



#AC CEL ERA TE#

editors

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URBANOMIC

Introduction

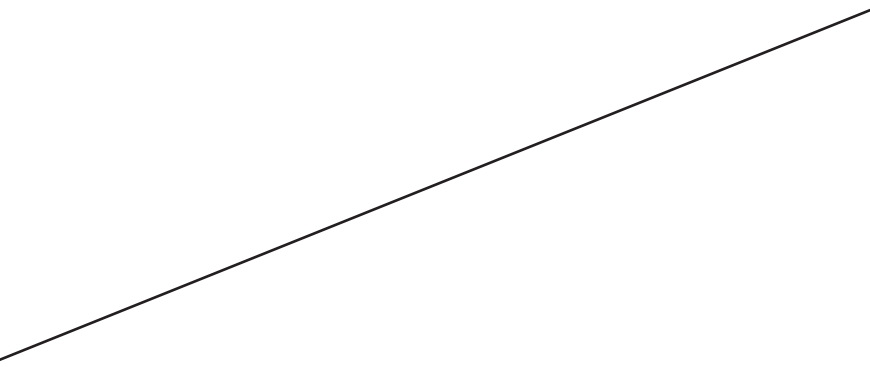
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#ACCELERATE: The Accelerationist Reader (ISBN 978-0-9575295-5-7)

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1858

The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power.

Karl Marx

1970

Just as the merging of the divided sexual, racial, and economic classes is a precondition for sexual, racial, or economic revolution respectively, so the merging of the aesthetic with the technological culture is the precondition of a cultural revolution.

Shulamith Firestone

1994

Catastrophe is the past coming apart. Anastrophe is the future coming together. Seen from within history, divergence is reaching critical proportions. From the matrix, crisis is a convergence misinterpreted by mankind.

Sadie Plant + Nick Land

2013

The most important division in today's Left is between those that hold to a folk politics of localism, direct action, and relentless horizontalism, and those that outline what must become called an accelerationist politics at ease with a modernity of abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology.

Alex Williams + Nick Srnicek

#ACCELERATE

Accelerationism is a political heresy: the insistence that the only radical political response to capitalism is not to protest, disrupt, or critique, nor to await its demise at the hands of its own contradictions, but to accelerate its uprooting, alienating, decoding, abstractive tendencies. The term was introduced into political theory to designate a certain nihilistic alignment of philosophical thought with the excesses of capitalist culture (or anticulture), embodied in writings that sought an immanence with this process of alienation. The uneasy status of this impulse, between subversion and acquiescence, between realist analysis and poetic exacerbation, has made accelerationism a fiercely-contested theoretical stance.

At the basis of all accelerationist thought lies the assertion that the crimes, contradictions and absurdities of capitalism have to be countered with a politically and theoretically progressive attitude towards its constituent elements. Accelerationism seeks to side with the emancipatory dynamic that broke the chains of feudalism and ushered in the constantly ramifying range of practical possibilities characteristic of modernity. The focus of much accelerationist thinking is the examination of the supposedly intrinsic link between these transformative forces and the axiomatics of exchange value and capital accumulation that format contemporary planetary society.

This stance apparently courts two major risks: on the one hand, a cynical resignation to a *politique du pire*, a politics that must hope for the worst and can think the future only as apocalypse and *tabula rasa*; on the other, the replacement of the insistence that capitalism will die of its internal contradictions with a championing of the market whose supposed radicalism is indistinguishable from the passive acquiescence into which political power has devolved. Such convenient extremist caricatures, however, obstruct the consideration of a diverse set of ideas united in the claim that a truly progressive political thought—a thought that is not beholden to inherited authority,

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ideology or institutions—is possible only by way of a future-oriented and realist philosophy; and that only a politics constructed on this basis can open up new perspectives on the human project, and on social and political adventures yet to come. This assumption that we are at the *beginning* of a political project, rather than at the bleak terminus of history, seems crucial today in order to avoid endemic social depression and lowering of expectations in the face of global cultural homogenization, climate change and ongoing financial crisis. Confronting such developments, and the indifference of markets to their human consequences, even the keenest liberals are hard-pressed to argue that capitalism remains the vehicle and sine qua non of modernity and progress; and yet the political response to this situation often seems to face backwards rather than forwards.

Despair seems to be the dominant sentiment of the contemporary Left, whose crisis perversely mimics its foe, consoling itself either with the minor pleasures of shrill denunciation, mediated protest and ludic disruptions, or with the scarcely credible notion that maintaining a grim 'critical' vigilance on the total subsumption of human life under capital, from the safehouse of theory, or from within contemporary art's self-congratulatory fog of 'indeterminacy', constitutes resistance. Hegemonic neoliberalism claims there is no alternative, and established Left political thinking, careful to desist from Enlightenment 'grand narratives', wary of any truck with a technological infrastructure tainted by capital, and allergic to an entire civilizational heritage that it lumps together and discards as 'instrumental thinking', patently fails to offer the alternative it insists must be possible, except in the form of counterfactual histories and all-too-local interventions into a decentred, globally-integrated system that is at best indifferent to them. The general reasoning is that if modernity=progress=capitalism=acceleration, then the only possible resistance amounts to deceleration, whether through a fantasy of collective organic self-sufficiency

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or a solo retreat into miserablism and sagacious warnings against the treacherous counterfinalities of rational thought.

Needless to say, a well-to-do liberal Left, convinced that technology equates to instrumental mastery and that capitalist economics amounts to a heap of numbers, in most cases leaves concrete technological nous and economic arguments to its adversary—something it shares with its more radical but equally technologically illiterate academic counterparts, who confront capitalism with theoretical constructs so completely at odds with its concrete workings that the most they can offer is a faith in miraculous events to come, scarcely more effectual than organic folk politics. In some quarters, a Heideggerian *Gelassenheit* or 'letting be' is called for, suggesting that the best we can hope for is to desist entirely from destructive development and attempts to subdue or control nature—an option that, needless to say, is also the prerogative of an individualised privileged spectator who is the subjective product of global capital.

From critical social democrats to revolutionary Maoists, from Occupy mic checks to post-Frankfurt School mutterings, the ideological slogan goes: There must be an outside! And yet, given the real subsumption of life under capitalist relations, what is missing, precluded by reactionary obsessions with purity, humility, and sentimental attachment to the personally gratifying rituals of critique and protest and their brittle and fleeting forms of collectivity? Precisely any pragmatic criteria for the identification and selection of elements of this system that might be effective in a concrete transition to another life beyond the iniquities and impediments of capital.

It is in the context of such a predicament that accelerationism has recently emerged again as a leftist option. Since the 2013 publication of Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek's '#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics' [MAP], the term has been adopted to name a convergent group of new theoretical enterprises that aim to

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conceptualise the future outside of traditional critiques and regressive, decelerative or restorative 'solutions'. In the wake of the new philosophical realisms of recent years, they do so through a recusal of the rhetoric of human finitude in favour of a renewed Prometheanism and rationalism, an affirmation that the increasing immanence of the social and technical is irreversible and indeed desirable, and a commitment to developing new understandings of the complexity this brings to contemporary politics. This new movement has already given rise to lively international debate, but is also the object of many misunderstandings and rancorous antagonism on the part of those entrenched positions whose dogmatic slumbers it disturbs. Through a reconstruction of the historical trajectory of accelerationism, this book aims to set out its core problematics, to explore its historical and conceptual genealogy, and to exhibit the gamut of possibilities it presents, so as to assess the potentials of accelerationism as both philosophical configuration and political proposition.

But what does it mean to present the history of a philosophical tendency that exists only in the form of isolated eruptions which each time sink without trace under a sea of unanimous censure and/or dismissive scorn? Like the 'broken, explosive, volcanic line' of thinkers Gilles Deleuze sought to activate, the scattered episodes of accelerationism exhibit only incomplete continuities which have until now been rendered indiscernible by their heterogeneous influences and by long intervening silences. At the time of writing we find a contemporary accelerationism in the process of mapping out a common terrain of problems, but it describes diverse trajectories through this landscape. These paths adjust and reorient themselves daily in a dialogue structured by the very sociotechnologies they thematize, the strategic adoption of the tag #accelerate having provided a global address through which to track their progress and the new orientations they suggest.

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If a printed book (and even more so one of this length) inevitably seems to constitute a deceleration in relation to such a burgeoning field, it should be noted that this reflective moment is entirely in keeping with much recent accelerationist thought. The explicit adoption of an initially rather pejoratively used term¹ indicates a certain defiance towards anticipated attacks. But it also indicates that a revisionary process is underway—one of refining, selecting, modifying and consolidating earlier tendencies, rebooting accelerationism as an evolving theoretical program, but simultaneously reclaiming it as an untimely provocation, an irritant that returns implacably from the future to bedevil the official sanctioned discourse of institutional politics and political theory. This book therefore aims to participate in the writing of a philosophical counterhistory, the construction of a genealogy of accelerationism (not the only possible one—other texts could have been included, other stories will be told), at the same time producing accelerationism ‘itself’ as a fictional or hyperstitional anticipation of intelligence to come.

This revisionary montage proceeds in four phases, first setting out three sets of historical texts to be appropriated and reenergized by the undecided future of accelerationism following the appearance of the MAP, and subsequently bringing together a sequence of contemporary accelerationist texts galvanized by the Manifesto’s call.

ANTICIPATIONS

The first section features late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century thinkers who, confronted with the rapid emergence of an integrated globalised industrial complex and the usurpation of inherited

1. The term ‘accelerationism’ was initially coined by Roger Zelazny in his 1967 SF novel *Lord of Light*, and taken up as a critical term by Benjamin Noys in *The Persistence of the Negative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 4–9. Noys continues his meditation on accelerationism in *Malign Velocities: Acceleration and Capitalism* (London: Zer0, 2014).

value-systems by exchange value, attempted to understand the precise nature of the relation between technical edifice and economic system, and speculated as to their potential future consequences for human society and culture.

Karl Marx is represented in perhaps his most openly accelerationist writing, the *Grundrisse*'s 'Fragment on Machines'. Here Marx documents the momentous shift between the worker's use of tools as prosthetic organs to amplify and augment human cognitive and physical abilities (labour power), and machine production properly speaking, dating the latter to the emergence of an integrated 'automatic system of machines' wherein knowledge and control of nature leveraged as industrial process supplant direct means of labour. Within this system, the worker increasingly becomes a prosthesis: rather than the worker animating the machine, the machine animates the worker, making him a part of its 'mighty organism', a 'conscious organ' subject to its virtuosity or 'alien power'. Individuals are incorporated into a new, machinic culture, taking on habits and patterns of thought appropriate to its world, and are irreversibly resubjectivized as social beings.

In *Erewhon*'s 'Book of the Machines', **Samuel Butler** develops Marx's extrapolations of the machine system into a full-scale machinic delirium, extending an intrinsic science-fictional aspect of his theoretical project which also entails a speculative anthropology: if technology is bound up with the capitalist decanting of primitive and feudal man into a new mode of social being, then a speculation on what machines will become is also a speculation on what the human is and might be. In line with the integration that at once fascinates Marx and yet which he must denounce as a fantasy of capital, Butler's vision, a panmachinism that will later be inspirational for Deleuze and Guattari, refuses any special natural or originary privilege to human labour: Seen from the future, might the human prove nothing but a pollinator of a machine civilization to come?

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Refusing such machinic fatalism, **Nicolai Fedorov's** utopian vision reserves within a 'cosmist' vision of expansion a Promethean role for man, whose scientific prowess he sees as capable of introducing purposefulness into an otherwise indifferent and hostile nature. Fedorov exhorts mankind to have the audacity to collectively invest in the unlimited and unknown possibilities this mastery of nature affords him: to abandon the modesty of earthly concerns, to defy mortality and transcend the parochial planetary habitat. It is only by reaching beyond their given habitat, according to Fedorov, that humans can fulfill their collective destiny, rallying to a 'common task'.

Thorstein Veblen, famously the author of *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, takes up the question of the insurrectionary nature of scientific and technical change as part of his evolutionary analysis of developments in modern capitalism (the emergence of monopolies and trusts). For Veblen it is not the proletariat but the technical class, the scientists and engineers, who ultimately promise to be the locus of revolutionary agency; he sees the tendencies of the machine system as being at odds with the ethos of business enterprise, which, ultimately, is just one more institutional archaism to be sloughed off in the course of its development. Significant also is Veblen's refusal to conceive 'culture' narrowly in an ameliorative role, offering compensation for the 'social problems' triggered by the reshaping of individuals and social relations in accordance with the automatism and standardization of the machine system: instead he insists that this process be understood as a radical transformation of human culture, and one that will outlive its occasional cause—an assumption shared by Fedorov in his vision of a 'multi-unity' allied in the 'common task' and armed with the confidence in the capacity of science and engineering to reshape the human life-world.

All of the core themes of accelerationism appear in germ in the projects of these writers, along with the variety of forms—descriptive,

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prescriptive, utopian, fictional, theoretical, scientific, realist—in which they will later be developed. The speculative extrapolation of the machine process, the affirmation that this process is inextricably social, technical and epistemic; the questioning of its relation to capitalism, the indifferent form of exchange-value and its corrosion of all previous social formations and subjective habits; and its effect upon culture and the new possibilities it opens up for the human conceived not as an eternal given, fated to suffer the vicissitudes of nature, but as a historical being whose relation to nature (including its own), increasingly mediated through technical means, is mutable and in motion.

FERMENT

The second section belongs predominantly to a moment in modern French philosophy that sought to integrate a theoretical analysis of political economy with an understanding of the social construction of human desire. Galvanized by the still uncomprehended events of May '68 and driven to a wholesale rejection of the stagnant cataracts of orthodox party politics, these thinkers of the 'Marx-Freud synthesis' suggest that emancipation from capitalism be sought not through the dialectic, but by way of the polymorphous perversion set free by the capitalist machine itself. In the works of Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard, and Lipovetsky, the indifference of the value-form, the machine composition of labour, and their merciless reformatting of all previous social relations is seen as the engine for the creation of a new fluid social body. It is the immanence with universal schizophrenia toward which capital draws social relations that promises emancipation here, rather than the party politics that, no doubt, paled by comparison with the oneiric escapades of '68. It is at this point that the credo of accelerationism is for the first time openly formulated—most explicitly by Gilles Lipovetsky: “[R]evolutionary actions” are not those which aim to overthrow the system of Capital, which has never

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ceased to be revolutionary, but those which complete its rhythm in all its radicality, that is to say actions which accelerate the metamorphic process of bodies'.

In 'Decline of Humanity?', **Jacques Camatte** extends the reflections of Marx and Veblen on the 'autonomization of capital', arguing that, in testing to the limit certain ambivalent analyses in Marx's thought, it reveals shortcomings in his thinking of capital. Marx claims that capital blocks its own 'self-realization' process, the way in which its 'revolutionary' unconditional development of production promises eventually to subvert capitalist relations of production. Capital is thus at once a revolutionary force (as evidenced by its destruction of all previous social formations) *and* a barrier, a limited form or mere transitional moment on the way to this force's ultimate triumph in another mode of social relation.

According to Camatte, Marx here underestimates the extent to which, particularly through the runaway acceleration of the 'secondary' productive forces of the autonomic form of machine capital, the revolutionary role of the proletariat is taken over by capitalism itself. Manifestly it leads to no crisis of contradiction: rather than the productive forces of humans having been developed by capital to the point where they exceed its relations of production, productive forces (including human labour power) now exist only for capital and not for humans. Thus Camatte suggests we can read Marx not as a 'prophet of the decline of capital' but instead as a Cassandra auguring the decadence of the human. Capital can and has become truly independent of human will, and any opportunity for an intervention that would develop its newly-reformatted sociotechnological beings into communist subjects is definitively lost.

Along similar lines to contemporaries such as Althusser and Colletti, Camatte concludes: no contradiction, therefore no dialectic. 'On this we agree: the human being is dead': more exactly, the human being has been transformed by capital into a passive machine part,

no longer possessed of any 'irreducible element' that would allow it to revolt against capital. For Camatte the only response to this consummate integration of humans is absolute revolt. The entire historical product of capitalism is to be condemned; indeed we must reject production itself as a basis for the analysis of social relations. Revolutionary thought for Camatte, therefore, urges a refusal of Marx's valorization of productivism, and counsels absolute retreat—we can only 'leave this world' (Camatte's work was thus a strong influence on anarcho-primitivist trends in political thought).²

Anything but an accelerationist, then, Camatte nevertheless sets the scene for accelerationism by describing this extreme predicament: Faced with real subsumption, is there any alternative to pointless piecemeal reformism apart from total secession? Can the relation between revolutionary force, human agency, and capitalism be thought differently? Where does alienation end and domestication begin? Is growth in productive force necessarily convertible into a socialized wealth? Camatte's trenchant pessimism outlines accelerationism in negative: He commits himself to a belief that subsumption into the 'community of capital' is a definitive endpoint in capital's transformation of the human. Still in search of a revolutionary thought, however, and despite his own analysis, he also commits himself to a faith in some underlying human essence that may yet resist, and that may be realised in an 'elsewhere' of capital—a position underlying many radical political alternatives imagined today. In contrast, accelerationism, making a different analysis of the ambivalent forces at work in capital, will insist on the continuing dynamism and transformation of the human wrought by the unleashing of productive forces, arguing that it is possible to align *with* their revolutionary force but *against* domestication, and indeed that the only way 'out' is to plunge further in.

2. For more on Camatte in relation to accelerationism, see R. Brassier, 'Wandering Abstraction', <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/wandering-abstraction>.

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Gilles Deleuze + Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* developed precisely the ambivalences noted by Camatte, modelling capitalism as a movement at once revolutionary—decoding and deterritorializing—and constantly reterritorializing and indifferently reinstalling old codes as 'nearchaic' simulations of culture to contain the fluxes it releases. It is within this dynamic that a genuine accelerationist strategy explicitly emerges, in order to reformulate the question that haunts every Left political discourse, namely whether there is a 'revolutionary path' at all. It is not by chance that probably the most famous 'accelerationist' passage in Deleuze and Guattari's work, included in the extract from *Anti-Oedipus* here, plays out against the backdrop of the dichotomy between a folk-political approach (in this case Samir Amin's Third-Worldist separatism) and the exact opposite direction, 'to go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to "accelerate the process".' Famously Deleuze and Guattari, at least in 1972, opt for the latter. Rather than contradictions precipitating collapse, on the contrary, ongoing crises remain an immanent source of capitalist productivity, and this also implies the production of ever new axioms capable of digesting any arising contradictions. For Deleuze and Guattari, there is no necessary conclusion to these processes, indeed the absence of any limit is their primary assumption; and yet they suggest that, as the capitalist socius draws into an ever-closer immanence with universal schizophrenia, (further deterritorializing) lines of flight are a real prospect.

In his writings from the early 70s, **Jean-François Lyotard** amplifies Deleuze and Guattari's heresies, at the same time as he joins *Anti-Oedipus's* struggle against reflective deceleration in theoretical writing and critique. In a series of extraordinary texts the claim of the

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immanence of the political and libidinal is enacted within writing itself. In *Libidinal Economy* Lyotard uncovers a set of repressed themes in Marx, with the latter's oeuvre itself seen as a libidinal 'dispositif' split between an enjoyment of the extrapolation and imaginary acceleration of capitalism's liquefying tendencies, and the ever-deferred will to prosecute it for its iniquities (embodied in the dramatis personae of 'Little Girl Marx' and 'Old Bearded Prosecutor Marx').

Lyotard strikingly reads *Anti-Oedipus* not primarily as a polemical anti-psychoanalytical tract, but as a stealth weapon that subverts and transforms Marxism through the tacit retirement of those parts of its critical apparatus that merely nourish *ressentiment* and the petty power structures of party politics. He denounces the Marxist sad passion of remonstrating and harping at the system to pay back what it owes to the proletariat while simultaneously decrying the dislocations brought about by capitalism—the *liberation* of generalised cynicism, the *freedom* from internalised guilt, the *throwing off* of inherited mores and obligations—as 'illusory' and 'alienated'. From the viewpoint of a schizoanalytics informed by the decoding processes of 'Kapital', there are only perversions, libidinal bodies and their liquid investments, and no 'natural' position. Yet critique invests its energies in striving to produce the existence of an alienated proletariat as a wrong, a contradiction upon which it can exercise its moral authority. Instead, Lyotard, from the point of view of an immanence of technical, social and libidinal bodies, asks: How can living labour be dismembered, how can the body be fragmented by capitalism's exchangeable value-form, if bodies are already fragments and if the will to unity is just one perversion among others? Thus he proposes an energetics that not only voluntarily risks anarchic irrationalism, but issues in a scandalous advocacy of the industrial proletariat's *enjoyment* of their machinic dissection at the hands of capital. Lyotard dares us to 'admit it...': the deracinating affect of capitalism, also, is a source of *jouissance*, a mobilization of desire.

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Saluting *Anti-Oedipus* as 'one of the most intense products of the new libidinal configuration that is beginning to gel inside capitalism, Lyotard summons a 'new dispositif' that is like a virus thriving in the stomach of capital: in the restless yet undirected youth movements of the late 60s and early 70s 'another figure is rising' which will not be stifled by any pedantic theoretical critique. As Deleuze and Guattari assert, 'nothing ever died of contradictions', and the only thing that will kill capitalism is its own 'excess' and the 'unserviceability' loosed by it, an excess of wandering desire over the regulating mechanisms of antiproduction.

Eschewing critique, then, here writing forms a pact with the demon energy liberated by Kapital that liquidates all inheritance and solidity, staking everything on the unknown future it is unlocking. Few can read Lyotard's deliberately scandalous celebration of the prostitution of the proletariat without discomfort. Yet it succeeds in uncovering the deepest stakes of unstated Marxist dogma as to the human and labour power: If there never was any human, any primary economic productivity, but only libidinal bodies along with their investments, their fetishes, where does theory find the moral leverage to claim to 'save' the worker from the machines, the proletariat from capital—or to exhort them to save themselves?

In 'Power of Repetition' **Gilles Lipovetsky** gives a broad exposition of the ungrounded metaphysics of desire underpinning *Libidinal Economy's* analyses (a metaphysics Lyotard simultaneously disclaims as just another fiction or libidinal device). In laying out very clearly a dichotomy between the powers of repetition and reinstatement of identity, and the errant metamorphic tendencies of capital, Lipovetsky makes a crucial distinction: Although capitalism may appear to depend upon powers of antiproduction which police it and ensure the minimal stability necessary for the extraction of profit, in fact these 'guard-dogs' are obstacles to the core tendency of capital qua 'precipitate

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experimentation' in the 'recombination of bodies'—and this latter tendency is the side that must be taken by emancipatory discourse and practice. Resisting the 'Marxist reflex' to critique 'capitalist power', Lipovetsky states that there is no such thing, but only and always a multiplicity of powers, which in fact restrain capital's advance. He thus repeats Lyotard's call for chaos and permanent revolution: there is no way to prevent new alien recombinations settling back into new forms of power; we must match and exceed capital's inhuman speeds, 'keep moving' in 'a permanent and accelerated metamorphic errancy'.

Lipovetsky also draws further attention to one of the important departures from Marx that Lyotard had expanded upon: For Deleuze and Guattari, more basic to an analysis of capitalism than human labour power is the way in which capitalism mobilizes time itself through the function of credit. (As Marx himself declares in *Grundrisse*, 'economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself'). Lipovetsky confirms that the supposed 'contradictions' of capital are a question of configurations of *time*, and accordingly his accelerationism pits capital's essentially destabilizing temporal looping of the present through the future against all stabilising reinstantiations of the past.

This futural orientation is also at work in Lyotard's attempt at an indistinction between description and prescription, between the theoretical and the exhortatory, something that will be extended in later accelerationisms—as Nick Land will write, there is 'no real option between a cybernetics of theory and a theory of cybernetics': The subject of theory can no longer affect to stand outside the process it describes: it is integrated as an immanent machine part in an open ended experimentation that is inextricable from capital's continuous scrambling of its own limits—which operates via the reprocessing of the actual through its virtual futures, dissolving all bulwarks that would preserve the past. In hooking itself up to this haywire time-machine, theory seeks to cast off its own inert obstacles.

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It would indeed be churlish to deny the enduring rhetorical power of these texts; and yet the hopes of their call to permanent revolution are poignant from a contemporary viewpoint: As we can glimpse in the starkness of Lipovetsky's exposition, beneath the desperate joy with which they dance upon the ruins of politics and critique, there is a certain 'Camattian' note of despair (acceleration 'for lack of anything better', as Lipovetsky says); and an unwitting anticipation of the integral part that the spirit of permanent creative festivity would come to play in the neoconservative landscape of late twentieth-century consumer capitalism.

Those writers included in the 'Anticipations' section had emphasised in their analyses that the incursion of the value-form and of machine production are not a 'merely economic' question, but one of the transformation of human culture and indeed of what it means to be human. As can clearly be seen in the mercurial topicality of Lyotard's 'Energumen Capitalism', under different cultural and sociotechnological conditions the same goes for the texts of this second phase of accelerationism. The position is set out in exemplary fashion by radical feminist activist and theoretician **Shulamith Firestone**. Beyond Fedorov's arguably shortsighted dismissal of the aesthetic response to the world as a squandering of energy that could be directed into the technological achievement of real transcendence, Firestone insists that the separation of these two modes of 'realizing the conceivable in the possible' is an artefact of the same constraints as class barriers and sex dualism. She envisages an 'anticultural' revolution that would fuse them, arguing that 'the body of scientific discovery (the new productive modes) must finally outgrow the empirical (capitalistic) mode of using them'. In Firestone's call for this cultural revolution the question is no longer, as in Fedorov, that of *replacing* imaginary transcendence with a practical project of transcendence, but of erasing the separation between imaginary vision and practical action.

If we take Firestone's definition of culture as 'the attempt by man to realize the conceivable in the possible' then we can see at once that (as Veblen had indicated) the application of culture as a salve for the corrosive effects of machine culture on the subject merely indicates a split within culture itself: the Promethean potentiality of the human, evidenced in 'the accumulation of skills for controlling the environment, technology' is hobbled by the obstruction of the dialogue between aesthetic and scientific modes of thinking. With industry, science and technology subsumed into commerce and exchange value, the question of other, aesthetic values becomes a matter of a compensatory 'outside' of the market, a retreat into private (and marketized) pleasures.

Closing this section of the volume, novelist **J.G. Ballard** echoes Firestone's call for a merging of artistic and technological modes, advocating the role of science fiction not only as 'the only possible realism in an increasingly artificialized society', but as an ingredient in its acceleration. SF dissolves fear into excited anticipation, implicitly preparing readers for a 'life radically different from their own'. Accepting that 'the future is a better guide to the present than the past', SF is not involved in the elaboration of the *meaning* of the present, but instead participates in the construction of the future through its speculative recombination: the only meaning it registers is the as yet uncomprehended 'significance of the gleam on an automobile instrument panel'. Like Firestone, Ballard cheerfully jettisons the genius cult of the individual artist and high culture, instead imagining the future of SF along the lines of an unceremonious integration of fiction into global industry and communications that is already underway.

Punctuating the end of this phase of accelerationism, Ballard's world of 'the gleam of refrigerator cabinets, the conjunction of musculature and chromium artefact' is echoed in the cut-up text 'Desirevolution' where Lyotard refuses to cede the dream-work of '68

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to institutional politics and Party shysters, countering its inevitable recuperation through an acceleration of the cut-up reality of the spectacle, an accelerated collage of 'fragments of alienation' launching one last salvo against political and aesthetic representation.

CYBERCULTURE

In the gos the demonic alliance with capital's deterritorializing forces and the formal ferment it provoked in writing was pursued yet further by a small group of thinkers in the UK. Following Lyotard's lead, the authors of this third section attempt not simply to diagnose, but to propagate and accelerate the destitution of the human subject and its integration into the artificial mechanosphere. It is immediately apparent from the opening of **Nick Land's** 'Circuitries' that a darkness has descended over the festive atmosphere of desiring-production envisaged by the likes of Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard and Lipovetsky. At the dawn of the emergence of the global digital technology network, these thinkers, rediscovering and reinterpreting the work of the latter, develop it into an antihumanist *anastrophism*. Their texts relish its most violent and dark implications, and espouse radical alienation as the only escape from a human inheritance that amounts to imprisonment in a biodespotic security compound to which only capital has the access code. From this point of view, it seems that the terminal stages of libidinal economics (as affirmation) mistook the transfer of all motive force from human subjects to capital as the inauguration of an aleatory drift, an emancipation *for* the human; while postmodernism can do no more than mourn this miscognition, accelerationism now gleefully explores what is escaping *from* human civilization,³ viewing modernity as an 'anastrophic' collapse into the future, as outlined in **Sadie Plant + Nick Land's** 'Cyberpositive'.

3. For more on this strain of accelerationism see the extensive editorial introduction to N. Land, *Fanged Noumena* (Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic/Sequence Press, 2011).

The radical shift in tone and thematics, despite conceptual continuities, can be related to the intervening hiatus: What differed from the situation in France one or two decades earlier? Precisely that, particularly in popular culture in the UK, a certain relish for the ‘inconceivable alienations’ outputted by the monstrous machine-organism built by capital had emerged—along with a manifest disinterest in being ‘saved’ from it by intellectuals or politicians, Marxist or otherwise. Of particular note here as major factors in the development of this new brand of accelerationism were the collective pharmaco-socio-sensory-technological adventure of rave and drugs culture, and the concurrent invasion of the home environment by media technologies (VCRs, videogames, computers) and popular investment in dystopian cyberpunk SF, including William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* trilogy and the *Terminator*, *Predator* and *Bladerunner* movies (which all became key ‘texts’ for these writers). As Ballard had predicted, SF had become the only medium capable of addressing the disorienting reality of the present: *everything is SF, spreading like cancer*.

gos cyberculture employed these sonic, filmic and novelistic fictions to turbocharge libidinal economics, attaching it primarily to the interlocking regimes of commerce and digitization, and thanatizing Lyotard’s *jouissance* by valorizing a set of aesthetic affects that locked the human sensorium into a catastrophic desire for its dispersal into machinic delirium. The dystopian strains of darkside and jungle intensified alienation by sampling and looping the disturbing invocations of SF movie narratives; accordingly the cyberculture authors side not with the human but with the Terminator, the cyborg prosecuting a future war on the battleground of now, travelling back in time to eliminate human resistance to the rise of the machines; with *Terminator II*’s future hyperfluid *commercium* figured as a ‘mimetic polyalloy’ capable of camouflaging itself as any object in order to infiltrate the present; and against the Bladerunner, ally of Old Bearded Prosecutor Marx,

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agent of biodespotic defense, charged with preventing the authentic, the human, from irreversible contamination (machinic incest), tasked with securing the 'retention of [the fictitious figure of] natural humanity' or organic labour.

Rediscovering Lipovetsky's repetitious production of interiority and identity on the libidinal surface in the figure of a 'negative cybernetics' dedicated to 'command and control', cyberculture counters it with a 'positive cybernetics' embodied in the runaway circuits of modernity, in which 'time itself is looped' and the only command is that of the feverishly churning virtual futurity of capital as it disassembles the past and rewrites the present. Against an 'immunopolitics' that insists on continually reinscribing the prophylactic boundary between human and its technological other in a futile attempt to shore up the 'Human Security System', it scans the darkest vistas of earlier machinic deliriums, echoing Butler in anticipating the end of 'the human dominion of terrestrial culture', welcoming the fatal inevitability of a looming nonhuman intelligence: *Terminator's* Skynet, Marx's fantastic 'virtuous soul' refigured as a malign global AI from the future whose fictioning is the only perspective from which contemporary reality makes sense.

This jungle war fought between immunopolitics and cyborg insurgency, evacuating the stage of politics, realises within theory the literal welding of the *punk* No with the looped-up machinic positivity of the *cyber*—'No demands. No hint of strategy. No logic. No hopes. No end...No community. No dialectics. No plans for an alternative state' (CCRU)—in a deliberate culmination of the most 'evil' tendencies of accelerationism. Beyond a mere description of these processes, this provocation employs theory and fiction interchangeably, according to a remix-and-sample regime, as devices to construct the future it invokes. Thus the performance-assemblages of the collective Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU), of which the hypersemically overloaded texts here ('text at sample velocity') were only partial components.

ACCELERATION

The final section documents the contemporary convergence toward which the volume as a whole is oriented. While distancing itself from mere technological optimism, contemporary accelerationism retains an antipathy, a disgust even, for retreatist solutions, and an ambitious interest in reshaping and repurposing (rather than refusing) the technologies that are the historical product of capitalism. What is most conspicuously jettisoned from 70s and 80s accelerationism is the tendency to reduce theoretical positions to libidinal figures. Gone is the attempt to write *with* rather than *about* the contemporary moment, and a call for Enlightenment values and an apparently imperious rationalism make an unexpected appearance. If *prima facie* at odds with the enthusiastic nihilism of its forerunners, however, today's accelerationisms can be seen as a refinement and rethinking of them through the prism of the decades that spanned the end of the twentieth century and the birth of the twenty-first. Broadly speaking, today the anarchistic tendencies of 'French Theory' are tempered by a concern with the appropriation of sociotechnological infrastructure and the design of post-capitalist economic platforms, and the antihumanism of the cyberculture era is transformed, through its synthesis with the Promethean humanism found in the likes of Marx and Fedorov, into a rationalist inhumanism.

Once again this apparent rupture can be understood through consideration of the intervening period, which had seen the wholesale digestion by the capitalist spectacle of the yearning for extra-capitalistic spaces, from 'creativity' to ethical consumerism to political horizontalism, all of which capitalism had cheerfully supplied. In a strange reversal of cyberculture's prognostications, technology and the new modes of monetization now inseparable from it ushered in a banal resocialisation process, a reinstalling of the most confining and identitarian 'neo-archaisms' of the human operating system.

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Even as they do the integrative work of Skynet, the very brand names of this ascendent regime—iPod, Myspace, Facebook—ridicule cyberculture’s aspiration to vicariously participate in a dehumanising adventure: instead, we (indistinguishably) work for and consume it as a new breed of autospectacularized all-too-human being. At the same time as these social neo-archaisms lock in, the depredations of capital pose an existential risk to humanity, while finance capital itself is in crisis, unable to bank on the future yet continuing to colonise it through instruments whose operations far outstrip human cognition. All the while, an apparently irreversible market cannibalization of what is left of the public sector and the absorption of the state into a corporate form continues worldwide, to the troubling absence of any coherent alternative. In short, it is not that the decoding and deterritorialization processes envisioned in the 70s, and the digital subsumption relished in the 80s, did not take place: only that the promise of enjoyment, the rise of an ‘unserviceable’ youth, new fields of dehumanised experience, ‘more dancing and less piety’, were efficiently rerouted back into the very identitarian attractors of repetition-without-difference they were supposed to disperse and abolish, in sole favour of capital’s investment in a stable future for its major beneficiaries.

When **Mark Fisher**, former member of CCRU, returned in 2012 to the questions of accelerationism, outlining the current inconsistency and disarray in left political thought, the notion of a ‘left accelerationism’ seemed an absurdity. And yet, as Fisher asks, who wants or truly believes in some kind of return to a past that can only be an artefact of the imaginary of capitalism itself? As Plant and Land had asked: ‘To what could we wish to return?’ The intensification of sociotechnological integration has gone hand in hand with a negative theology of an outside of capital; as Fisher remarks, the escapist nostalgia for a precapitalist world that mars political protest is also embedded in popular culture’s simulations of the past. The accelerationist dystopia of *Terminator* has been replaced by the

primitivist yearnings of *Avatar*. Fisher therefore states that, in so far as we seek egress from the immiseration of capitalist realism, 'we are all accelerationists'; and yet, he challenges, 'accelerationism has never happened' as a real political force. That is, insofar as we do not fall into a number of downright inconsistent and impossible positions, we must indeed, be 'all accelerationists', and this heresy must form part of any anticapitalist strategy.

A renewed accelerationism, then, would have to work through the fact that the energumen capital stirred up by Lyotard and co. ultimately delivered what Fisher has famously called 'capitalist realism'.⁴ And that, if one were to maintain the accelerationist gambit à la cyberculture at this point, it would simply amount to taking up arms for capitalist realism itself, rebuffing the complaint that capitalism did not deliver as sheer miserablism (*Compared to what? And after all, what is the alternative?*) and retracting the promises of *jouissance* and 'inconceivable alienations' as narcissistic demands that have no place in an inhuman process (*Isn't it enough that you're working for the Terminator, you want to enjoy it too?*)—a dilemma that opens up a wider debate regarding the relation between aesthetic enjoyment and theoretical purchase in earlier accelerationism.

Alex Williams + Nick Srnicek's '#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics' can be read as an attempt to honour Fisher's demand for a contemporary left accelerationist position. In provocation of the contemporary Left's often endemic technological illiteracy, Srnicek and Williams insist on the necessity of precise cognitive mapping, and thus epistemic acceleration, for any progressive political theory and action today. With full confidence that alternatives are thinkable, they state the obvious, namely that neoliberal capitalism is not just unfair or unjust as a system, but is no longer a guarantor of dynamism or progress.

4. M. Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zer0, 2009).

#ACCELERATE

Intended as a first draft of a longer theoretical and political project, MAP found immediate notoriety (being translated into numerous languages within months of appearing online) but was also criticised for not yet offering new solutions beyond focussing on three general demands: firstly for the creation of a new intellectual infrastructure, secondly for far-reaching media reform, and thirdly for the reconstitution of new forms of class power. Following the example of Marx—according to them a ‘paradigmatic accelerationist thinker’—Williams and Srnicek attempt to overcome the mistrust of technology on the left in the last decades. And closely affiliated to the rationalist wing of current speculative philosophy, they adopt the topos of ‘folk psychology’ for their polemic against a *folk politics*, opposing a politics based on inherited and intuitively ready-to-hand categories with an accelerationist politics that conceives its program on the basis of ‘a modernity of abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology’ that outstrips such categories.

A key element of any left Promethean politics must be a conviction in a transformative potential of technology, including the ‘transformative anthropology’ it entails, and an eagerness to further accelerate technological evolution. Thus this new accelerationism is largely dependent on maturing our understanding of the current regime of technology and value. Even though **Antonio Negri**’s response is critical of what he calls the ‘technological determinism’ of the Manifesto, he agrees that the most crucial passage of the manifesto—concerning the relation between machinic surplus value and social cooperation—cannot really be understood independently of the technological dimension implied. Clearly it is not enough to valorize the ‘real’ human force of labour over the perversions of technocapital or to attempt to recover it: if ‘the surplus added in production is derived primarily from socially productive cooperation’, as Negri says, and if it must be admitted that this cooperation is technically mediated, then the project of reappropriation cannot circumvent the necessity to deal

with the specific 'material and technical qualities' that characterise this fixed capital today.

With Negri's response, the first of several contributions by Italian authors linked to 'post-operaismo' who address precisely this point, we are dealing with a tradition that is already heretical to official Marxism. Both in theory and in political practice the 'operaismo' (workerism) of the 1960s and 70s was opposed to official party politics and its focus on the state. Operaism's molecular politics, focused on concrete activities in factories, is also the background for recent (post-operaistic) investigations of immaterial labour and biopower. In the present context this tradition contributes towards a greater insight into the nature of technological change (an insight which also owes something to the bitter experience following early optimism with regard to the Internet's liberatory possibilities). This allows a much subtler reading of the relation between technology and acceleration than cyberculture's championing of positive feedback and networks, which in certain ways reiterates the horizontalism of Lyotard's metaphysics of the flat 'libidinal band'. Not only has this horizontalism (as MAP indicates) been an ineffective paradigm for political intervention, it also significantly misrepresents the mode of operation of 'network technology' in general. For the latter's technological and subjectivizing power (as substantially anticipated in Veblen) resides in the progressive and hierarchical 'locking in' of standardized hardware and software protocols each of which cannot be understood as means to a particular end, but rather present an open set of possibilities.

Tiziana Terranova suggests a reappropriation of this logic in the form of a 'red stack' bringing together the types of autonomous electronic currencies that are currently emerging outside the bounds of nation-state or corporate governance, social media technology, and the 'bio-hypermedia' that is thriving in the interference zone between digital and bodily identities. This vision of a digital infrastructure

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of the common enacts MAP's shift from abstract political theory ('this is not a utopia') to an experimental collaboration with design, engineering, and programming so as to activate the latent potential of these technologies in the direction of another *socius*.

In 'finally grasp[ing] the shift from the hegemony of material labour to the hegemony of immaterial labour' (Negri), a particular focus is the increased importance of the algorithm as the general machine regime in the information economy, which takes the baton from Marx and Veblen's 'machine system' in continually accumulating, integrating, linking and synergizing 'informational fixed capital' at every level of collective production, commercial circulation and consumption. As has been widely discussed, the rise of the algorithm runs parallel to the visible absorption into the integrated machine system of human cognitive and affective capacities, which are also now (in Marx's words) 'set in motion by an automaton'—or rather a global swarm of abstract automata. The algorithms at work in social media technologies and beyond present an acute test case for reappropriation. Unlike heavy metal machines, algorithms do not themselves embody a value, but rather are valuable in so far as they allow value to be extracted from social interaction: the real fixed capital today, as Negri suggests, is the value produced through intensive technically coordinated cooperation, producing a 'surplus beyond the sum' of its parts (the 'network externalities' which economists agree are the source of value in a 'connected economy').

To reduce of the value of software to its capacity for monetization, as Terranova suggests, leaves unspoken the enthusiasm and creativity in evidence in open source software movements. Perhaps the latter are better thought of as a collective practice of supererogation seizing on the wealth of opportunities already produced by capitalism as a historical product, in the form of hardware and software platforms, and which breaks the loop whereby this wealth is reabsorbed into the cycles of exchange value. This invocation of the open-source

movement is a powerful reminder that there are indeed other motivating value systems that may provide the 'libidinizing impulse' that Fisher calls for in the search for alternative constructions; it also recalls Firestone's call for a cultural revolution in which the distinction between aesthetic imagination and technical construction is effaced.

Next **Luciana Parisi** turns to computational design to ask what we can learn from the new cutting-edge modes of production that are developing today. Carefully paring apart the computational processes from their ideological representations, Parisi suggests that these new computational processes do indeed present a significant break from a model of rationality that seeks command and control through the top-down imposition of universal laws, aiming to symbolically condense and circumscribe a system's behaviour and organization. And yet computation driven by material organization cannot be regarded as simply entering into a dynamic immanence with the 'intelligence of matter'. Rather, these algorithmic operations have their own logic, and open up an artificial space of functions, a 'second nature'. For Parisi these developments in design figure the more general movement toward systems whose accelerated and extended search and evaluation capabilities (for example in 'big data' applications) suggest a profound shift within the conception of computation itself.

It is often claimed that through such advanced methods accelerated technocapital invests the entire field of material nature, completely beyond the human field of perception. Such a strict dichotomy, Parisi argues, loses sight of the reality of abstraction in the order of algorithmic reason itself, moving too quickly from the Laplacean universe of mechanism governed by absolute laws to a vitalist universe of emergent materiality. Instead, as Parisi argues, the action of algorithms opens up a space of speculative reason as a Whiteheadian 'adventure of ideas' in which the counter-agency of reason is present as a motor for experimentation and the extraction of novelty.

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Reza Negarestani addresses a related dichotomy to the one Parisi critiques, and which lies behind contemporary political defeatism and inertia—namely, the choice between either equating rationality with a discredited and malign notion of absolute mastery, or abandoning all claim for the special status of human sapience and rationality. In the grip of this dichotomy, any possible platform for political claims is nullified. Rather than an abdication of politics, for Negarestani accelerationism must be understood precisely as the making possible of politics through the refusal of such a false alternative. In ‘The Labor of the Inhuman’, he sets out a precise argument to counter the general trend to identify the overcoming of anthropomorphism and human arrogance with a negation of the special status of the human and the capacities of reason.

The predicament of a politics after the death of god and in the face of real subsumption—and the temptation either to destitute subjectivity, leaving the human as a mere cybernetic relay, or to cling to obsolete political prescriptions made on the basis of obsolete folk models of agency—is stripped down by Negarestani to its epistemic and functional kernel. Drawing on the normative functionalism of Wilfrid Sellars and Robert Brandom, he criticizes the antihumanism of earlier accelerationisms as an overreaction no less nihilistically impotent than a yearning for substantial definitions of the human. In their place Negarestani proposes an ‘inhumanism’ that emerges once the question of what it means to be human is correctly posed, ‘in the context of uses and practices’.

What is specific to the human is its access to the symbolic and sociotechnological means to participate in the construction and revision of norms; the task of exploring what ‘we’ are is therefore an ongoing labour whose iterative loops of concept and action yield ‘non-monotonic’ outcomes. In this sense, understanding and committing to the human is synonymous with revising and constructing the human.

Far from involving a voluntaristic impulse to 'freedom', this labour entails the navigation of a constraining field of collateral commitments and ramifications, through which the human responds to the demands of an agency (reason) that has no interest in preserving the initial self-image of the human, but whose unforeseeable ramifications are unfolded *through* the human—'a future that writes its own past' in so far as one views present commitments from the perspective of their future ramifications, yielding each time a new understanding of past actions.

In other words, whereas the human cannot 'accelerate' within the strictures of its inherited image, in merely rejecting reason it abdicates the possibility of revising this image at all. Acceleration takes place when and in so far as the human repeatedly affirms its commitment to being impersonally piloted, not by capital, but by a program which demands that it cede control to collective revision, and which draws it towards an inhuman future that will prove to have 'always' been the meaning of the human. 'A commitment works its way back from the future', and inconceivable vistas of intelligence open up through the 'common task' or duty of the labour of the inhuman.

In the absence of this indispensable platform of commitment and revision, Negarestani insists, no politics, however shrill its protestations and however severe its prescriptions, has the necessary motor with which to carry a project forward—indeed it is this inability to 'cope with the consequences of committing to the real content of humanity' that is according to him at the root of today's political inertia. In effect, then, Negarestani re-replaces the infinite will-without-finality within reason rather than capital, and rethinks the inhuman futural feedback process through which it conducts human history not as a thanatropic compulsion but as social participation in the progressive and self-cultivating anastrophism of in/humanity.

Design strategist **Benedict Singleton**, in a contemporary return to Fedorov's project, rethinks the question of the mastery of nature

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through the question of perhaps humankind's most Promethean project: space exploration. Continuing Negarestani's examination of the pragmatic momentum that drives a continual opening up of new frontiers of action, he finds in the logic of design a way to think this 'escape' otherwise than in the form of a creative 'leap of faith': as an 'escapology not an escapism', a twisted path in which the stabilisation of new invariants provides the basis for new modes of action, and, reciprocally, new modes of action and new instruments for cognition enable new perspectives on where we have come from and where we are going: design is a dense and ramified leveraging of the environment that makes possible the startling clarity of *new observables*, as well as enabling the transformation of apparently natural constants into manipulable variables required for constructing new worlds.

Drawing out a language of *scheming*, *crafting*, and *plotting* that declares itself quite clearly in the vocabulary surrounding design, but which has been studiously ignored by a design theory rather too keen to ingratiate itself with humanist circles, Singleton elaborates a counter-history of design that affirms this plotting or manipulative mode of thought, and even its connotations of deception, drawing on Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant's unearthing of the Greek notion of *mêtis*—'cunning intelligence'. As Singleton suggests, *mêtis* is exemplified in the *trap*, which sees the predator adopting the point of view of the prey so that its own behaviour is harnessed to ensure its extinction. *Mêtis* thus equates to a practice in which, in the absence of complete information, the adoption of hypothetical perspectives enables a transformation of the environment—which in turn provides opportunities for further ruses, seeking to power its advance by craftily harnessing the factors of the environment and its expected behaviours to its own advantage.

Important here is the distinguishing of this 'platform logic' from a means-end 'planning' model of design. In altering the parameters

of the environment in order to create new spaces upon which yet more invention can be brought to bear, cunning intelligence gradually twists free of the conditions in which it finds itself 'naturally' ensnared, generating paths to an outside that does not conform to the infinite homothetism of 'more of the same' but instead opens up onto a series of convoluted plot twists—precisely the ramifying paths of the 'labour of the inhuman' described by Negarestani. Ultimately this escapology, Singleton insists, requires an abduction of *ourselves* by perspectives that relativize our spontaneous phenomenal grasp of the environment. Echoing Fedorov, he calls for a return to an audacity that, far from seeking to 'live in harmony with nature', seeks to spring man out of his proper place in the natural order so as to accelerate toward ever more alien spaces.

Taking up this Promethean theme, **Ray Brassier** launches a swingeing critique of some of the absurd consequences entailed by the countervailing call to humility, and uncovers their ultimately theological justification. Whence the antipathy toward any project of *remaking* the world, the hostility to the normative claim that not only *ought* things to be different but that they ought to be *made* different? Examining Jean-Pierre Dupuy's critique of human enhancement, Brassier shows how the inflation of human difference into ontological difference necessitates the same transcendental policing that Iain Hamilton Grant explores in his reading of *Bladerunner*: what is *given*—the inherited image of the human and human society assumed as transcendental bond—shall by no means be *made* or indeed *remade*. Certain limits must be placed on the ability of the human to revise its own definition, on pain of disturbing a certain 'fragile equilibrium'. As Brassier remarks, since the conception of what a human can be and should tolerate is demonstrably historical, it is only possible to understand this invocation of a proper balance or limit as a theological sentiment. This reservation of an unconceptualisable transcendence

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beyond the limits of manipulation devolves into a farcical discourse on the ‘reasonableness’ of the suffering inflicted by nature’s indifference to the human—a suffering, subjection, and finitude which is understood to provide a precious resource of meaning for human life. However Prometheanism consists precisely both in the refusal of this incoherency and in the affirmation that the core of the human project consists in generating *new* orientations and ends—as in Negarestani’s account of the production and consumption of norms, echoed here in the ‘subjectivism without selfhood [...] autonomy without voluntarism’ that Brassier intimates must lie at the core of Prometheanism. The productivism of Marx, too, as Brassier reminds us, holds mankind capable of forging its own truth, of knowing and controlling that which is given to it, and of remaking it. Like Negarestani, Brassier holds that the essential project here is one of integrating a descriptive account of the objective (not transcendental) constitution of rational subjectivation with an advocacy of the rational subject’s accession to self-mastery.

Against these new approaches, **Nick Land**, in ‘Teleoplexy’, insists that it is the practice of forward-looking capitalization alone that can produce the futural dynamic of acceleration. Against Williams and Srnicek, for whom ‘capitalism cannot be identified as the agent of true acceleration’, and Negarestani, for whom the space of reasons is the future source from which intelligence assembles itself, Land argues that the complex positive feedback instantiated in market pricing mechanisms is the only possible referent for acceleration. And since it is capitalization alone that gives onto the future, the very question *What do we want*—the very conception of a *conditional* accelerationism and the concomitant assertion, made by both MAP and Negri, that ‘planning is necessary’ in order to instrumentalise knowledge into action—for Land amounts to nothing but a call for a compensatory movement to *counteract* acceleration. For him it is the state and politics per se that constitute constraints, not ‘capital’; and therefore

the claim that 'capitalism has begun to constrain the productive forces of technology' is senseless. Land's 'right accelerationism' appears here as an inverted counterpart to the communitarian retreat in the face of real subsumption: like the latter, it accepts that the historical genesis of technology in capitalism precludes the latter from any role in a postcapitalist future. If at its most radical accelerationism claims, in Camatte's words, that 'there can be a revolution that is not for the human' and draws the consequences of this, then one can either take the side of an inherited image of the human against the universal history of capital and dream of 'leaving this world', or one can accept that 'the means of production are going for a revolution on their own'. This reappearance of accelerationism in its form as a foil for the Left (even left-accelerationism), with Land still fulfilling his role as 'the kind of antagonist that the left needs' (Fisher), rightly places the onus on the new accelerationisms to show how, between a prescription for nothing but despair and a excitable description that, at most, contributes infinitesimally to Skynet's burgeoning self-awareness, a space for action can be constructed.

If 'left accelerationism' is to succeed in 'unleashing latent productive forces', and if its putative use of 'existing infrastructure as a springboard to launch towards postcapitalism' is to issue (even speculatively) in anything but a centralized bureaucracy administering the decaying empty shell of the historical product of capitalism, then the question of incentives and of an alternative feedback loop to that of capitalization will be central. This is one of the 'prescriptions' that **Patricia Reed** makes in her review of the potentials and lacunae of the Manifesto that concludes our volume. Among her other interventions is the suggestion that a corrective may be in order to address the more unpalatable undertones of its relaunch of the modern—a new, less violent model of universalisation.

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It also does not pass unnoticed by Reed that the MAP's rhetoric is rather modest in comparison to earlier accelerationism's enthusiastic invocations and exhortations ('maximum slogan density'). A tacit aim in the work of Plant, Land, Grant and CCRU is an attempt to find a place for human agency once the motor of transformation that drives modernity is understood to be inhuman and indeed indifferent to the human. The attempt to *participate* vicariously in its positive feedback loop by fictioning or even mimicking it can be understood as an answer to this dilemma. The conspicuous fact that, shunned by the mainstream of both the 'continental philosophy' and cultural studies disciplines which it hybridized, the Cyberculture material had more subterranean influence on musicians, artists and fiction writers than on traditional forms of political theory or action, indicates how its stance proved more appropriable as an *aesthetic* than effective as a political force. The new accelerationisms instead concentrate primarily on constructing a conceptual space in which we can once again ask *what to do* with the tendencies and machines identified by the analysis; and yet Fisher's initial return to accelerationism turned upon the importance of an 'instrumentalisation of the libido' for a future accelerationist politics. Reed accordingly takes MAP to task in its failure to minister to the positive 'production of desire', limiting itself to diagnostics and prognostics too vague to immediately impel participation. She rightly raises the question of the power of belief and of motivation: Whatever happened to *jouissance*? Where is the motor that will drive commitment to eccentric acceleration? Where is the 'libidinal dispositif' that will recircuit the compelling incentives of consumer capitalism, so deeply embedded in popular imagination, and the bewildered enjoyment of the collective fantasies of temporary autonomous zones? As Negri says, 'rational imagination must be accompanied by the collective fantasy of new worlds'. Certainly however much one might 'rationalise' the logic of speculation, it still

maintains a certain bond with fiction; yet earlier accelerationisms had attempted to mobilize the force of imaginative fictions so as to adjust the human perspective to otherwise dizzying speculative vistas.

In addition, as Reed notes, Accelerationism, far from entailing a short-termism, involves taking a long view on history that traditional politics is unable to encompass in its 'procedures...based on finitude, and the timescale of the individual human'; and equally needs to engage with algorithmic processes that happen beneath the perceptual thresholds of human cognition (Terranova, Parisi). Therefore a part of the anthropological transformation at stake here involves the appropriation and development of a conceptual and affective apparatus that allows human perception and action some kind of purchase upon this 'Promethean scale'—new science-fictional practices, if not necessarily in literary form; and once again, Firestone's 'merging of the aesthetic with the technological culture'.

RETURN TO OR DEPARTURE FROM MARX?

Before closing this introduction, it is worth returning in more detail to Marx, since much of the volume contends with his contributions, whether implicitly or explicitly. The disarray of the Left fundamentally stems from 'the failure of a future that was thought inevitable' (Camatte) by Marxism—the failure of capitalism to self-destruct as part of history's 'intrinsic organic development', for the conflict between productive forces and capitalist relations of production to reach a moment of dialectical sublation, or for the proletariat to constitute itself into a revolutionary agent. And theoretical analysis of the resulting situation (real subsumption into the spectacle) seems to offer no positive possibility of opposition, yielding only modes of opposition frozen in cognitive dissonance between the 'disruptions' they stage and the inevitability of their recuperation. Accelerationism is significant in the way in which it confronts this plight through a

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return to a few fundamental questions posed by Marx upstream from various Marxist orthodoxies such as the dialectic, alienation, and the labour theory of value. Indeed one feature of accelerationism is a repeated return to these fundamental insights each time under a set of stringent conditions related to the prevailing political conditions of the epoch, a radical repetition that sometimes demands violent rejections. For, as the MAP contends, there is an accelerationist strand to Marx's work which is far from being the result of a tendentious reading.

According to the 'Fragment', then, the development of large-scale integrated machine production is a sine qua non of Capital's universal ascendancy ('not an accidental moment', says Marx, later positing that intensity of machinic objectification=intensity of capital). Machine production follows directly from, maximally effects, and enters into synergy with capital's exigency to reduce the need for human labour and to continually increase levels of production. Undoubtedly the absorption of the worker into the burgeoning machine organism more clearly than ever reduces the worker to a tool of capital. And yet, crucially, Marx makes it clear that these two forms of subsumption—under capital, and into a technical system of production—are neither identical nor inseparable in principle.

In the machine system, the unity of labour qua collectivity of living workers as foundation of production is shattered, with human labour appearing as a 'mere moment [...] infinitesimal and vanishing' of an apparently autonomous production process. And although it reprocesses its original human material into a more satisfactory format for Capital, for Marx the machine system does not preclude the possibility of other relations of production under which it may be employed. It is, however, inseparable from a certain metamorphosis of the human, embedded in a system that is at once social, epistemic (depending on the scientific understanding and control of nature), and technological.

Man no longer has a direct connection to production, but one that is mediated by a ramified, accumulated objective social apparatus constructed through the communication, technological embodiment, replication and enhancement of knowledge and skills—what Marx calls the ‘elevation of direct labour into social labour’ wherein ‘general social knowledge [...] become[s] a direct force of production’. Once again, however, this estrangement is not *identical* with alienation through capital; nor is the former, considered apart from the strictures of the latter, necessarily a deplorable consequence. It is precisely at this point that Marx enters the speculative terrain of accelerationism: for in separating these two tendencies—the expanded field of production and the continuing metamorphoses of the human within it, and the monotonous regime of capital as the meta-machine that appropriates and governs this production process and its development—the question arises of whether, and how, the colossal sophistication, use value, and transformative power of one could be effectively freed of the limitations and iniquities of the other.

Such is the kernel of the MAP’s problematic and a point of divergence between the various strains of accelerationism: Williams and Srnicek, for example, urge us to devise means for a practical realization of this separability, whereas for Nick Land and Iain Hamilton Grant writing in the gos, Deleuze and Guattari’s immanentization of social and technical machines was to be consummated by rejecting their distinction between technical machines and the capitalist axiomatic.

Since the ‘new foundation’ created by integrated machine industry is dependent not upon direct labour but upon the application of technique and knowledge, according to Marx it usurps capitalism’s primary foundation of production upon the extortion of surplus labour. Indeed, through it capital ‘works toward its own dissolution’: the total system of production qua complex ramified product of collective social labour tends to counteract the system that produced it.

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The vast increase in productivity made possible through the compaction of labour into the machine system, of course, ought also to free up time making it possible for individuals to produce themselves as new subjects. How then to reconcile this emancipatory vision of the sociotechnological process with the fact that the worker increasingly becomes a mere abstraction of activity, acted on by an 'alien power' that machinically vivisects its body, ruining its unity and tendentially replacing it (a power which, as Marx also notes, is 'non-correlated'—that is, the worker finds it impossible to cognitively encompass it)? Once again, Marx distinguishes between the machine system as manifestation of capital's illusory autonomy, confronting the worker as an alien soul whose wishes they must facilitate (just as the worker's wages confront them as the apparent source of their livelihood), and the machine system seen as a concrete historical product. Even as the process of the subsumption of labour into machine production provides an index of the development of capital, it also indicates the extent to which social production becomes an immediate force in the transformation of social practice. The monstrous power of the industrial assemblage is indissociable from the 'development of the social individual': General social knowledge is absorbed as a force of production and thus begins to shape society: 'the conditions of the process of social life itself [...] come under the control of the general intellect and [are] transformed in accordance with it'. Labour then only exists as subordinated to the general interlocking *social* enterprise into which capital introduces it: Capital produces new subjects, and the development of the social individual is inextricable from the development of the system of mechanised capital.

This suggests that the plasticity of the human and the social nature of technology can be understood as a benchmark for progressive acceleration. Marx's contention was that Capitalism's abstraction of the *socius* generates an undifferentiated social being that can be subjectivated into the proletariat. That is, a situation where the

machinic system remained in place and yet human producers no longer faced these means of production as alienating would necessarily entail a further transformation of the human, since, according to Marx, in the machine system humans face the product of their labour through a ramified and complex network of mediation that is cognitively and practically debilitating and disempowering.

This 'transformative anthropology' (Negri) is what every communist or commonist (Negri's or Terranova's post-*operaismo*) programme has to take into account. Granted the in-principle separability of machinic production and its capitalist appropriation, the 'helplessness' of the worker in the face of social production would have to be resolved through a new social configuration: the worker would still be confronted with this technical edifice and unable to reconcile it with the 'unity of natural labour', and yet humans would 'enter into the direct production process as [a] different subject', ceasing to suffer from it because they would have attained a collective mastery over the process, the common objectified in the machine system no longer being appropriated by the axiomatic of capital. This participation would thus be a true social project or common task, rather than the endurance of a supposedly natural order of things with which the worker abstractly interfaces through the medium of monetary circulation, the 'metabolism of capital', while the capitalist, operating in a completely discontinuous sphere, draws off and accumulates its surplus.

However, as Marx observes (and as Deleuze and Guattari emphasise), capitalism continues to operate as if its necessary assumption were still the 'miserable' basis of 'the theft of labour time', even as the 'new foundation' of machine production provides 'the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high'. The extortion of human labour still lies at the basis of capitalist production despite the 'machinic surplus value' (Deleuze and Guattari) of fixed capital, since the social axiomatic of capital is disinterested in innovation for itself and is under

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the necessity to extract surplus value as conveniently as possible, and to maintain a reserve army of labour and free-floating capital. The central questions of accelerationism follow: What is the relation between the socially alienating effects of technology and the capitalist value-system? Why and how are the emancipatory effects of the 'new foundation' of machine production counteracted by the economic system of capital? What could the social human be if fixed capital were reappropriated within a new postcapitalist socius?

FORWARD

At the core of new accelerationisms, and responding in depth to these questions so as to fill out the MAP's outlines, new philosophical frameworks suggested by Negarestani, Singleton and Brassier reaffirm Prometheanism, and bring together a transformative anthropology, a new conception of speculative and practical reason, and a set of schemas through which to understand the inextricably social, symbolic and technological materials from which any postcapitalist order will have to be constructed. They advocate not accelerationism in a supposedly known direction, and even less sheer speed, but, as Reed suggests, 'eccentrication' and, as Negarestani, Brassier and Singleton emphasise in various ways, *navigation* within the spaces opened up through a commitment to the future that truly understands itself as such and acknowledges the nature of its own agency.

In earlier accelerationisms, 'exploratory mutation' (Land) was only opened up through the search-space of capital's forward investment in the future. As Land tells us, 'long range processes are self-designing, but only in such a way that the self is perpetuated as something redesigned'. However, for cybercultural acceleration, this 'self' can be none other than capital's 'infinite will' as it absorbs modernity into its 'infinite augmentation', its non-finality. In the account of Negarestani, this non-finality is displaced into the space of reason progressively constructed by the advent of symbolic social technologies and

the space of norms they make possible and continually transform, thus providing an underpinning to the MAP's aims and a framework within which its technological and social questions can be treated. In Singleton's understanding of design, the opportunistic and cunning appropriation of the powers of nature progressively ratchets open an uncircumscribable space of freedom, springing human intelligence from its parochial cage and extending it through prostheses and platforms.

Whereas earlier moments of accelerationism had been a matter of a conviction in utopian projects or in the possible imminent collapse of capitalism, and subsequently a delirious summoning of revolutionary forces at work *within* it, today's accelerationism, no less optimistic in certain respects, is undoubtedly more sober; a fact that cannot be unconnected to the fact that it emerges in a climate of combined crisis-and-stagnation for capitalism. It is indeed interesting to note that accelerationism reappears at moments when the powers of capitalism appear to be in crisis and alternatives appear thin on the ground. As Fisher insists, today's crisis provides an opportune point at which to reassess those previous moments.

The destiny of the authors included in the 'Ferment' section is instructive here: Deleuze and Guattari arguably diluted the stance of *Anti-Oedipus* in *A Thousand Plateaus* with calls for caution in deterritorialization and a more circumspect analysis of capitalism. As Iain Grant recounts, Lyotard was soon to openly deplore his 'evil' accelerationist moment, and instead—in effect concurring with Camatte's pessimism—set out to develop minor strategies of aesthetic resistance. In similar fashion, Lipovetsky's 1983 collection tellingly entitled *The Era of Emptiness*⁵ modulates the revolutionary tone to one of acquiescent approbation: although still concerned with an 'accelerating destabilisation', he now sees it largely operating

5. *L'Ère du vide: essais sur l'individualisme contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

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through a 'process of personalisation' whose overall liberatory vector is balanced by a contraction into narcissism and the spectacular consumption of ubiquitous 'communication'.

The cyberculture phase, in extending Lyotard's own 'branching-off' from Deleuze and Guattari, arguably reproduced his failure to reckon with the powers of *antiproduction*: Deleuze and Guattari drew attention not just to the 'positive' schizophrenia of decoding and deterritorialization but to a certain schizophrenic *dissociation* within the technical or scientific worker himself, who 'is so absorbed in capital that the reflux of organized, axiomatized stupidity coincides with him' ('Dear, I discovered how to clone people at the lab today. Now we can go skiing in Aspen', as Firestone puts it). The transformation of surplus value of code into surplus value of flux necessitates that, just as technical knowledge is separated from aesthetics, so the potentially insurrectionary social import of machinically-potentiated errant intelligence is itself 'split' and its surplus drawn off safely by capital.

Thus, under capital, individuals are sequestered from the immense forces of production they make possible qua social beings, and feedback is limited to a minimal 'reflux', a purchasing 'power' qualitatively incommensurable with the massive flows of capital. In 'Teleoplexy' Land continues to set store by the crossover between consumer devices and economically-mobilizable technologies within consumer capitalism itself. Yet the earlier expectation that technology would of itself disrupt antiproduction was overoptimistic—in line with the contemporary Thatcherite spirit of free enterprise, which promised to empower every citizen with opportunities for self-realization through access to the market. The explosion in share ownership, consumer credit, and the burgeoning of consumer media and information technology did little to dislodge this dissociative mechanism that, for Deleuze and Guattari, constitutes 'capitalism's true police'. Projects such as those of Terranova and Parisi, of examining and rebuilding technological platforms outside this value-system and its

ideological assumptions, benefit today from a greater appreciation of the subtlety of antiproduction, and complement the new philosophical resources emerging within contemporary accelerationisms.

Herein lies the real divergence between Land's consolidated right-accelerationism and the burgeoning left-accelerationisms: whereas one continues to see an ever increasing accumulation of both collective intelligence and collective freedom, bound together in the monstrous form of Capital itself, the other, as it develops, is proving more speculative and more ambitious in its conception of both 'intelligence' and 'freedom', seeing Capital as neither an inhuman hyperintelligence nor the one true agent of history, but rather as an idiot savant driven to squander collective cognitive potential by redirecting it from any nascent process of collective self-determination back into the self-reinforcing libidinal dynamics of market mechanisms. In this respect, the work of Negarestani and Brassier forms the conceptual bulwark preventing left-accelerationism from collapsing back into schizoid anarchy or technocapitalist fatalism. By reviving the constitutive link between freedom and reason at the heart of German idealism (Kant and Hegel), reconfigured and repurposed by pragmatist functionalism (Sellars and Brandom), they not only provide a dynamic measure of the emancipatory promise of modernity at odds with Capital's own monotonous modes of valuation, but equally demonstrate how its progressive realization implies, in contrast to the blind idiot cyborgod of Kapital, the constitution of a genuine collective political agency.

This dialectic parallels that played out in artificial intelligence research between dominant strains developing AI capable of parochial problem solving and those increasingly concerned with characterising artificial general intelligence (AGI). The shift from conceiving intelligence as a quantitatively homogeneous measure of adaptive problem solving to conceiving it as a qualitatively differentiated typology of reasoning capacities is the properly philosophical condition of the

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shift from the hyperstitional invocation of machinic intelligence of the Cyberculture era to the active design of new systems of collective intelligence proposed by MAP.

The labour of constructing an accelerationist politics, its machines and its humans, is a matter, as Marx says, of ‘both discipline, as regards the human being in the process of becoming... [and] at the same time, practice, experimental science, materially creative and objectifying science, as regards the human being who has become, in whose head exists the accumulated knowledge of society’. If this space of speculation outside of capital is not a mirage, if ‘we surely do not yet know what a modern technosocial body can do’, isn’t this labour of the inhuman not just a rationalist, but also a vitalist one in the Spinozist sense, concerning the indissolubly technical and social human—*homo sive machina*—in the two aspects of its collective labour upon its world and itself: *Homo hominans* and *homo hominata*?

ROBIN MACKAY + ARMEN AVANESSIAN
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