarily from the God position, but the mechanism by which that position is constructed differs between them. In Thiel’s discourse, the God position is assembled through intellectual authority. His perception of the freedom-democracy incompatibility is presented as the conclusion of rigorous philosophical and historical reasoning that the political mainstream is incapable of following.

Musk’s God position operates through a different operation. In the DOGE op-ed, the governance claim is authorised by inversion (democratic institutions are reframed as “antidemocratic” and the entrepreneur is reframed as the restorer of democratic legitimacy). The mechanism here is the annexation of democratic vocabulary to a non-democratic argument. The reader cannot appeal to democratic principles against this governance claim because the claim has already appropriated those principles. The identity work this performs is the construction of the entrepreneur as the legitimate heir of the founding ideal, and the existing state apparatus as its betrayal.

The Victim position enters the critique at the moments when the God position alone risks appearing as mere arrogance. In Thiel’s 2025 essay, the vocabulary of “liberation from the DISC prison” constructs the speaker as someone who has been actively suppressed by the institutions he is describing as historically exhausted. The mechanism here is a temporal narrative, what the founder has been enduring privately is now publicly confirmed by the collapse of the regime. In Musk’s case, “the bird is freed” performs the same operation in three

words. The Musk victim position is more dispersed than Thiel's but no less central to the mechanism. Where Thiel constructs his victim position through a sustained intellectual narrative of suppression by an institutional class incapable of hearing him, Musk constructs his through an accumulation of persecution episodes that are then narrated as evidence of the institutional dysfunction the governance claims to diagnose. The "bird is freed" formulation implies a captor, and the surrounding texts make the captor explicit. Advertisers who withdrew under pressure, regulators who are described as obstructing free speech, journalists who are accused of fabricating harm, and a "woke mind virus" said to have captured the institutions from which Twitter is being rescued are the antagonists from whom liberation is required. The DOGE op-ed performs a parallel move at the level of state institutions. The "unelected bureaucrats" described as an "existential threat to our republic" (Musk & Ramaswamy, 2024) are the persecutors whose existence justifies the entrepreneurial intervention. The Victim position here authorises governance by inversion. Those who challenge the entrepreneurial action are reframed as the agents of the dysfunction that the action is correcting. The mechanism works even though the speaker is among the wealthiest individuals in the world, because the victim position is not about material vulnerability but about discursive positioning relative to a system the speaker is simultaneously claiming to rescue and claiming to be persecuted by.

4.2 Framing of Societal Crises as Governance Failures

The second thematic domain concerns how both founders construct crises and attribute their urgency to the failure of existing governance to address them. This framing performs a specific discursive function. It transfers the locus of the problem from the crisis to the institution, and in doing so, it creates the conditions under which entrepreneurial intervention becomes necessary.

Thiel: Stagnation as civilisational death

Thiel's crisis discourse is organised around a single recurring proposition: that technological progress has stalled, and that this stagnation is a symptom of deep institutional failure. The opening line of the 2009 Cato Unbound essay announces the stakes in terms that exceed ordinary political disagreement: "I remain committed to the faith of my teenage years: to authentic human freedom as a precondition for the highest good. I stand against confiscatory taxes, totalitarian collectives, and the ideology of the inevitability of the death of every

individual” (Thiel, 2009). The inclusion of mortality itself, “the inevitability of the death of every individual,” alongside taxation and collectivism transforms the political into the existential. The register in which the essay operates is thereby established from its first sentences as one in which political failure carries ultimate consequences.

This formulation is most compressed in *Zero to One*, where Thiel writes that “in business, equilibrium means stasis, and stasis means death” (Thiel & Masters, 2014, p. 34). At the textual level, this sentence deploys a chain of equivalences that collapses what might be understood as distinct conditions into a single trajectory. The word “equilibrium,” which in economic theory normally denotes a stable and even desirable state, is grammatically equated with its opposite. That is, not balance but paralysis, and ultimately, extinction. By importing the vocabulary of mortality into a discussion of market structure, Thiel transforms a proposition about innovation into a proposition about survival. The assumption embedded in this formulation is that any system that is not actively accelerating is dying. Democratic governance, which operates through deliberation, compromise, and incremental adjustment, is structurally incapable of the kind of acceleration Thiel describes. The crisis framing thus goes beyond identifying a problem, it eliminates democratic governance as a possible response.

This proposition intensifies across Thiel’s later work. In the 2011 National Review essay ‘The End of the Future,’ the title itself performs a crisis declaration. The essay constructs a before-and-after in which the mid-twentieth century represents a period of genuine civilisational progress and the decades since the 1970s represent decline. At the 2016 Republican National Convention, the same argument is compressed into a single sentence: “Instead of going to Mars, we have invaded the Middle East” (Thiel, 2016). This formulation is analytically significant because it condenses the entire stagnation thesis into a contrast between what technology could have achieved (Mars) and what democratic governance actually produced (war). The contrast assumes that the listener already shares the judgement that going to Mars would have been the correct use of civilisational resources, and the existence of war instead of going to Mars is self-evidently a governance failure. The 2009 essay frames the resulting situation as a “deadly race between politics and technology” in which “the future will be much better or much worse, but the question of the future remains very open indeed” (Thiel, 2009). This binary structure, in which the only possible outcomes are radical improvement or radical decline, eliminates gradualism as an option and thereby eliminates democratic deliberation (which is by nature gradualist) as a credible response.

At the level of discursive practice, the crisis-as-stagnation narrative draws on a specific intellectual genealogy. The Spenglerian tradition of civilisational decline, which Thiel invokes at the conclusion of ‘The Straussian Moment’ (2007) with a direct quotation in German from *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Thiel, 2007), provides the macro-historical framework. According to this framework, civilisations rise and fall, and the question is not whether decline will occur but whether it can be arrested. The libertarian tradition provides the diagnosis: it is the state, specifically the welfare state, that has produced the stagnation. The combination of these traditions produces a crisis discourse in which the urgency is existential and the cause is institutional.

By the time of the 2023 Oxford Union address, the crisis framing has acquired an explicitly eschatological register. Thiel compares the United Nations to the antichrist and argues that a technocratic world government would constitute a threat greater than Armageddon itself (Thiel, 2023a, as cited in Ibled, 2025, p. 637). The eschatological vocabulary shifts the register from political argument to theological revelation, positioning the speaker as someone who has perceived a truth that operates at the level of civilisational salvation and damnation. The 2025 Financial Times essay returns to the stagnation thesis, citing “the 50-year slowdown in scientific and technological progress” as one of the “deepest questions” the *ancien régime* “barely acknowledged, let alone answered” (Thiel, 2025). The same essay states: “The future demands fresh and strange ideas. New ideas might have saved the old regime” (Thiel, 2025). The phrase “fresh and strange” recurs from the opening of *Zero to One*, where it describes the result of the singular act of creation (Thiel & Masters, 2014, p. 1). This intertextual echo is revealing. By deploying the same vocabulary in both texts, Thiel links the entrepreneurial act of founding to the resolution of civilisational crisis. The “fresh and strange ideas” that the *ancien régime* failed to produce are, by implication, the province of founders. The continuity of this proposition across fourteen years of discourse (2011 to 2025) demonstrates that the crisis framing is constitutive rather than opportunistic.

Musk: Extinction and demographic collapse

Musk’s crisis discourse operates through different content but arrives at the same structural destination. The discursive starting point is the 2012 Caltech commencement speech, where Musk frames his entire career trajectory as a response to existential questions: “I always had an existential crisis, because I was trying to figure out ‘what does it all mean?’... if we can advance the knowledge of the world, if we can do things that expand the scope and scale of

consciousness, then we're better able to ask the right questions and become more enlightened. And that's the only way forward" (Musk, 2012). The phrase "the only way forward" performs a closure of alternatives: consciousness expansion through technological progress is the sole available path. The speech then describes the transition from PayPal to SpaceX in terms that construct the founder's choices as civilisationally motivated rather than commercially driven: "What are some of the other problems that are likely to most affect the future of humanity? It really wasn't from the perspective of, 'what's the best way to make money,' which is okay, but, it was really 'what do I think is going to most affect the future of humanity'" (Musk, 2012). The distinction between making money and affecting humanity's future constructs the founder as an agent whose motivations exceed the commercial domain. The God position is operative from the earliest text in the Musk corpus.

The most sustained crisis formulation appears in the 2017 paper 'Making Humans a Multiplanetary Species,' where Musk argues: "I think there are really two fundamental paths. History is going to bifurcate along two directions. One path is we stay on Earth forever, and then there will be some eventual extinction event... The alternative is to become a space-bearing civilization and a multi-planetary species" (Musk, 2017, p. 46). The textual structure presents exactly two options, extinction or multiplanetary settlement, with no intermediate possibility acknowledged. The word "bifurcate" performs a scientific-sounding partition of the future into binary alternatives, lending the argument the appearance of logical necessity rather than political preference. In the same paper, Musk frames the Mars programme in populist terms: "By talking about the SpaceX Mars architecture, I want to make Mars seem possible... There really is a way that anyone could go if they wanted to" (Musk, 2017). The phrase "anyone could go" constructs an image of universal access that sits in tension with the material realities of interplanetary travel. The discursive operation is significant. By framing the exit as open to "anyone," Musk naturalises a governance arrangement in which the deciding agent is a private corporation rather than a democratic polity, while deploying the language of democratic inclusion to legitimise it. Also in the same paper, Musk states: "The main reason I am personally accumulating assets is in order to fund this" (Musk, 2017, p. 57). This sentence takes the accumulation of personal wealth and reframes it as the material precondition for civilisational survival.

In Musk's Phase 2 discourse (post-2022), the crisis content shifts from existential risk and space colonisation to demographic collapse. In a series of social media posts across 2023 and 2024, Musk characterises population decline as "the biggest problem that humanity faces"

(Musk, 2024b). The textual features of these posts are distinctive. They deploy the superlative without qualification, treating the claim as self-evident. A related post declares: “Having children is saving the world” (Musk, 2023b). This formulation performs a specific discursive operation as it takes an intimate personal act and recasts it as a civilisational intervention. The verb “saving” imports the register of crisis response into the domain of reproduction, and the definite article “the world” elevates the stakes from the personal to the planetary. In another post, Musk extends the framing beyond immigration policy to a universal demographic claim: “Even countries that have very few immigrants, like Korea and Japan, are experiencing population collapse” (Musk, 2024a). By naming countries that cannot attribute demographic decline to immigration, Musk constructs population collapse as a systemic governance failure rather than a policy-specific issue. This shift is analytically significant because it reveals how crisis framing is a mobile discursive resource that can be redeployed as the speaker’s institutional context changes. That is, in Phase 1, Musk’s crisis discourse positioned him as a universalist visionary while in Phase 2, the same structural logic is mobilised in the service of a partisan political project.

God and Victim in crisis framing

The God position dominates the crisis framing across both cases. The founder who perceives the crisis occupies a position of perceptual superiority relative to the institutions that have failed to perceive it or act on it. The crisis is what the founder sees and what the political mainstream does not, and the act of naming it is itself a governance claim.

The Victim position surfaces at specific moments. In Thiel’s eschatological register, the intensity of the crisis positions the speaker as someone burdened by knowledge that others refuse to accept. The 2009 essay’s framing of the intellectual trajectory, from optimism to disillusionment to the recognition that “the prospects for a libertarian politics appear grim indeed” (Thiel, 2009), constructs the speaker as a figure whose political hopes have been defeated by current structures. In Musk’s case, the Victim position emerges most clearly when the demographic crisis framing intersects with public criticism: the founder who identifies “the biggest problem” facing humanity and is attacked for doing so occupies both positions simultaneously, the God who perceives the crisis and the Victim who suffers for perceiving it. In both cases, the effect of the crisis framing is to eliminate democratic governance as a credible response by defining the problem in terms that exceed what deliberative institutions can address.

4.3 Positioning of Entrepreneurial Actors as Superior to Existing Political Institutions

The third thematic domain is the most direct expression of ideological entrepreneurship as defined by Chalmers et al. (2025). This is the discursive construction of the entrepreneurial founder as a governance actor whose authority exceeds that of existing political institutions.

Thiel: The founder as king

The most explicit articulation of entrepreneurial superiority in the corpus is Thiel's Stanford lecture 'Founder as Victim, Founder as God' (Thiel & Masters, 2012a), which provides the title and organising framework for Ibled's (2025) analysis. In this lecture, Thiel argues that the "best arrangement" for a start-up is "a quasi-mythological structure where you have a king-like founder who can do more than in a democratic ruler" (Thiel & Masters, 2012a). At the textual level, "quasi-mythological" positions the start-up as a structure that participates in myth, drawing its authority from the same sources as the archetypes of pre-democratic governance. "King-like" is not a metaphor that hedges; the qualifier "like" normalises the comparison rather than diminishing it, presenting monarchical authority as the natural analogy for what a founder does. The assumption is that political authority is a function of capacity rather than mandate, and that the question of who should govern is answered by who can do the most rather than by who has been authorised through collective deliberation. It should be noted that the scapegoat and founder-as-victim section of the original Class 18 lecture was expunged from the published book *Zero to One* (Ibled, 2025, fn. 30). The analytical claims in this section therefore draw on the lecture notes rather than on the book.

The proposition that the founder occupies a category apart from ordinary actors is extended in *Zero to One* through Thiel's account of creation. The book's opening announces: "Every moment in business happens only once. The next Bill Gates will not build an operating system. The next Larry Page or Sergey Brin won't make a search engine" (Thiel & Masters, 2014, p. 1). This passage constructs the founder as radically singular: each act of founding is unrepeatable, and the founder who accomplishes it occupies a position that cannot be filled by imitation. The act of creation produces "something fresh and strange" (Thiel & Masters, 2014, p. 1), a formulation that locates the founder's authority outside the ordinary categories through which political legitimacy is assessed. If every founding moment is unique, then the founder's authority derives from irreplaceability rather than from mandate. Democratic governance,

which is by definition replaceable (one elected official can be substituted for another), cannot compete with this claim.

The same book extends the argument through the concept of monopoly. Thiel argues that “creative monopolies” produce “new products that benefit everybody” and constitute a superior form of economic and social organisation (Thiel & Masters, 2014, ch. 3). The discursive move is to take the commercial monopoly (which in democratic political economy is ordinarily understood as a market failure requiring regulatory correction) and recast it as the highest form of organisation. The start-up monopoly becomes a governance model: the company is, in Thiel’s framing, the last institution in the liberal world where planning is still possible, where a singular vision can be implemented without the compromises that democratic deliberation requires.

The intellectual genealogy of this positioning extends beyond the texts published under Thiel’s name. In a 2018 interview, Thiel reflects on the contemporary relevance of Ayn Rand: “When the Ayn Rand books were written in the 1950s, it felt like it was crazy... the last decade, it’s in many ways felt much more correct” (Thiel, 2018). This statement is revealing because it names an explicit intertextual resource. In Rand’s framework, the “builder” or “producer” is the heroic figure whose withdrawal from a parasitic society causes its collapse. Thiel’s use of the word “builder” at the 2016 Republican National Convention is legible as a Randian allusion: “I build companies... He is a builder, and it’s time to rebuild America” (Thiel, 2016). The vocabulary operates across texts: “builder” in the convention speech, “creative monopoly” in *Zero to One*, “king-like founder” in the Stanford lecture, and the Rand endorsement in the interview. Together they construct a coherent subject position in which entrepreneurial founding is treated as a higher form of governance than democratic politics.

The God position is operative throughout. The founder-king who creates monopolies, who perceives opportunities that competitive markets cannot, and whose act of creation produces something “fresh and strange,” occupies a subject position that is by definition inaccessible to institutional actors.

The Victim position appears in the same lecture through the figure of the scapegoat. Drawing on René Girard’s theory of sacrificial mechanism, Thiel argues that founders are structurally positioned as scapegoats: exceptional figures who are elevated by the community and then sacrificed when the community’s internal tensions require a target. As Ibled (2025, p. 641) documents, the vocabulary Thiel uses to describe scapegoats, “extremely powerful,”

“omnimalevolent” and “omnibenevolent,” “extreme outsider” and “extreme insider,” “worshipped” and “demonized,” is the same as that he uses for the founder. The simultaneous occupation of God and Victim is explicit and theorised in this text. The founder-king who governs through superior capacity is also the founder-scapegoat who suffers for governing. The governance claim acquires a sacrificial dimension: the founder’s right to govern comes at a personal cost, and that cost validates the authority in a register that democratic mandate cannot reach.

Musk: The founder as civilisational agent

Musk’s construction of entrepreneurial superiority operates through enactment rather than argument. While Thiel theorises the founder-king, Musk performs it through ventures and commercial actions that embed governance claims in material reality.

The 2012 Caltech commencement speech establishes the founding logic. After describing his transition from PayPal to SpaceX and Tesla, Musk concludes: “you guys are the magicians of the 21st century, don’t let anything hold you back. Imagination is the limit. Go out there and create some magic” (Musk, 2012). The speech opens with a quotation from Arthur C. Clarke: “A sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic” (Musk, 2012). The vocabulary of magic performs a specific discursive function. It removes the founder’s activity from the domain of ordinary economic rationality and positions it in a register of quasi-supernatural agency. Thiel deploys the same vocabulary in *Zero to One*, where he calls new technologies “miracles” (Thiel & Masters, 2014, p. 2). As Ibled (2025, p. 633) observes, this language presents the founder as a “thaumaturgist” who can “rewrite the plan of the world.” The convergence of vocabulary across both founders is analytically significant. Although they operate in different registers, they draw on the same discursive resource, the vocabulary of supernatural creation, to construct the founder as a figure whose capacities exceed what ordinary institutional actors can achieve.

The Mars colonisation programme is the most sustained expression of this positioning. As analysed in Section 4.1, the Starlink Terms of Service embed a sovereignty claim in a commercial document by requiring users to “recognize Mars as a free planet” (Starlink, 2022). What is significant for the present theme is what this passage assumes about the relationship between the entrepreneur and the state. The entrepreneur does not petition existing political authorities for permission to govern and the commercial document unilaterally declares the entrepreneur’s governance authority as an accomplished fact.

The DOGE initiative brings the same logic to terrestrial governance, but through an additional discursive layer. As examined in Section 4.1, the op-ed frames the existing bureaucratic state as “antidemocratic” (Musk & Ramaswamy, 2024). What the present section can add to that observation is the structural contradiction at the heart of the op-ed’s argument. The text complains that “most legal edicts aren’t laws enacted by Congress but ‘rules and regulations’ promulgated by unelected bureaucrats” (Musk & Ramaswamy, 2024). The word “unelected” positions electoral mandate as the sole legitimate source of authority. Yet the agent proposed as the solution, Musk himself, is equally unelected. The op-ed acknowledges this openly: “We are entrepreneurs, not politicians. We will serve as outside volunteers, not federal officials or employees” (Musk & Ramaswamy, 2024). The distinction between two kinds of unelected authority (the bureaucratic kind, which is illegitimate, and the entrepreneurial kind, which is legitimate) is never stated explicitly, but the text’s logic implies it: the entrepreneur’s authority derives from demonstrated capacity rather than from any democratic process. The op-ed closes by anticipating opposition in language that activates the Victim position: “We are prepared for the onslaught from entrenched interests in Washington. We expect to prevail” (Musk & Ramaswamy, 2024). The word “onslaught” constructs future criticism as aggression, and the founders’ willingness to endure it is presented as evidence of their commitment.

In contrast to the explicit philosophical character of Thiel’s governance claims, Musk’s authority claim is often communicated through an informal, social media register that performs its own legitimation. A 2021 post on X reads: “I am accumulating resources to help make life multiplanetary & extend the light of consciousness to the stars” (Musk, 2021). The phrasing “extend the light of consciousness to the stars” imports a quasi-spiritual vocabulary into what is materially a statement about personal wealth accumulation. This register is different from Thiel’s philosophical mode, but the discursive structure is parallel: private enrichment is reframed as civilisational mission, and the founder’s personal resources are presented as the instrument through which the species’ destiny is advanced.

Simultaneous occupation of the God and Victim Positions

The most analytically productive passages in this domain are those where the God and Victim positions are mobilised simultaneously. Among these, three stand out.

First, Thiel’s ‘Founder as Victim, Founder as God’ lecture (2012a), where the simultaneous occupation is explicitly theorised. The founder is the king and the scapegoat at once, and Thiel argues that this dual position is structurally necessary. That is, the community needs both the

visionary and the sacrifice, and the founder provides both. The governance claim that emerges is that the founder's authority is grounded in a sacrificial economy in which suffering is the price of vision.

Second, Thiel's 2025 Financial Times essay, which constructs the simultaneous occupation through a specific narrative arc. The essay describes "the old guard's war on the internet, a war the internet won" (Thiel, 2025), positioning the internet's founders as victors in a conflict against the ancien régime. The speaker is simultaneously the God who has won the war (the internet has triumphed) and the Victim who fought it from a position of suppression (the "DISC prison" analysed in Section 4.1). The essay then extends this into a call for "truth and reconciliation" (Thiel, 2025), a phrase borrowed from the lexicon of transitional justice. Applying it to the relationship between the technology sector and the democratic state positions the ancien régime as a rights-violating authority and the founders as its survivors. This framing closes the space for critique: to defend the ancien régime is to side with the prison against the prisoners.

Third, Thiel's 2009 essay contains a revealing passage in which the simultaneous occupation is performed through the rhetoric of provocation. In a follow-up response to critics, Thiel writes: "I had hoped my essay on the limits of politics would provoke reactions, and I was not disappointed" (Thiel, 2009). This sentence positions the speaker as someone who deliberately provokes (God: the truth-teller who is unafraid of consequences) and who then experiences the provoked reaction as confirmation of his thesis (Victim: the reactions prove that the political mainstream cannot tolerate the truths he has articulated). The discursive structure is one in which any response other than agreement is absorbed into the Victim narrative. In this sense, criticism becomes evidence of suppression, and suppression validates the critique.

In each of these passages, the simultaneous occupation of God and Victim closes the space for critique in the way the theoretical framework anticipated. To challenge the founder's governance claim is to confirm the Victim narrative, and to accept the Victim narrative is to accept the God position. The two positions are mutually reinforcing, and together they construct a form of authority that seems structurally immune to the kinds of challenge that democratic accountability is designed to provide. This is the domain where commercial authority and political authority become indistinguishable, and where ideological entrepreneurship as defined by Chalmers et al. (2025) is most directly observable as a discursive phenomenon.

4.4 Chapter Synthesis

The analysis across the three thematic domains has traced a coherent discursive mechanism. First, the selective deployment of vocabulary, grammatical structure, and rhetorical form to embed assumptions. Second, the drawing on established cultural and intellectual traditions to mobilise authority. Third, the construction of God and Victim positions, from which governance claims acquire their particular force. These three operations are the mechanism. Taken together, they answer the research question that asked “How prominent technology founders mobilise entrepreneurial identity to construct and legitimise visions of political governance in their public discourse?”

This operational mechanism works across all three thematic domains, and they work differently in each. In the critique of democracy, they produce a subject who perceives what institutions cannot. In the framing of crises, they produce a subject for whom acting is an existential obligation rather than a political preference. In the construction of entrepreneurial superiority, they produce a subject whose authority is grounded in capacity and sacrifice rather than mandate.

The two cases share this underlying mechanism while deploying it through different discursive modes. Thiel assembles the mechanism through explicit intellectual argument, drawing on philosophical and theological traditions that supply the historical depth and cultural authority the mechanism requires. Musk assembles it through institutional action and social media performance, embedding governance claims in commercial structures and in a register of informal directness that produces its own form of authority. What the two cases demonstrate together is that ideological entrepreneurship as a discursive phenomenon is a mechanism that is portable across textual formats and styles.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The analysis in Chapter 4 demonstrated the three-operation discursive mechanism. This chapter asks what that finding means for ideological entrepreneurship, what the comparative and temporal dimensions of the study reveal, and how the relationship between entrepreneurial discourse and democratic legitimacy should be understood.

5.1 Mechanism below ideology

Chalmers et al. (2025) correctly classify both founders as right-accelerationist ideological entrepreneurs, and their typology operates at the level of ideological content. That is, what actors believe, what institutional order they are contesting, and what they propose in its place. The comparative analysis in this study reveals a level of structure below that classification. Both founders share the same ideological position but deploy it through different rhetorical framings. Thiel's framing is one of explicit rejection where democratic governance is philosophically inadequate, and exit is the appropriate response. Musk's operates mostly through inversion, where existing institutions have betrayed the democratic founding ideal and the entrepreneurial intervention restores rather than rejects it. The same three-operation mechanism underlies both framings, which means that it is a structural property that operates below the level of ideological classification.

Fairclough (2003) distinguishes between text, discursive practice, and social practice as three dimensions of any communicative event. The ideological content of the governance claims lives at the level of social practice, in the specific orientation of the discourse toward a recognisable ideological position. The mechanism, by contrast, lives mostly at the level of discursive practice (the conventions, genres, and operations through which texts are produced and through which they draw on or reproduce). The Chalmers et al. typology analyses the social practice dimension. The present study shows that analysis at the level of discursive practice reveals an invariance that is invisible from the ideological classification alone.

A framework that classifies ideological entrepreneurs by content tells us what they are contesting and toward what end, but not how they construct the discursive authority to pursue it. The present study suggests that attending to this mechanism is a productive analytical strategy for analysing the governance claims of ideological entrepreneurs. It also raises the question (which this study cannot answer but future research could pursue) of whether the same

mechanism is available to ideological entrepreneurs with different ideological orientations, or whether it is specific to the right-accelerationist configuration examined here.

This invariance below the level of ideological content is not freestanding. The mechanism draws upon a specific cultural formation without which its operations would not be intelligible to the audiences it addresses. What Barbrook and Cameron (1996) named the Californian ideology, and what Turner (2010) traced through the absorption of countercultural suspicion of institutional authority into a celebration of entrepreneurial individualism, supplies the materials that the mechanism mobilises. The relationship is more active than the language of context or background suggests. The Californian ideology is a discursive resource that ideological entrepreneurs draw upon and intensify. Each of the three operations identified in Chapter 4 mobilises material that the Californian ideology has made available. The first operation embeds assumptions that this formation has spent five decades naturalising, such as the proposition that institutions obstruct what entrepreneurs would otherwise achieve, or that technological development is inherently liberatory. The second operation borrows authority from a tradition in which the technology founder has already been constituted as an exceptional civic agent rather than a private commercial actor. The third operation constructs God and Victim positions whose plausibility rests on the Californian ideology's prior installation of the visionary-disruptor archetype and its persecution narrative. Thiel's invocation of pre-revolutionary France, his recovery of classical political vocabulary, and his eschatological rereading of contemporary politics gather Californian-ideology materials and intensify them through philosophical elaboration. Musk's "town square" framing of Twitter, his characterisation of Mars settlement as a frontier project, and his positioning of DOGE as start-up logic applied to the state do the same work through institutional and performative means.

The ideological entrepreneur, in this sense, is an active intensifier of a cultural formation already in circulation. The mechanism does not invent the cultural authority of the founder. It deploys it, intensifies it, and converts it into specifically political claims. This clarifies what ideological entrepreneurship adds to Lubinski and Tucker's (2025) account of entrepreneurialism as a diffuse cultural ideology. They show that entrepreneurialism frames political choices in ways that position existing institutions as obstacles. The present study shows that specific actors can mobilise that diffuse formation in the specific domain of governance claims, through a structured discursive process that converts the general cultural authority of entrepreneurialism into the specific political authority of the governance claim.

5.2 Authority without argument

Weber (1922) distinguished charismatic authority from rational-legal authority on the grounds that the former derives from the recognition of extraordinary personal qualities rather than from institutional mandate or procedural adherence. The two cases in this study implement authority construction through different modes. Thiel constructs authority through philosophical genealogy and intellectual depth. His texts proceed by way of scholarly framing, etymological reasoning, and reference to political theology and the classical canon. The 2025 *Financial Times* essay opens by recovering the original meaning of *apokálypsis* as “unveiling,” and on that etymological ground proceeds to characterise the present moment as an apocalypse in which the institutional order is being exposed. The argumentative work is done by the etymology itself. Once the word has been redefined, the political claim follows as if by translation rather than by assertion. Musk constructs authority through institutional scale and platform reach. His texts are short, his most consequential utterances are issued on a platform he owns, and the speech act is reinforced by the institutional position from which it is made. The tweet “the bird is freed,” three words long, accomplishes a governance claim that Thiel would arrive at across several pages of philosophical preparation. The brevity is possible because the audience is already assembled, the platform is already his, and the inferential work is done by the institutional context rather than by the text.

What is structurally identical between these two modes is that governance claims arrive as presuppositions rather than as propositions. Thiel’s etymology presupposes that the present moment is what the recovered word names. Musk’s tweet presupposes that the bird was captive. In neither case is the audience invited to evaluate the underlying claim. The claim is embedded in the grammar of the utterance and emerges already accepted. This is the analytical sense in which the mechanism is the same despite the modes being so different. The intellectual resource in Thiel’s case, the classical tradition, and the institutional resource in Musk’s case, ownership of the platform on which the utterance lands, are different vehicles for the same operation.

The contrast with Weber is instructive. Weber’s charismatic authority depends on followers recognising extraordinary personal qualities in the leader. The mechanism examined here does not ask for recognition, it simply presupposes it. Where Weber’s charismatic figure must be seen and acknowledged as extraordinary in order for authority to be generated, the discourses of Thiel and Musk build extraordinariness into the structure of the utterance, so that the

audience is positioned as having already granted what Weber's account treats as the precondition of charismatic authority. This is not a refutation of Weber but an extension of him. It identifies a discursive technology through which the recognition Weber treated as the foundational act of charismatic authority is itself produced by the form of the utterance rather than secured prior to it.

5.3 The dynamic mechanism

The temporal analysis reveals something about the nature of ideological entrepreneurship as a governance practice. It is that discourse is not a fixed ideological property of the founder, but a responsive practice that adapts to changing institutional conditions.

The most significant finding here is the distinction between what this study terms "anticipatory" and "performative" governance discourse. Before the rupture point in each case, the discourse is anticipatory. It constructs the framework of perception and legitimacy within which alternative governance arrangements will eventually be justified. The propositions are directional rather than operational. They establish that existing institutions are inadequate, that founders have superior perceptual capacity, and that the criteria for legitimate authority are different from those democratic procedures produce. After the rupture, the same propositions function performatively. They legitimise governance arrangements that are already being enacted rather than arguing for arrangements that might one day exist. The discourse moves from building a case to naturalising a status quo. The transition between these two functions, and the fact that the same propositions and identity resources serve both, is not accounted for in existing frameworks for ideological entrepreneurship.

The temporal analysis also reveals a patterned adaptation in the Victim position. In both cases it intensifies after the rupture point, precisely when governance claims become materially consequential and institutional opposition becomes direct rather than hypothetical. The discourse responds to and is shaped by the institutional conditions in which it is embedded. The Victim position is latent when governance claims are theoretical and becomes central when those claims are enacted and challenged. It functions as the mechanism's adaptive component, the part that absorbs institutional opposition and converts it into further validation of the claim being challenged.

Both patterns remain visible beyond the corpus endpoint and have intensified in the months since. The remainder of this section steps outside the analytical corpus delimited in Chapter 3

to consider how those patterns continue to operate. Its purpose is to illustrate the ongoing relevance of the analytical findings to a phenomenon that continues to unfold while this thesis is being completed, and to indicate how the dynamic mechanism propagates beyond the texts that the thesis has formally analysed.

Thiel's invitation-only lecture series on the Antichrist, delivered to selective audiences in San Francisco in autumn 2025, and continued in Paris and Rome in early 2026, extends his post-rupture eschatological register into the territory of the private elite seminar. The form itself is analytically significant. The selectivity of the seminar structurally enacts the God position, since the audience is positioned as those capable of receiving knowledge that institutional discourses cannot accommodate, while the Italian politicians' reactions in response to the Rome lectures (Bove, 2026) confirm the Victim narrative. Thiel's use of the Antichrist figure to designate those who advocate slowing technological development as "legionnaires of the Antichrist," and his identification of figures such as Greta Thunberg as exemplars of this category (Lichtenberg, 2026), illustrates the post-rupture mechanism precisely. The propositions that were anticipatory in his earlier corpus are now performative. They legitimise the political and infrastructural rearrangements that Thiel-backed projects are materially enacting through Palantir, Founders Fund portfolio companies, and the political careers of allies, including Vice President J.D. Vance.

The Musk pattern continues in a structurally parallel way. After his departure from the Department of Government Efficiency in late May 2025, Musk's discourse intensified rather than receded. On 5 July 2025, following his public fallout with President Trump over the latter's signature spending legislation, Musk announced on X the formation of the "America Party" (Musk, 2025), framed in his words as a vehicle to "give back" freedom to the American people and as a response to what he termed the "two-party (some would say uniparty) system" (Shorman, 2025). The vocabulary is continuous with "the bird is freed" three years earlier (Musk, 2022c). Governance claims arrive as presuppositions: that the system is captive, that the people are unfree, and that the founder is the agent of release.

The mechanism also propagates beyond Thiel through the institutional ecology he has constructed. In April 2026, Palantir Technologies, the data-analytics company Thiel co-founded in 2003 and where he remains chairman of the board (Allyn, 2025), posted a twenty-two-point manifesto on X under the corporate account (Palantir Technologies, 2026), condensing the argument of CEO Alex Karp and Nicholas Zamiska's 2025 book *The Technological Republic* (Karp & Zamiska, 2025). The post is not Thiel speaking, but the

intellectual and institutional continuity with his discourse is direct. Karp, who co-founded Palantir alongside Thiel, has described the shared project as developing intelligence tools to “power the West to its obvious, innate superiority” (Allyn, 2025), and the manifesto proceeds through the same three operations identified in this study. Governance claims arrive as presuppositions rather than propositions, as in the assertion that “the ability of free and democratic societies to prevail requires something more than moral appeal. It requires hard power, and hard power in this century will be built on software” (Palantir Technologies, 2026). Authority is borrowed from civilisational and theological registers in claims about “the West” and about pluralism being an insufficient cultural glue. And the God and Victim positions are simultaneously occupied. The “we” of the manifesto is positioned as a perceptual elite that sees what the dominant inclusivity culture cannot, asserting that “some cultures have produced vital advances; others remain dysfunctional and regressive” (Palantir Technologies, 2026), and as a persecuted minority defending the West against an internal elite that is “intolerant of religious belief” (Palantir Technologies, 2026). That a publicly traded corporation chaired by Thiel posted a governance manifesto from its corporate account, drawing widespread commentary including charges of “technofascism” (Karpf, 2026), is itself evidence that the mechanism examined in this study has become a routine vocabulary for actors aligned with the discursive formation traced here. The manifesto’s defence of Musk by name is also worth noting. Point 16 frames Musk as a figure the culture “almost snickers” at, whose “interest in grand narrative” is treated with “thinly veiled scorn” (Palantir Technologies, 2026). Coming from a corporate vehicle that Thiel built, this is the moment when the discourse, which the present study has analysed as the parallel projects of two founders, names itself as a community.

Taken together, these post-corpus developments suggest that the dynamic identified in this study is not exhausted and the mechanism continues to reconfigure as institutional conditions change. It propagates beyond the individual founder through the corporate vehicles he has built. It absorbs new antagonists into the same Victim structure. And it makes its claims with increasing condensation and explicitness as the political infrastructure required to enact them comes into being.

5.4 Democratic implications

The mechanism’s relationship to democratic accountability is the final dimension requiring interpretation. Democratic governance rests on a set of interlocking legitimacy requirements. Authority derives from electoral mandate, is exercised through procedures that are in principle

publicly arguable, and is subject to review through established accountability mechanisms. The analysis demonstrates that the three operations address each of these requirements in a structurally consistent way. Electoral mandate is pre-empted by grounding the founder's authority in criteria that no electoral outcome produces or revokes. The requirement for public argumentation is addressed by embedding governance claims as presuppositions rather than propositions, so that the claims never appear as positions to be argued for but as the background conditions from which argument proceeds. Accountability mechanisms are addressed by the Victim position, where institutional challenge is reframed as persecution by a corrupt or failing order.

It is important to note that the analysis does not establish that these three operations are deliberately coordinated against democratic legitimacy. What it does establish is that they are structurally consistent in their effects. Taken together, they construct a form of governance authority that occupies the space democratic legitimacy requirements would otherwise fill, while remaining resistant to the forms of challenge those requirements are designed to enable. This is what makes ideological entrepreneurship, in the form examined here, a phenomenon of democratic consequence rather than a discursive curiosity. The mechanism through which the founders construct governance authority is structured in ways that make democratic accountability ineffective against it, and the distinction between these two things matters for how the phenomenon is understood and how its consequences might be addressed.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Findings and Contributions

Before stating the contributions of this study, it is necessary to clarify how it relates to Ibled (2025), the only existing study that analyses the same two cases through the same conceptual framework. Ibled demonstrates that Thiel and Musk construct an entrepreneurial subject that simultaneously occupies the position of God and Victim, and she shows that this double construction is central to how the founder figure is culturally sustained in neoliberal contexts. She reaches these conclusions through a psychoanalytic framework drawing on Freudian and Lacanian theory, and her focus is the fantasmatic structure of the founder figure. What Ibled does not address is how that structure is assembled in specific texts, through specific vocabulary choices, grammatical patterns, and embedded assumptions, nor how it functions as a mechanism for constructing political governance authority. This thesis takes the God/Victim framework from Ibled as an established structural insight and asks what Faircloughian CDA can reveal about how that structure operates at the textual level and what institutional authority it produces. The two studies are therefore complementary rather than overlapping. Ibled establishes what the founder figure is at the level of cultural fantasy. This thesis shows how it is built in language and what governance claims it supports.

The research question guiding this study asked how prominent technology founders mobilise entrepreneurial identity to construct and legitimise visions of political governance in their public discourse. The answer this study found is that this is done through a three-operation discursive mechanism in which governance claims are embedded as assumptions rather than advanced as arguments, authority is borrowed from established cultural and intellectual traditions that exceed the individual founder, and subject positions are constructed that simultaneously place the founder above ordinary political actors and validate that elevation through sacrificial suffering. These three operations work cumulatively, and their combined effect is a form of governance authority that occupies the space that democratic legitimacy requirements would otherwise fill while remaining structurally resistant to the forms of challenge those requirements are designed to enable.

The mechanism delivers a distinctive mode of authority. The two cases construct authority through different vehicles, Thiel through philosophical genealogy and Musk through institutional scale and platform reach, but the structural operation is the same. In both,

governance claims arrive as presuppositions rather than as positions to be argued. This is an extension of Weber's account of charismatic authority. Where Weber's charismatic figure must be recognised as extraordinary before authority can be generated, the mechanism examined here builds extraordinariness into the form of the utterance itself, so that recognition is presupposed by the grammar rather than secured by it.

The temporal dimension of the mechanism is a further finding. The discourse moves from an anticipatory function, in which propositions establish the conditions of legitimacy for governance arrangements that do not yet exist, to a performative function, in which the same propositions legitimise governance arrangements that are already being enacted. The Victim position intensifies after the rupture point in both cases, precisely when governance claims become materially consequential and institutional opposition becomes direct. This is the adaptive component of the mechanism, the part that absorbs institutional challenge and converts it into further validation of the claim being challenged.

The study's primary contribution to ideological entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship studies in general is the specification of this mechanism. Chalmers et al. (2025) establish that ideological entrepreneurs employ venture creation and entrepreneurial identity as vehicles for political world-building, and correctly identify Thiel and Musk as right-accelerationist instances of this phenomenon. What they do not specify is how the construction of governance authority operates at the level of discourse. The present study fills that gap. By demonstrating the mechanism across three thematic domains and two cases with different rhetorical framings of the same underlying ideological position, it shows that the mechanism is a structural property of this form of governance discourse.

The study also contributes to the Entrepreneurship Research 4.0 agenda as identified by Kirsch, Wadhwani and Welter (2025). Kirsch, Wadhwani and Welter (2025) identify the political contexts of entrepreneurship and the relationship between entrepreneurial agency and governmental authority as the terrain a fourth era of entrepreneurship research needs to address. The present study demonstrates what attending to that terrain may look like in practice. It shows that the relationship between entrepreneurial agency and governmental authority is not limited to a sociological or institutional topic to be studied at a macro level. It is an active discursive construction that can be traced at the level of specific vocabulary choices, grammatical structures, intertextual references, and embedded assumptions in specific texts. A further contribution is to the concept of "entrepreneurialism". Lubinski and Tucker (2025) argue that entrepreneurialism extends entrepreneurial logic into social life as a diffuse cultural ideology.

The present study refines this account by identifying the Californian ideology as an active discursive resource rather than a passive cultural backdrop. The mechanism examined here is the process through which ideological entrepreneurs draw upon and intensify that resource, converting its diffuse cultural authority into specifically political governance claims.

The study also makes the God and Victim framework of Ibled (2025) available for broader empirical application. By translating this psychoanalytic structural insight into identifiable textual operations, the present study shows that the simultaneous occupation of these subject positions can be traced in specific vocabulary choices, grammatical patterns, and intertextual references. The temporal dimension adds a further conceptual contribution. It identifies a distinction between anticipatory and performative governance discourse and shows that the Victim position intensifies when governance claims become materially consequential. This reveals that ideological entrepreneurship is a dynamic discursive practice responsive to institutional context rather than a fixed ideological formation of the individual founder. This dynamic dimension is absent from the existing literature on the phenomenon.

Lastly, the study demonstrates that Faircloughian Critical Discourse Analysis is a productive method for the study of ideological entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship studies in general. The three-dimensional model and the specific instruments of intertextuality and assumption analysis are shown to generate findings that the existing entrepreneurship literature has not yet used extensively.

6.2 Limitations

The study has several limitations such as the two-case limit. Two cases are sufficient to demonstrate that the mechanism is not idiosyncratic to only one founder, but they are not conclusive in establishing how widely it operates. It is also a limitation that these two cases are drawn from the same national and cultural context. Whether the mechanism operates similarly in political cultures where these specific formations are differently configured, or absent, is a question this study raises but cannot answer. Another limitation is that the analytical procedure is explicitly selective. It performs close reading on the richest passages rather than systematic coverage of the entire corpus. This is a methodological commitment grounded in the nature of CDA, but it also carries a cost. The selection of which passages to read closely is an interpretive decision, and different selections might have foregrounded different features of the mechanism or revealed aspects of the discourse that the present analysis does not capture. The study cannot claim to have exhausted what the corpus contains.

Moreover, the study cannot address how the governance discourse is received, by which audiences, and with what effects. Whether the mechanism succeeds in producing the authority it claims is a question about reception that discourse analysis alone cannot answer. A complete account of how ideological entrepreneurship functions as a governance force would require pairing this analysis with an account of how the discourse circulates, how it is accepted or contested, and by which institutional actors. That pairing exceeds the scope of the present study.

6.3 Directions for Future Research

The most productive immediate extension of this study is cross-ideological application. If the mechanism is structural, it should in principle be detectable in governance discourse produced by founders with different ideological orientations. Applying the same analytical procedure to left-accelerationist or degrowth ideological entrepreneurs would test whether the mechanism is specific to right-accelerationist Silicon Valley discourse or operates more widely.

Extending the framework to cases outside the American context would address a significant limitation of the present study. Cases of technology-founder governance discourse in European, East Asian, or Global South contexts would reveal whether the institutional targets, the available intertextual resources, and the cultural authority of the entrepreneurial subject position operate similarly elsewhere, or whether the American case is a specific configuration that the framework captures without being generalisable beyond it.

The temporal structure used in the present study, organised around rupture points and phases, could be extended into a fully longitudinal analysis that tracks the evolution of specific formulations, vocabulary choices, and subject positions across the complete corpus of each founder over time. This would add analytical depth to the finding that governance discourse is context-responsive, and it would make it possible to trace with greater precision how specific events and institutional developments alter the mechanism's deployment.

Combining the discursive analysis developed here with reception research is another possible direction for future research. Understanding the conditions under which specific audiences accept the embedded assumptions, recognise the identity positions, and receive the governance claims as authoritative would move the field from a structural account of how governance authority is constructed to a causal account of when and why it succeeds. Finally, pairing

discourse analysis with institutional analysis of specific governance outcomes would produce the fullest available account of ideological entrepreneurship as a governance phenomenon.

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Appendix A – Use of AI Tools

The following tools were utilized during the writing process of this thesis:

- Scopus AI: Utilized during the exploratory phase of the research to assist in brainstorming, identifying relevant academic literature, and mapping the theoretical intersections between entrepreneurship, political sociology, and critical discourse.
- Claude: Employed as an editorial assistant. The tool was used to refine the language and improve the logical flow of the prose.
- Grammarly: Used throughout the drafting process for continuous proofreading, grammatical corrections, and punctuation checks to ensure the text adhered to formal writing standards.