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Where did the critical tradition of art go? Maybe that's the wrong question. Because we know the answer. It went into spectacle. It went into finance. It got privatized, democratized, scrutinized, defunded, bureaucratized, then professionalized. The critical stick became a seductive carrot. But maybe we don't have to see this only in terms of a fall from grace. Maybe this is the time for a long-overdue realism that an art field still in the thrall of modernist humanism struggles to avoid recognizing. Isn't it strange how we are subjected to the most extreme aspects of this new order and yet still suppress its most emergent qualities? What if we suspend the guilt of lapsed certainties and good-person compulsions for just a moment and take a look in the mirror? What would we see? We might see velocity-driven psychotics ravaged and dragged through sky and sludge, crying from revolution teargas and boring discussions at the same time. We might see uneducated beasts using their own bodies to mash culture with physics with economics with mysticism. We might see a strange new form of human tumble out. For the Summer 2013 issue of e-flux journal, we are very pleased to present Gean Moreno's guest-edited issue on accelerationist aesthetics. Read it at the beach!

– Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

The entrenchment of neoliberal fundamentalism has been accompanied by a desire to save whatever critical edge art production can still muster. This has become increasingly pressing as art becomes decor for the offices of hedge fund managers, and as the art world – as David Graeber put it somewhere – mutates into “an appendage to finance capitalism.” The urgency to maintain a critical edge has manifested itself variously: in a turn toward post-autonomia theories that shed light on the position of the cultural producer within a post-Fordist regime of labor; in the production of artifacts that engage reflexively with the conditions of production, display, and circulation in the art world; in recovery operations that target particular legacies, such as those of politicized Conceptual art and structuralist or essayistic filmmaking; in interventionist efforts that leave behind the commercial circuits of art presentation altogether and attempt to work in the social field itself. The common aim of all these efforts amounts to approaching concrete conditions soberly, to being analytical and measured. A *subtractive* logic is the general animating force: take away – subjective imprint, gratuitous ornament, traces of skill, commercial viability, ambivalent postures, ideological residue, and so forth – until a potent and

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http://www.academia.edu/2197499/Cybernetic_Phuturism_The_Politics_of_Acceleration.

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Hannah Sawtell, ICA, London, October 9, 2012–November 18, 2012. See <http://moussemagazine.it/sawtell-melgaard-ica/>. Including texts by texts by Alun Rowlands and Diedrich Diedrichsen. See <http://temporarysite.org/ven.dor>.

28
Robert Garnett, "The 4th-Dimensional Politics of Rhythm," Marres/Centrum voor Contemporaine Cultuur Maastricht, 2013. With reference to Franco Berardi Bifo, "Emancipation of the Sign: Poetry and Finance During the Twentieth Century," *e-flux journal* 39 (November 2012). See <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/emancipation-of-the-sign-poetry-and-finance-during-the-twentieth-century/>. Garnett argues for "some rather preposterous claims for the politicality of the pre-posterous: the politics of rhythm exists in its capacity to produce heterogeneous blocs of temporality, rhythmic group subjectivities and becomings—otherwise, reelsewheres, in out of the here and now. Rhythm is the collective investment in the production of desire—production. This is what art or music does politically that politics cannot."

29
Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, "Afterword to the Second German Edition." See <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p3.htm>.

30
Marx, *The German Ideology*, 1846

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Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 118.

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probing, if often flat-footed, proposal crystallizes.

Past the edges of the art world, however, where the condition of privilege doesn't haunt every gesture with the possibility of contradiction, less "sober" engagements with the social are awake and on the prowl. There may still be a line of thinking excited by subtraction and formal rigor, but it is pitted against a proliferation of delirious and maximalist redeployments of pop culture: salvage-punk fantasy literature that probes obliquely, through gasoline fumes and/or unapologetic and slimy monsters, points of resistance to late capitalism and residual anthropocentric nostalgia; hauntological sonic archeology that calls up utopian traces often muffled by electronic music, using the latter's digital methods of production; B movies that are jacked into the symptomatology of attention deficit disorders as a way to point to the incessant modulations that subjectivity suffers through in control societies; novels written and impossible buildings dreamt in code-language that has mutated like a virus and swallowed the antibodies deployed to eradicate it; soundings of the strange new territories — abyssal drops for a self now revealed as not actually there in the way we had thought — that neuroscience is carving open and sci-fi is mainlining onto its pages; board-game strategizing adjusted to new transnational networks and transformed, through the prism of "Total Design," into geopolitical planning for the future. The gleefully overloaded and hyperactive artifacts that result often feel less handicapped than art objects that are safely ensconced in cultural institutions when attempting to cognitively and affectively mapping the spaces and forces of transnational capitalism. Perhaps these hyperactive artifacts can even begin to map a hard-to-imagine Outside *beyond* transnational capitalism.

One of the strands that participates in this revved-up deployment of forms is what has been called "accelerationist aesthetics," even if the precise traits that establish its parameters and the full range of products that constitute it may still need to be determined. The name was suggested by Steven Shaviro in his book *Post-Cinematic Affect*. It derives from a political program — accelerationism — which comes down from the Deleuze and Guattari of *Anti-Oedipus* and the Lyotard of *Libidinal Economy*, and which finds its most virulent and seductive expression in the texts that British philosopher Nick Land began producing in the 1980s.

The term "accelerationism" was first coined by Benjamin Noys in his book *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*, as way to designate this

tendency and the political praxis it suggested. Shaviro, in turn, drew a distinction between an accelerationist politics or praxis, and an accelerationist aesthetics. As a politics, in the version that comes filtered through the writings of Nick Land, accelerationism has been taken to task by a number of theorists, including Ray Brassier, Alberto Toscano, Noys, and Shaviro himself. However, as it is being questioned and bashed, there is a parallel effort afoot to think accelerationism beyond the boundaries that were established for it by Land et al. Reza Negarestani, Alex Williams, Nick Snirneck, and Benjamin Singleton, among others, have been looking for ways around the shortfalls and blindsides of an early accelerationism, generating new ways to think through it, employing it less as a drive toward meltdown than a cunning practice through which to capture and redeploy existing energies and platforms in the service of a re-universalized left politics.

Although often disparaged as a political program, accelerationism, which early on performed its ideas most notably through carefully crafted theory-fictions, has always had a robust aesthetic side. It is here, in both a seductive performative dimension (which spills into the everyday experiential field) and in the affective range of these aesthetics — which ran for a time parallel to an emerging cyberpunk, a fertile moment in electronic music and Cronenbergian flesh-melts, and now begin to link up with interfacial skins, data avalanches, predictive modeling at substantial scale and the like — that we may find what sustains the desire to keep accelerationism around even if some remain weary of it (or one of its versions) as political theory or praxis.

Despite Shaviro's effort to define it, the notion of an accelerationist aesthetics remains an open problem, suggestively bubbling with, on the one hand, the potential to provoke innovative cartographic exercises that probe unprecedented social complexity and look for new liberatory programs that live up to it, and on the other hand, dark intimations that this aesthetics is indissoluble from the drive to deliberately exacerbate nihilistic meltdowns as the only response to being dragged by the vertiginous speeds of a runaway capitalism. It is working through the impasse between these two extremes — and, more often than not, assuming the first at the expense of the second — that fuels a number of the texts in this issue of *e-flux journal*. The essays respond to two sets of questions:

What constitutes an accelerationist aesthetics? Is it possible? Why would it matter? What should its scope be? And

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whose interest would it serve?
Does such an aesthetics, if possible or desirable, have anything to offer an art production exhausted with sober formalisms and critique-based models that increasingly spin in place, taking ineffective aim at the very protocols and institutions that allow them to exist in the first place and that provide the infrastructure for their sustainability?

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Bound to these questions is a desire to turn the horizon that currently sets the coordinates of what is deemed of importance or value in art production into a porous border from which we can, through pendular sweeps, reach out to adjacent neighborhoods of thought and production and bring back fertile material. The returns on a model deeply invested in critique, as it has been structured within the art world, seem to dwindle at an alarming rate in the face of social and economic relations that everywhere eat away at whatever autonomy the cultural field ever had, or ever dreamed of. The very space of possibility that this model once ushered in with such force seems to have been foreclosed upon. Surely there are efforts still articulating themselves out there, refusing the institution and its co-opting logic no less than the market and its logic, sounding potential alternatives or prefigurations of a different world. But, barring full conversion into activism, these interventionist art exercises seem increasingly pushed to the cusp of having to default on their promise.

The anxiety to shake things up, in light of the disaster of a vanishing critical dimension, has to boil over into something concrete at some point, and this, at least from where I'm standing, demands a lateral move *through* the horizon that currently determines the conditions in which art production is allowed to unfold. It demands probing expeditions into other spaces, into terrains from where the other side of what we are currently inside may begin to take shape. And it demands the sharpening of robust synthesizing conceptual tools to engage in fruitful cross-fades and appropriations. This issue of *e-flux journal* is one of these probing expeditions.

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1
The term was coined (negatively) by Benjamin Noys in his *Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

2
From the introduction to Accelerationism Symposium, at Goldsmith's College (September 14, 2010). Quotation Nick Land, "Machinic Desire," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1993).

3
See the recent "Accelerate: Manifesto For An Accelerationist Politics," Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, <http://speculativeheresy.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/accelerate.pdf>.

4
Mark Fisher, "Terminator vs. Avatar: Notes on Accelerationism," 2010. See <http://markfisherblog.tumblr.com/post/32522465887/terminator-vs-avatar-notes-on-accelerationism>.

5
Benjamin Noys, "The Grammar of Neoliberalism," 2010. See http://www.academia.edu/327085/The_Grammar_of_Neoliberalism.

6
As Alberto Toscano suggests: "'Enjoying the death of the universe': is there anything more pitifully human?" Questions after Accelerationism Symposium. See <http://moskvax.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/accelerationism-questions-after-session-1-mark-fisher-and-ray-brassier/>.

7
Ray Brassier, "Accelerationism," Accelerationism Symposium. See <http://moskvax.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/accelerationism-ray-brassier/>.

8
Fisher/Brassier, questions after Accelerationism Symposium. See <http://moskvax.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/accelerationism-questions-after-session-1-mark-fisher-and-ray-brassier/>.

9
Mark Fisher, "Fans, Vampires, Trolls, Masters," 2009. See <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/011172.html>. See also Fisher, "Terminator vs. Avatar."

10
See Fisher, "Mind Games," *Dazed and Confused* (May 2011).

11
Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (London: Zero Books, 2010), 136.

12
Frederic Jameson, *Archeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science*

Fictions (New York: Verso, 2007), 232–33. Quoted in Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 137.

13
Reza Negarestani, "Drafting the Inhuman: Conjectures on Capitalism and Organic Necrocracy," in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, eds. Levi R. Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 182–202.

14
Assisted quotation: T.S. Elliot, *The Waste Land*, 1922.

15
Gean Moreno, "Notes on the Inorganic, Part II: Terminal Velocity," *e-flux journal* 32 (February 2012). See <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/notes-on-the-inorganic-part-ii-terminal-velocity/>.

16
Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 46.

17
Sanford Kwinter, "Generica," in *Mutations* (Barcelona: Actar, 2001), 525. Quoted in Moreno

"Notes on the Inorganic, Part II."

18
Benjamin Noys, "The Grammar of Neoliberalism." Accelerationism Workshop, Goldsmiths: London (14 September 2010).

19
Letter from Marx to Engels, June 18, 1862. See http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1862/letters/62_06_18.htm.

20
Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1922.

21
Frank Herbert, *Dune* (New York: Ace Books, 1987), 124. See Nicola Masciandaro, "WormSign," 2011, <http://thewhim.blogspot.co.uk/2011/01/wormsign.html>.

22
Stanislav Lem, *The Futurology Congress: From the Memoirs of Ijon Tichy*, 1971.

23
Alberto Toscano, questions after Accelerationism Symposium. See <http://moskvax.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/accelerationism-questions-after-session-1-mark-fisher-and-ray-brassier/>.

24
Ray Brassier, "Accelerationism," Accelerationism Symposium. See <http://moskvax.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/accelerationism-ray-brassier/>.

25
Noys, "Cyberpunk Phuturism: The Politics of Acceleration," 2012. See

“discoveries” and Malthusian “struggle for existence.”¹⁹

The sweep of capital mapped onto the sweep of Nature, its inevitability linked to the inevitability of the trajectory of Life to Death, as in Freud’s articulation of biological conservatism where “all organic instincts are conservative” and “directed towards regression, towards the reinstatement of something earlier. As a return to the inorganic where ‘The goal of all life is death.’”²⁰ Capital as “fact” lined up with the “fact” of Death. Worms. Silvery worms, techno tubes for waste disposal, a writhing mass, disposing of organic material. A twisting mass of annelids and toothed apertures. Hungering mouths. “A writhing mass of words, spoken by many and none. A sermon in the sign of the worm. Bless the coming and going of Him. May His passage cleanse the world.”²¹

Which is to say that this is all connected up to the circulation of dumb ideas. A space where images float like marshmallows, cutting across institutional, public, private and academic discourse. At the Accelerationism Symposium in 2010, at Goldsmith’s College, the point was made that:

It seems to me simply an aesthetics, a very common extrapolation from a certain lyrical vision of capitalism which to one extent or another you famously encounter in the *Communist Manifesto*, which simply doesn’t seem to actually involve any theory, if by theory we mean something which could find confirmation or refutation ... What strikes me is this is a completely ideological position ... [there] might be a mobilizing kick to this, but it’s at a purely ideological level ... I wouldn’t say it’s an interesting theory.²³

Accelerationism presents the dream of “speed” (or the rate of change of velocity per unit of time) in full-on dumb-Futurist banality. Ray Brassier is right when he describes how Land’s version of accelerationism eliminates the Bergsonian dimension of Deleuze and Guattari’s thought where speed AND slowness is duration and not just linear time.²⁴ Using instead the emptied out idea of “speed” as psychotically speeded-up logical (factory) clock time. Speed as going “faster” than something else which is going “slower.” Speeding us towards the dystopian/utopian horizon of capitalism, as a social form of “pure” drive and accumulation, “freed” from its dependence on the “meat” and slowness of labor.²⁵ Computer acceleration, fire-and-forget warfare, drone attack, and “compression of the kill chain.” Like the imaging of austerity where good mobile, hard-working,

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entrepreneurial productivity is contrasted against bad lazy, immobile profligacy. Or the dumb circulation of images in the ongoing economy of monarchist zombie-ideology: Margaret Thatcher, the Queen, Mom’s apple pie, Freedom or whatever. For instance, the recent blanket coverage by the British media of the Jubilee and Margaret Thatcher’s funeral. A continuous circulation and saturation. All of which is no less dumb, according to Mark Fisher, than leftist Politics where Badiou and Žižek’s ideas operate as pomo simulations performed for the academic gallery: as comedy Maoism and comedy Stalinism. “The promised land turns out to be a scorched earth where the raddled old communist terms, ideas and histories cannot take root.”²⁶

An abysmal economy of idiocy – forceful and relentless. A form of production as ideology: the ideal expression of “the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.”³⁰ Accelerationism in this context is a thinking in these transformations of production in/as idiocy (as opposed to rarified reflection from “outside”). An experimentation with the illocutional force of ideas/images which anyway-always operate as forcefully in the context of academia and art as in popular culture, politics, and so on. Whether this is a “theory” or not, it is a sophisticated fictioning of production as illocutional force, sliding in the deathly mud of ideology. Shaviro extends this trajectory in his analysis of the transformation of the modes of production in post-digital cinema where “post-continuity” editing is orientated not towards the production of meaning but “moment-by-moment manipulation of the spectators affective state.”³¹ The performance of generic stylized (ideological) scenarios, stock characters and images, superseding naive strategies of art-house cinema: complex characterization, narrative, montage, and so forth. Moreover, he proposes that Deleuze’s analysis of cinema in relation to affect and Time Image, is better applied to the “mainstream” examples Shaviro cites than to the films Deleuze himself references (something we all knew already). Accelerationism as an aesthetics presents an alternative to the usual claims to transcendence (through impossible transcendence) as a glimpse of something else, of hopeless hope, institutionally contained negative criticality and other familiar art dreams, but it is trapped by the conception of Time it requires. It is an obvious sideways move to propose, not an accelerationist aesthetics, but a productivist aesthetics where the “image” is not “speed” but repetition, Repetitionism.

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Alex Williams Escape Velocities

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In the early years of the twenty-first century there emerged a renewed interest in theoretical ideas of *acceleration*. The key figure in these discussions has been the British philosopher Nick Land. The term “accelerationism,” itself coined by Benjamin Noys (in a characteristically critical register), bares some explanation. As Noys defines it, accelerationism describes certain libertarian post-Marxist positions (Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, Lyotard’s *Libidinal Economy*, and the Baudrillard of the mid-1970s). According to Noys,

[Such thinkers] reply to Marx’s contention that “the real barrier of capitalist production is capital itself,” by arguing that we must crash through this barrier by turning capitalism against itself. They are an exotic variant of *la politique du pire*: if capitalism generates its own forces of dissolution then the necessity is to radicalise capitalism itself: the worse the better. We can call this tendency *accelerationism*.¹

It is Land who exemplified, and indeed exacerbated, this strategy of “the worse the better” to new heights of sick perversity in the 1990s. But what is of interest to us is not so much questions of conceptual genealogy but the resurgence of the idea: What is accelerationism today?

At present we find a swarm of new ideas operating under this rubric, ranging from post-capitalist techno-political theory, to sci-fi speculative cosmist design, to universal rationalist epistemologies. It is to be suggested that this return to ideas of acceleration must be indexed to our present condition of political, economic, and cultural *decay*. And though Land’s own ideas of *what* is to be accelerated, and in what acceleration *consists*, have been superseded, such references, now existing at multiple levels (epistemic, ontological, political, cosmological) might now come to be marshaled more directly against the spectre of a greying, obese, and yet still hegemonically rictus-tight neoliberal order.

In this, the role of the aesthetic must similarly shift. For whereas in Land’s schema of acceleration the aesthetic is both omnipresent and yet denied autonomy, in this newly imagined envisioning of the idea, the aesthetic may come to take on a more independent and causally significant role.

The Heresies of Nick Land

Nick Land was amongst the most prescient thinkers of the capitalism emerging in the mid-1990s. His work combined the cybernetics of

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Norbert Weiner with emerging Deleuzo-Guattarian libidinal philosophy, complexity science, UK rave culture, and cyberpunk pulp fiction, to generate a kind of pitch-black psychedelic reductio ad absurdum of neoliberal ideology. Key to Land's thinking was an idea he drew from Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project: capitalism differs from prior social formations in that it operates through processes of deterritorialization, which work to liberate inhibited dynamics of creativity, previously carefully imprisoned in primitive or despotic taboos. Land hijacked this schematization, bringing out an implicit inhuman pro-capitalism. Deleuze and Guattari asked:

Which is the revolutionary path? ... To withdraw from the world market? ... Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market? ... Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to "accelerate the process."²

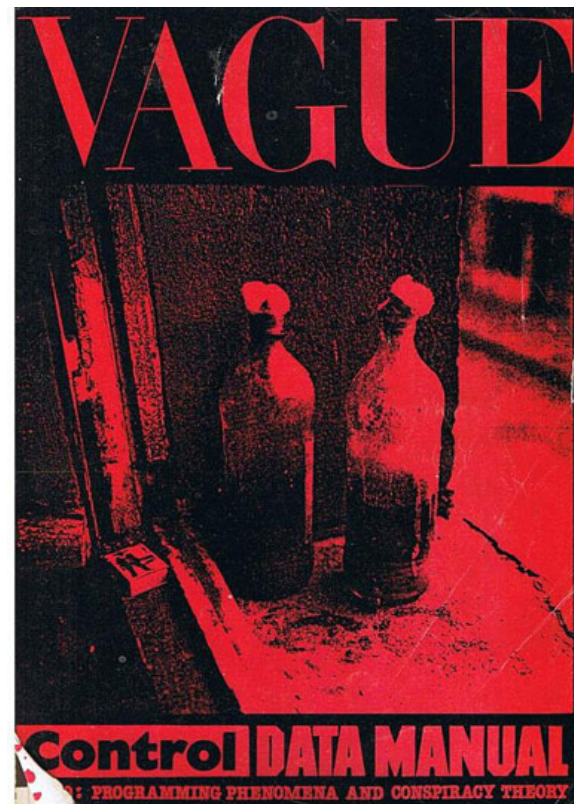
To this question, Land answered in the affirmative. Where Deleuze and Guattari ultimately counseled caution, to accelerate with care to avoid total destruction, Land favored an

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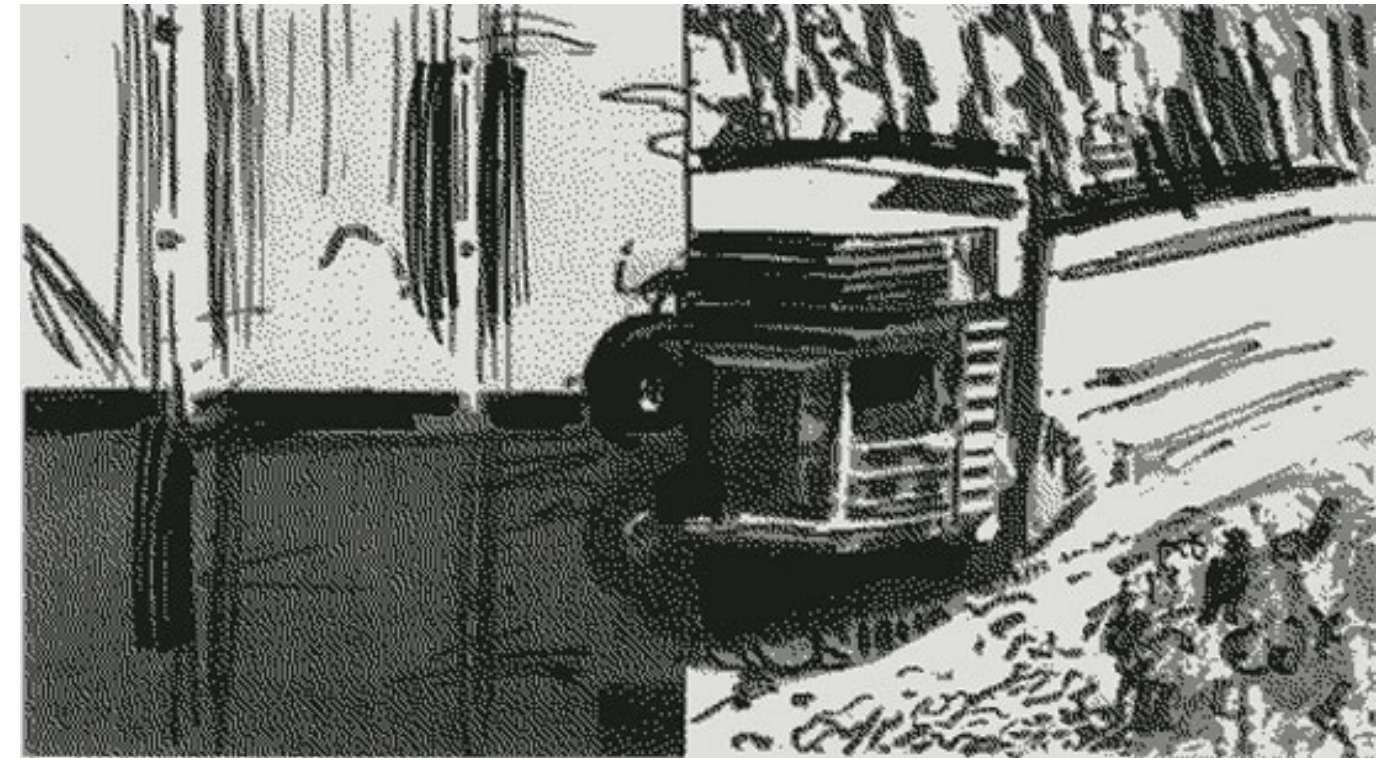
absolute process of acceleration and deterritorialization, identifying capitalism as the ultimate agent of history. As Land puts it, "Capitalism has no external limit, it has consumed life and biological intelligence, [and it is] vast beyond human anticipation."³ Here, the deregulation, privatization, and commodification of neoliberal capitalism will serve to destroy all stratification within society, generating in the process unheard of novelties. Politics and all morality, particularly of the leftist variety, are a blockage to this fundamental historical process. Land had a hypnotizing belief that capitalist *speed* alone could generate a global transition towards unparalleled technological singularity. In this visioning of capital, even the human itself can eventually be discarded as mere drag to an abstract planetary intelligence rapidly constructing itself from the bricolaged fragments of former civilizations. As Land has it, through the acceleration of global capitalism the human will be dissolved in a technological apotheosis, effectively experiencing a species-wide suicide as the ultimate stimulant head rush.

As bizarre as it may sound to the ears of the present day, this brand of thinking made a twisted kind of sense in the 1990s. This was the

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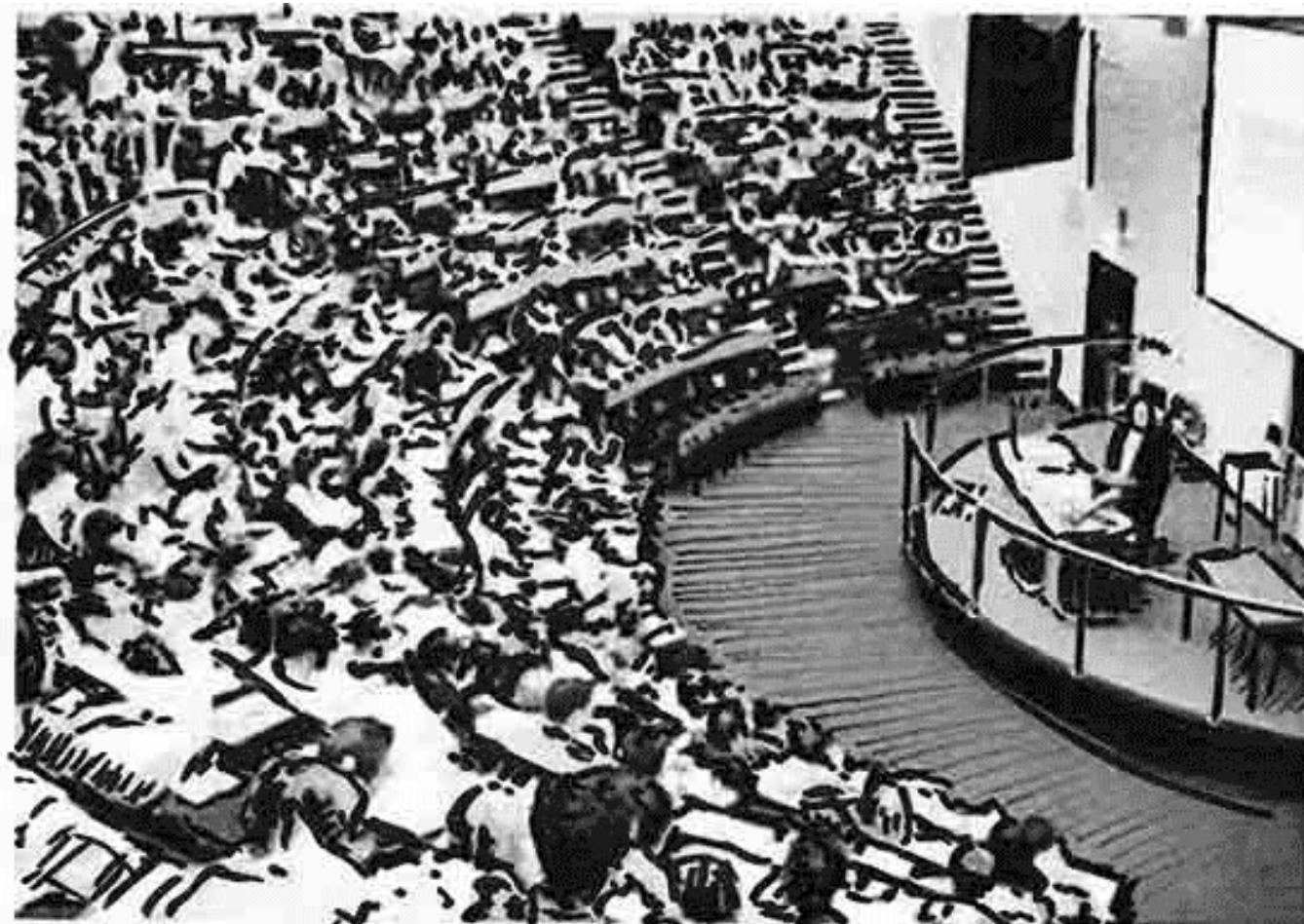


Cyberpunk magazine "Vague," by Tom Vague, London, 1980s.



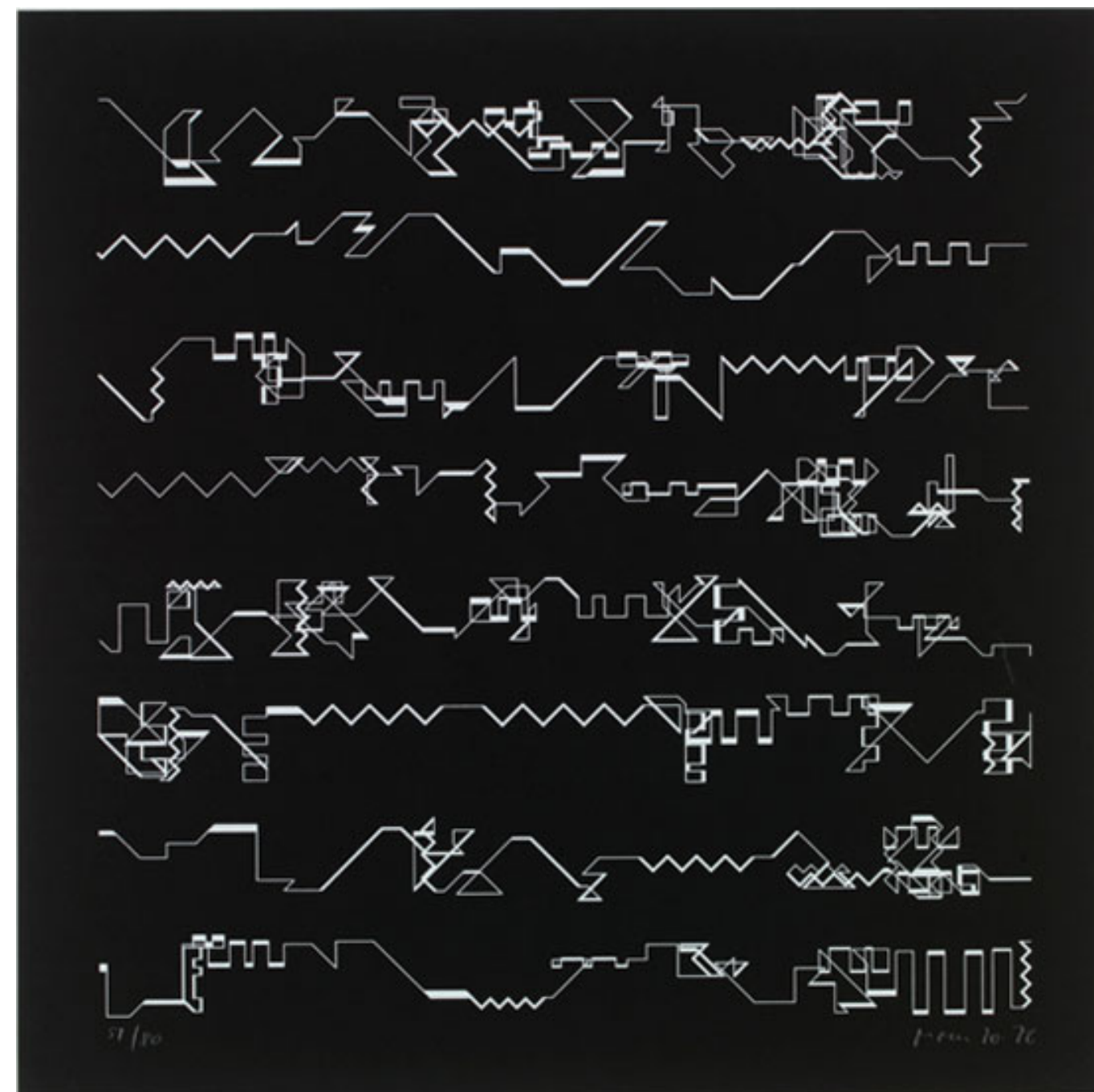
Hannah Sawtell, *OSCULATOR*, a remixable HD video loop, 2012.²⁷Sawtell's cinema scale backprojection at ICA, sited in the theatre space between two wooden screens including reworked industrial soundtrack. The film presents the image of a web-sourced truck rotating in a mine, revolving across the split screen, grooved in tire tracks and then cutting into the 3D model of a yellow/green monster truck grinding through the virtual space of Apple HQ, grinding across the split screen and back into the heavy metal of the truck in the mine. Previous works by Sawtell use similar pre-set screen wipes and transitions to mechanically repeat and return differently. Set against mechanical and/or sampled soundtracks, for instance the video "You'll Never Walk Alone" (2006) which uses "I lost control" by Sleazy D (1986) as a soundtrack. As Robert Garnet writes: "Real rhythm, as opposed to precisely pulsed meter is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, what 'renders duration sonic.' Duration is the détournement of linear, logical time, the rendering pre-posterous of time, where the present is contracted and dilated into the intensive simultaneity of the past and the future of the past, or the future-past of the present; duration is the nonsense of lived time."²⁸ Rotating. A truck rotating. "Flow" but circular. Production grinding round. Not going anywhere but grinding around inside a mine and then the Apple HQ. The movement is relentless but around in circles, grinding a hole in the screen. Revolving. But what if this is not a "stopping" but rotation as a kind of dialectical meat grinder that, to quote Marx, is: a "scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom" that both recognizes "the existing state of things" and recognizes "the negation of that state."²⁹ Production-as-production as an aesthetic of repetition. As the terror of the "... P ..." of production (in Marx's formula) as the point where "M" has not been recuperated but put into continuous repetition. As a continuous circulation of production as interruption, withdrawal of labor and anti-accumulation in the fantasy-as-fantasy of an aesthetics of production-as-production. An adjacency to means of production where the production of the capitalist sublime (capitalist aesthetics) is replaced by a blank production of production where the dissimilarity/similarity of "art" and "politics" from/to these generalized categories, by which they are recognized, controlled and rendered impotent, is grinded out as the return of the same as different. Or the continuous potential of this (in repetition). Coiling. Drilling. Screwing. Holing. Sucking. A hole or mouth laughing. Screaming. A vortex to suck the shit through. The angel of history in rotation. Whirlpool Spiral/screw hurricane. A solar anus burning backwards. Production as production.

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"Each speaker was given four minutes to present his paper, as there were so many scheduled – 198 from sixty-four different countries. To help expedite the proceedings, all reports had to be distributed and studied beforehand, while the lecturer would speak only in numerals, calling attention in this fashion to the salient paragraphs of his work. To better receive and process such a wealth of information, we all turned on our portable recorders and pocket computers (which later would be plugged in for the general discussion). Stan Hazelton of the US delegation immediately threw the hall into a flurry by emphatically repeating: 4, 6, 11, and therefore 22; 5, 9, hence 22; 3, 7, 2, 11, from which it followed that 22 and only 22!! Someone jumped up, saying yes but 5, and what about 6, 18, or 4 for that matter; Hazelton countered this objection with the crushing retort that, either way, 22. I turned to the number key in his paper and discovered that 22 meant the end of the world."22

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Manfred Mohr, *P-021*, 1970. Screenprint after a plotter drawing, from the portfolio "Scratch Code: 1970-1975," published by Editions Média, 1976. Copyright: the artist. Photo: V&A Images.

decade after the collapse of actually existing Communism, when capitalism stood entirely unopposed, when Francis Fukuyama was declaring “The End of History.” With the expansion of digital culture and the widespread adoption of internet technologies, techno-utopians such as Kevin Kelly were pronouncing the advent of a new social and economic epoch. And while much of culture was already mired in retrograde maneuverings, underground dance music fully embodied the inhuman science-fictional vision of Land, suffused with alien sonic innovations, contorted into an apocalyptic paranoid euphoria. As Land himself put it, this was “impending human extinction becoming accessible as a dance-floor,” a prime way (along with the production of theory and the ingestion of accelerant narcotics) that the unrepresentable speed of inhuman capitalism could be experienced by individual humans. This was an alienation that was *enjoyable*, to be perversely *desired*.

Acceleration > Speed

But if Land’s rabidly nihilistic vision of global capitalist acceleration made sense in the fervid 1990s, it makes less sense today. One reason for this is that Land’s accelerationist schema rejects politics as a sentimental excrescence, as a matter simply of buttressing the incontinent egos of wet liberals and feeble Marxists. On Land’s account, at least, the raw accelerative force of capitalistic innovation alone ought to be sufficient to drive revolutionary change. But as Deleuze and Guattari recognized, what capitalist speed deterritorializes with one hand, it reterritorializes with the other. Social modernization becomes caked in the kitsch remainders of our communal past, as Thatcherite-Reaganite deregulation sits comfortably beside pseudo-Victorian family and religious values. A deep tension exists within neoliberal capitalism, between its self-image as the singular vehicle of modernity, and the somewhat paltry reality it is in fact capable of providing. Far from dissolving the social in the universal acid of hyper-technological acceleration, today the best we can hope for is marginally improved consumer gadgetry, against a background of political inertia, cultural hyperstasis, ecological collapse, and growing resource crisis. Technological progress, rather than erasing the personal, has become almost entirely Oedipalized, ever more focused on supporting the liberal individual subject. The very agent which Land identified as the engine of untold innovation has run dry. This is alienation of an all-too familiar, ennui-inducing kind, rather than a coldly thrilling succession of future-shocks. All of this opens up a space for the

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political again: if we *desire* a radically innovative social formation, capital alone will *not* deliver.

Moreover, from a philosophical perspective, Landian accelerationism flattens real distinctions in the world into a crudely univocal system. The key consequences of this is an inability to demarcate the differences between thinking and being, reducing the rational to the ontological. In this regard, Land follows Deleuze and numerous other process philosophers. As Ray Brassier has argued, this leads to a scenario where, since difference is what ultimately undergirds the reality of being, and thought is merely a difference in being, everything which *is*, to some extent, *thinks*. In this fashion, a pre-critical panpsychism emerges, unable to properly account for the status of logical or normative rational thought.⁴ With Land, this problematic antirationalism finally results in an elision not just of thinking and being, but of the ontological and the aesthetic.⁵ Even theory itself becomes a mere stimulant, outside of any reference to external truth, capable only of inculcating an affective state that enables limited access for individual subjects to the ultra-complex becoming of capital-as-world-devouring-intelligence-system. This process leaves Land’s theory unmoored and incapable of justifying itself, except perhaps via a Nietzschean investment in the “force” of literary style, the libidinal pull of text itself.⁶

At the level of the mechanics of acceleration, Reza Negarestani has prosecuted the critique that the Landian position, grounded in a conception of machinic efficacy, is constitutively unable to generate the kind of apocalyptic teleological dynamics he envisions.⁷ Land’s singularitarian future depends upon an underlying system of capitalistic self-augmentation, ultimately resting on an algorithmic paradigm of recursive computation. Following the critique of the philosopher of science Giuseppe Longo, all computational systems function according to an operative architecture which is discrete, built from individual instructions, akin to the stages of a recipe, and this discrete, finitized conception of time is distinctly inadequate to match the continuous processes we find in nature.⁸ As well as discrete processes, computational systems also exhibit a crude quantization in terms of measurement. When computers are used to model complex natural systems (for example, human neurology or weather systems) subtle differences in starting conditions get simplified, occluded in a “blocky” or “pixelated” rounding off. In complex systems, nonlinear feedback processes lead even infinitesimally small differences in initial conditions to generate vastly divergent results over time. The

illusion of growth. It can never perform its own self-image successfully but always falls back on brute power (unnetworked, unambiguous, dumb). It is a system whose strongest production is the production of the image of its own productivity. And obviously these images don’t make sense and so cannot be effectively critically deconstructed or contested. As Žižek says, ideology operates on the register of the sublime, where ideological objects have no meaning, but following Kant’s structuring, our inability to grasp their “meaning” provides testimony to their Transcendent nature – of Nation, God, Freedom, Market, and so forth. Far above the ordinary or profane things of the world, including the limitations of our perceptual/conceptual capabilities. The Truth and force of ideology resides in its lack of meaning.

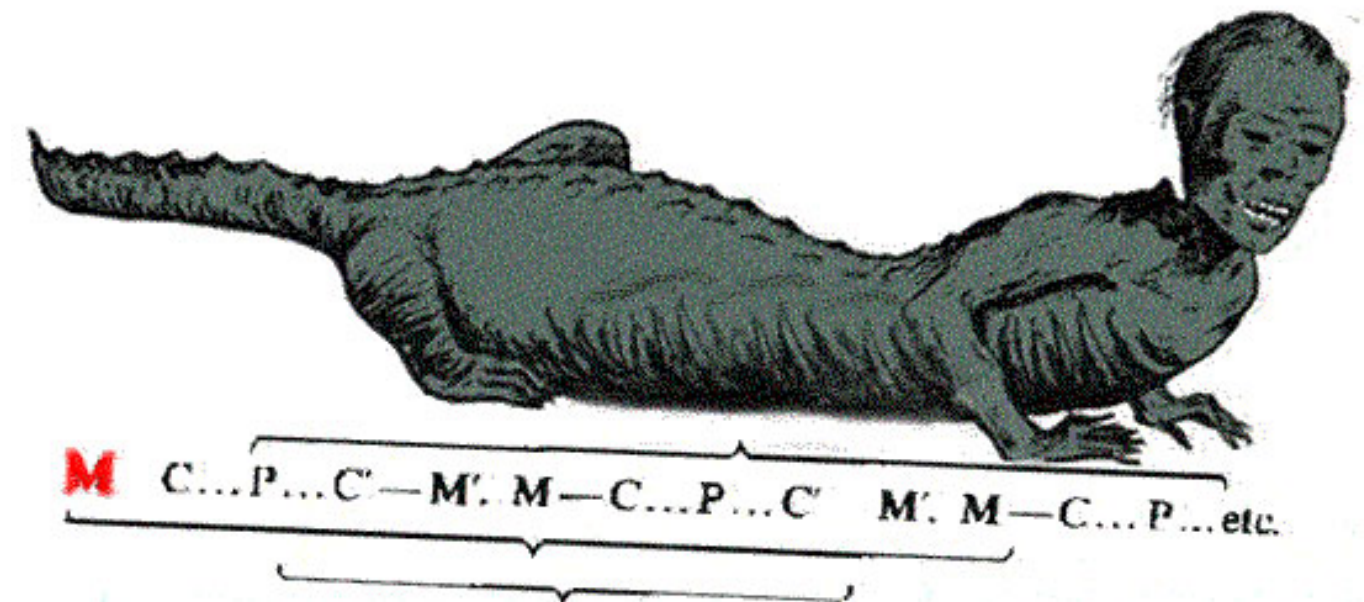
We don’t live long. This is a simple fact – we don’t live long. And “they” love us for this pathetic temporary-ness, squirted out into the violence and control of language and exchange value, and dying shortly afterwards: a few summer holidays, a few children, 3,000 hours on the toilet and 20,000 hours watching TV. Political transformation requires organization and time but we keep dying. A miserable counter-revolutionary brevity, written precisely into the mechanisms of capitalism as the finite expenditure of labor power, chopped up into small circuits of work and pay, repeated again and again (and our dependence upon this repetition) until death. Replayed to us as the aesthetics of the capitalist sublime and/or

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Speculative Wowism where the brutal cycles of labor and wage are contrasted with the “infinity” of M-C-M and the myth of its serpent-like omnipresence linked up to Romanticism: “wow it’s amaaaaazing how vast the universe is and how many stars ... and the relentless flow of markets in relation to the finite shitness of our lives.”

The neoliberal End of History and the look-of-love-of-death as sublime wonder carefully cultivated through a series of right-wing think-tanks emerging in the 1940s, encompassing (for instance) the ideas of economist Friedrich Hayek and his development of the Mont Pelerin Society as an attempt to readdress the perceived global slide towards socialism, State ascendancy, and Marxist or Keynesian planning. Fictioning a new anti-statist, anti-scientist worldview, prototyped in post-war Germany where “legitimation was achieved through economic growth rather than in political terms.”¹⁸ Rearticulating the image of capitalism as unplanned and organic, the economy as a system of flows and State or socialist intervention or planning as “unnatural.” A reversal and reappropriation of nineteenth-century socialist critiques of capitalism as mechanistic with capitalism refictioned as natural/Nature and as the “fact”/Truth of natural selection. As Marx writes:

It is remarkable how among beasts and plants Darwin rediscovers his English society with its division of labor, competition, opening up of new markets,



provocation: the kind of provocation the Left needs. Institutional critique – its racy delights pitched strategically and institutionally against the constrained traditions of criticality and (more precisely) the academic Left, or the “embourgeoisified state-subsidized grumbling that so often calls itself academic Marxism.” A menagerie of “careerist sandbaggers,” “guffawing Guardianistas” and “academic trolls” engaged in “quibbling critique” and “the ruthless protection of petit bourgeois interests dressed up as politics.” And all this coagulating around the Kurtz-like figure (and writing) of Nick Land – the dark-brain, enfant-terrible of British philosophy, lurking like a spider in the caves of Mordor (or China). In contrast to the hypocrites described above, Land was on the “outside” – he was earnest, man! – “to the point of psychosis and auto-induced schizophrenia” in his pursuit of “the Spinozist-Nietzschean-Marxist injunction that a theory should not be taken seriously if it remains at the level of representation.”⁹ Predictably, Land’s anti-careerism is now used by his disciples as cultural capital, with stakeholders and beneficiaries pegged out and lineages coiffured.¹⁰ Business as usual.

In part, this is laid out in relation to the same old pseudo-oppositions of philosophical binaries. Nietzsche’s “YES” opposed to the dialectical “NO”; affirmation to dialectical negation; difference to dialectical contradiction; joy, enjoyment, the ecstasy of the event to dialectical labor; lightness, dance to dialectical responsibilities. Life to Death and so on. But there is another way of thinking about all this – key here is the idea of production.

In his book *Post-Cinematic Affect*, Steven Shaviro makes a proposal for an “accelerationist” aesthetics, despite what he sees as its obvious deficiencies as a “political strategy.”¹¹ As a way of mapping the landscape of contemporary capitalism, exploring the contours of the “prison we find ourselves in,” and as “a meditation on the impossible.”¹² In the situation where we are told that There Is No Alternative, this is an aesthetics of the post-impossible after the end of the End of History. OK, so far this is just more of the same.

The immediate problem is that accelerationist aesthetics is *already* the aesthetics of capital – not the official version obviously (which comes wrapped up in cutesy humanism) but its dark white phosphorus fantasy as vertiginous, desubjectified force – inhuman and “Other.” A porned-up version of Marx where capitalism is always-already everywhere, an abstract, infinite and remorseless evil that “... doesn’t feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And ... absolutely will not stop, ever.” A Terminator robot striding across the

blackened landscape of post-Fordism swept by the winds of hyperactive production and blasted by the delirious financial flows of neoliberal economy. Hollowed out as the howling wolf-droids of capital’s hyper abstraction and “the repressed desire of capitalism for meltdown.”¹³ Billions of tons of meat sliding down a chute minced out into surplus value and programmed into dull servitude of a bloated homogenizing ruling class (the contingent rule of the bovine). Dark capitalism ... you got to crack a few eggs ... I mean, exactly how many fucking cuckoo clocks do you want anyway?

Shaviro’s analysis is articulated simultaneously in relation to the transformation of modes of cinematic production and on the level of the sublime. These are interlinked. He describes how the de-particularized spaces through which the protagonist moves (Asia Argento in *Boarding Gate* [2007]): “corporate offices, loading bays, swank offices, sweat shops ...” are engineered as “generic modules that proliferate in order to lubricate the movement of resources, configured to maximize the profitability of space by erecting buildings in relation to the metrics of larger networks of circulation.”¹⁵ This is expressed in the movement of the camera roving “nervously back and forth” through the space on the screen regardless of whether it is a murder scene or a shopping mall. Everything is interchangeable, “or at least exchangeable.”¹⁶ An aesthetic that presents itself as

the expression of a distilled structure whose sole concern and use is to ramp up levels of efficacy and expediency in the extraction of surplus value and circulation of privatized matter and cognitive production. A developmental ethos that does not hesitate to declare itself a kind of new mathematical sublime: this landscape, with its engineered beams, boxes, piles, glacis, and equipment parks, offers itself as the pure, one-dimensional result of numbers, algorithms, and protocols crunched ... elsewhere.¹⁷

This is the already-dream of the managers and participants of capital. We luuuurve it! The fantasy sweep of the vast/incalculable flow of capital in its infinite and unbounded nature played off against the finitude of the worker. An architectural aesthetic where form does not reflect function, but like Albert Speer’s fascist architecture, is the shoddy attempt to fiction it.

Capitalism is not continuous flux, algorithmic automatism, and dematerialized circulation, but instead breakdown, stagflation, crisis, primitive accumulation, violence, and the

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Dr. Hiroshi Ishiguro and his android robot, ATR Intelligent Robotics and Communication Laboratories, Keihanna, Japan. Dr. Ishiguro’s project of life-like robots, made to function as surrogates of the person they represent, has sparked discussions about the empathy or repulsion a nearly-human-looking entity can provoke.

continuous nature of reality escapes the quantized grasp of our present computational paradigm, and that paradigm rests at the core of Land's machinery of acceleration: a unidirectional accumulative process of algorithmic amplification.

One final line of problematization for the Landian program of accelerationism concerns its presumptions relating to the meaning of freedom. In common with much liberal and neoliberal thought, Land conceives of a primary freedom which various forms of structure inhibit. Though distinguished by his rigorous inhumanism (*vis-à-vis*, say, a classical liberal like Locke) he maintains an interest in a merely negative freedom: the freedom of capital from deleterious (and misguided) human intervention. This is, however, to entirely ignore the richer and more suggestive domain of positive freedom. It is in this sense that Land confuses *speed* with *acceleration*. We may be moving fast today, but only within a strictly defined set of capitalist parameters that themselves never waver. As such, Landian accelerationism is stuck in a merely dromological register, a localized ramping up of intensity, rather than a more properly accelerative regime capable of navigating *beyond* the ultimately mind-numbing capitalist axiomatic of accumulation-for-accumulation's sake.⁹ These critiques of the Landian position collectively constitute the basis for a reformatted, updated, and thoroughly upgraded notion of what accelerationism might mean.

For A New Enlightenment

To begin with the last and most significant of these criticisms, what must bind together otherwise divergent new accelerationist approaches is an overriding project of *freedom*.¹⁰ In this respect, accelerationism today has moved closer to a classically Kantian perspective: freedom consisting in the following of (rational-normative) *rules*, so as to free ourselves from the impulses of *drive*. This is what Brassier describes as a "cultural achievement," the erection of an *artificial* order of rational, rule-governed imperatives enabling an evasion of ever more modulated and manipulated impulses. In contradistinction to libertarian and purely negative conceptions of freedom, the tyranny of drive, impulse, emotion, and affectivity can be supplanted only to the extent that such libidinal phenomena are held in check by the formalized workings of reason, a non-natural, synthetic edifice, a positive construction developed in the face of a universe which would otherwise leave us the slaves of baser instinct. What distinguishes this position from a mere regurgitation of familiar Enlightenment tropes is a maximal yet rigorously inhuman

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Prometheanism. It is this inhumanized Promethean account of freedom which threads together the disparate fabrics of epistemic, political, and cosmist accelerationism. As epistemic accelerationism engenders new modes of thinking and new bodies of knowledge, so political accelerationism generates new social and economic systems to embody, express, and capitalize upon these rationalist gains. Our epistemic and causal capacities are expanded in tandem, in the fashion of a ratchet.

The twin thinkers of epistemic accelerationism are Ray Brassier and Reza Negarestani. Accelerationism in this guise is the project of maximizing rational capacity – the contents of knowledge about the world – and enabling the ramification of the conceptual space of reason. For both Brassier and Negarestani, this process is one which proceeds via *alienation*. For Brassier, this is due to a direct identification of the processes of scientific discovery with nihilism. Enlightenment, rather than entailing an edifying reassurance of the humanistic order, instead gradually but irreparably modifies the manifest image of ourselves-in-the-world, stripping back the comforting homilies of humanism to reveal, Terminator-style, the gleaming bones of Wilfrid Sellars's empty, formalist, rational subject lying beneath.

For Negarestani, epistemic acceleration rests in generating new ways to navigate conceptually. This spatialized, geometric understanding of conceptual behavior emphasizes the creative aspects of thought, focusing on conceptual discovery and abductive transition, over and above analytic parsimony. This modern system of knowledge, much inspired by recent work in the synthetic philosophy of mathematics,¹¹ is driven by opportunities to build connections, bootstrapping out of local horizons of knowledge and tracing the pathways which exist towards more globalized conceptual horizons. In this sense, Negarestani's project is one which argues for a "true to the universe" thought, which binds the traumatic and vertiginous inhuman perspectives that scientific and mathematical thought provide to the rational subject.¹² This revolution "for and by the open"¹³ prioritizes neither the global over the local *nor* the local over the global, but rather their imbrication with one another, their potential for perforation, and their possibilities for transplantation or transition. Considered from the perspective of an epistemological account of conceptual space, this is to operate under the rational injunction towards *exploration*, albeit of a necessarily traumatic kind. Epistemic acceleration then consists in the expansion and exploration of conceptual capacity, fed by new

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"Hey how fast you guys going?" "I dunno man ... fast ... fast, I can feel the wind on my face and my hair blown back" ... "and when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's, my cousin's, he took me out on a sled, and I was frightened. He said, Marie, Marie, hold on tight. And down we went. In the mountains, there you feel free. I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter."



In 1982, the replicant Rutger Hauer famously claimed: "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe ..." No you fucking haven't you fucking fake. But then ... OK ... he is right ... this is the structure of fantasy ... we won't ever see "attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion." And his destiny is to play the granddad in some Hollywood film about a giant dog. Degenerating reverse-forwards like Phil Daniels in Mark Leckey's *The Destructors* (2004), from the youthful figure in the 1970s, through Quadrophenia and on/down/up through successive repetitions in soap operas towards death – in cinema as in life, first living then as a corpse increasingly, films are like this – full of dead people – from the 1940s through the 1980s – necrocinematic carts of corpses rattling down the cobbled street of some tired-out medieval drama.



Diana looks ahead of her out of the speeding car. At last she has found true love. As they enter the tunnel there is a faint smell of alcohol. The driver's hands screw up on the wheel like spiders – the moment hangs ... gyrating ... hypnotized. The last thing that goes through her mind is the dashboard.

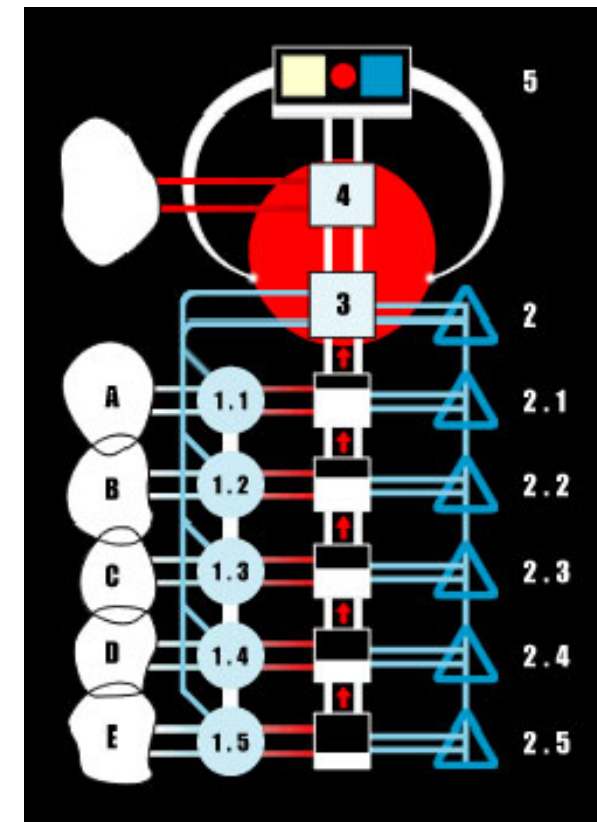


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Project room for Cybersyn, a Chilean project cybernetic simulator developed between 1971–1973 (by Stafford Beer for Salvador Allende's government) aimed at constructing a distributed decision support system to aid in the management of the national economy. The project consisted of four modules: an economic simulator, custom software to check factory performance, an operations room, and a national network of telex machines that were linked to one mainframe computer.



It wasn't the best place to be recognized as a pedophile. At a municipal swimming pool, in the shallow end. The woman had pointed at him and turned and shouted to other people. A local agency had pasted up a series of warning posters in the neighborhood but the photo was out of date and his hair had been dyed and permed since then. He hadn't thought it would cause him any trouble. But the water had flattened his curls and darkened them – more like the photo. His denials were not working. The families circled around him. He tried to explain ... all those sessions of realignment therapy.



Graphic imagery for the Cybersyn Lab, Chile.

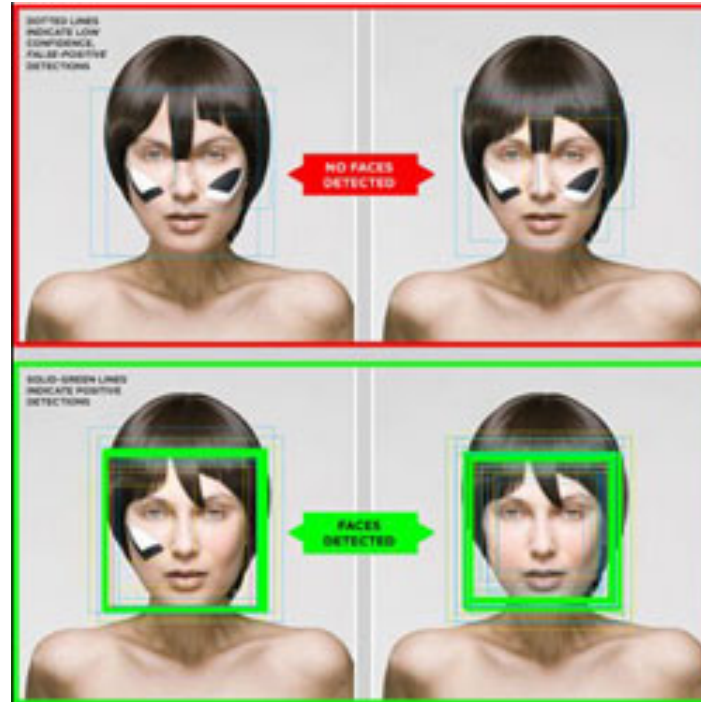
techno-scientific knowledges, resulting in the continual turning-inside-out of the humanist subject in a perpetual Copernican revolution. In so doing, epistemic accelerationisms preserve the crucial distinctions between thought and being, and hence are capable of undergirding a rationalist picture of the world and its operations.

As Nick Srnicek has argued, one significant pinion point between epistemic and political acceleration is the potential for the transformation of economics. Here, epistemological gains directly interface with technological, social, and political ones. Srnicek reasons that economic models effectively operate as navigational systems for particular social and ideological infrastructures, and as such we can distinguish between those models which provide orientation and strategic support for the current capitalist system, and those which might provide resources by which we could navigate towards a future post-capitalist society. In this fashion, “the critique of restricted knowledge therefore parallels the critique of restricted economies.”¹⁴ In other words, new ways of thinking the economy can have dramatic effects on how actual economies operate. The post-capitalist order which political accelerationism takes as its immediate goal necessarily depends on the ability to transform the discipline of economics and the body of knowledge it supports and instantiates. The transformation of economics can be seen as one important element within a broader process of transition, with the development of new models and cognitive maps of the existing system leading towards the development of a speculative image of the future economic system.

Beyond the economic, political accelerationism seeks to revolutionize the contemporary political Left. Holding that capitalism now constrains the productive forces of technology, directing them towards narrow and often fruitless ends, accelerationism as a political project proposes identifying latent productive forces which must be unleashed *against* neoliberalism. Rather than working to smash the current capitalist system, the existing infrastructure is here identified as a platform requiring *repurposing* towards post-capitalist, collective ends. Technology, from this standpoint, is enslaved to myopic capitalist purposes, with the wager being that the real transformative potentials of much scientific and technical research remain untapped. These pre-adaptations may become decisive, but only sociopolitical action is capable of activating them, meaning that technological change alone will remain entirely insufficient to radically alter

our world. What ought to be aimed towards, this tendency suggests, is a sociotechnical hegemony, with the goal of repurposing the present material platforms of finance, production, logistics, and consumption towards post-capitalist ends. What accelerationist politics proposes is that only a future that is *more modern* – an alternative future that neoliberalism is inherently unable to generate – will be sufficient to motivate a genuinely transformative and coherent politics.¹⁵

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First test shoot for the project “CVDazzle Camouflage from Computer Vision: Look #1.” The project aims to develop camouflage for facial recognition programs. Copyright: Adam Harvey.

Such a future is only going to be possible with significant transformations in the radical Left. The Euro-American Left’s current obsessions with localism, direct action, and deliberative democracy are ill-matched when confronted with the acephalous monstrosity that is global capital today. What is therefore necessary is the constitution of a Left comfortable with globality, complexity, mediation, quantification, and technology, rather than sentimentalized modes of action and organization more suited to generating an affective sensation of feeling good in pious defeat, rather than efficacious action. The fetishization of localized horizons of direct democracy must be replaced by a more substantive conception of collective self-mastery, wherein the more we are able to harness our knowledge of the social and technical world, the better we will be able to effectively rule ourselves. This Promethean

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A car crash harnesses elements of eroticism, aggression, desire, speed, drama, kinesthetic factors, the stylizing of motion, consumer goods, status – all these in one event. I myself see the car crash as a tremendous sexual event really: a liberation of human and machine libido (if there is such a thing).

– J.G. Ballard, interview in *Penthouse* (September 1970)

The already-dead term “accelerationism” is productive as a way of thinking and negotiating the register of stupidity – or brutal idiocy – where “meaning” is less important than force. That is, the language of ideology which is neither complex nor beautiful but forceful, articulating “meaning” on the level of flesh as surplus labor, television, academic discourse, and electrocution.¹ Spiraling out of the writing of Deleuze and Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard, and Nick Land, among others, accelerationism is a quasi-Marxist strategy where “the cure is posed as more of the disease,” or more of the disease than capitalism can stand. The immanent radicalization of capital’s own dynamic of deterritorialization and decoding. A machinic revolution pressing in the opposite direction to “socialistic regulation,”² embracing the demonic forces of the market as these rip apart the petty bureaucracies of the State. Played out as either a dehumanizing radicality which (paradoxically) clears the field for a post-capitalist humanism, like the end of *Total Recall* when the dome cracks open and idealized Life pours out into the regenerating landscape.³ Or as an inversion of Hegelian-Marxist historical materialism, in which capitalism will not be ultimately unmasked as exploited labor power but rather humans unmasked as “the meat puppets of Capital,” and their “identities and self-understandings” as simulations skinned off⁴ – so we can get on “with the business of fully inhabiting inhuman capitalist jouissance.”⁵ After the Apocalypse the accelerationist either reprograms him or herself back into a “good hippy” or embraces the dark joys of Oblivion like the Nazgûl or Nero in *Star Trek 2009*.⁶ But obviously accelerationism doesn’t actually do any of this. A criticism of it is that by strategically endorsing the impersonal processes of neoliberalism, with the alibi of “instrumental distance,” there is no way to dissociate praxis from identifiable ends anymore.⁷ But this is hypothetical; there is no praxis and capitalism doesn’t need/know/care about any of this. It is like waving a flag as a juggernaut surges past.⁸

Perhaps then, as Mark Fisher suggests, accelerationism should be considered as a

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- 1 Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (London: Athlone, 2008), 239.
- 2 Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (London: Zero Books, 2010), 137. See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), 231–32.
- 3 *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 137.
- 4 See, for example, the opening paragraphs of Gean Moreno's "Notes on The Inorganic, Part I: Accelerations," *e-flux journal* 31 (January 2012), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/notes-on-the-inorganic-par-t-i-accelerations/>.
- 5 Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect*, 137.
- 6 Serres, *Five Senses*, 239.
- 7 Félix Guattari, *The Machinic Unconscious*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) 2011), 59, original emphasis.
- 8 Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect*, 138.
- 9 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 169, original emphasis.
- 10 Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 45.
- 11 Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect*, 139.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Serres, *The Five Senses*, 291.
- 14 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 206.
- 15 Ibid., 128.
- 16 Michel Serres, *Genesis*, trans. Genevieve James and James Nielson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 98.
- 17 Serres, *Genesis*, 101, 69, 101
- 18 Guattari, *Machinic Unconscious*, 82–3.
- 19

Ibid., 105.

20 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Athlone, 2000), 67.

politics of maximal mastery over society and its environment will necessarily be highly experimental in nature. The older forms of mastery more traditionally associated with Enlightenment thinking stressed a Laplacian absolute knowledge, fit for a clockwork Newtonian universe. Today, our knowledge of non-trivial complex systems means that any attempts at mastering our world entail developing a mode of action which is more capable of metabolizing contingency, able to use the technical tools at its disposal to model the range of possible outcomes to any interventions.¹⁶

Finally, it is only a post-capitalist sociopolitical model which is likely to be capable of launching a robust cosmist imperative. The first two thirds of the twentieth century saw astounding leaps forward in technology and political and social consciousness, with the era immediately after the Second World War (running up to about 1979) the apogee of future-oriented thought in scientific and popular culture. But these futurological visions of the revolutionary intersection of techno-scientific development and social transformation, after the advent of neoliberalism, were quickly replaced by a yearning for kitsch retro-futurism. This is the story of modernism and early postmodernism collapsing into what might be termed a generalized chronosickness: a loss of the thread of techno-social Enlightenment. This is encapsulated especially in the loss of space as "final frontier." Starting in the 1970s, the huge Soviet and American space programs collapsed under the strain of political pressure and budget cuts. The resumption of a serious and ongoing exploration of space is perhaps the ultimate expression of freedom imaginable to present minds, what the design theorist Benedict Singleton refers to as a "maximum jailbreak."¹⁷

Accelerationist Aesthetics

It is against this backdrop that we can specify what an accelerationist *aesthetics* might look like: in the processes of epistemic conceptual navigation, in hyperstitional ideological feedback loops, in the design of interfaces of control, and as a blueprint for action in complex systems.

First to epistemic aesthetics. The spatialized conception of the navigation and ramification of conceptual spaces at the core of Negarestani's notion of epistemic acceleration has an immediately aesthetic dimension, a highly visualized approach, grounded in the mathematics of topos theory. This abstract mathematical aesthetic of gesture, navigation, limitropism, and pathway-finding reroutes the philosophy of mathematics away from a basis in set theory and logic, and instead seeks an

ultimately *geometric* ground.¹⁸

Secondly, as regards political accelerationism, what becomes crucial is the ability of a reconstituted Left to not simply operate inside the hegemonic coordinates of the possible as established by our current socioeconomic setup. To do so requires the ability to direct preexisting and at present inchoate desires for post-capitalism towards coherent visions of the future. Necessarily, given the experimental nature of such a reconstitution, much of the initial labor must be around the composition of powerful visions able to reorient populist desire away from the libidinal dead end which seeks to identify modernity as such with neoliberalism, and modernizing measures as intrinsically synonymous with neoliberalizing ones (for example, privatization, marketization, and outsourcing). This is to invoke the idea, initially coined by Land's Cybernetic Cultural Research Unit, of *hyperstition* – narratives able to effectuate their own reality through the workings of feedback loops, generating new sociopolitical attractors. This is the aesthetic side of the task of constructing a new sociotechnical hegemony.

Third, we have the idea of an aesthetics of interfaces, control rooms, and cognitive maps.¹⁹ Here, an important aspect of rendering reality tractable, and hence furthering the overriding accelerationist project of maximal collective self-mastery, is the ability to marshal and interact effectively with data. In a world increasingly marked by its complexity, vast amounts of data present a problem as much as a solution. The aesthetics of design are therefore important in being able to properly render interfaces which enable agents to interact and manipulate these data fields effectively. One only need think of the kinds of heads-up displays used in contemporary finance for a contemporary and all-too-effective example. Design is also crucial in building control rooms and other physical infrastructures which enable the direction of interventions in complex systems. One prototypical exemplar here is the specially constructed control center for the cybernetic socialist project Cybersyn, in Allende's Chile of the early 1970s.²⁰ Both interfaces and control rooms embody the aesthetics of cognitive maps, technically mediated cartographies of the present world acting as a basis from which action can be planned.

Finally, we have the aesthetic of action in complex systems. What must be coupled to complex systems analysis and modeling is a new form of action: improvisatory and capable of executing a design through a practice which works with the contingencies it discovers only in

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the course of its acting. This can be best described through the Ancient Greek concept of *mêtis*, a particular mode of cunning craft. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant define *mêtis*, in contrast to *poesis* or *techne*, as “skill with materials guided by a kind of cunning intelligence.”²¹ This is a mode of artifice through devious and well-timed action, which brings into play the dynamic tendencies of the materials it works on in an improvisatory fashion. *Mêtic* practice entails a complicity with the material, a cunning guidance of the contingent (and unknowable in advance) latencies discoverable only in the course of action. This dovetails with the epistemological constraints imposed by complex systems. Our models and simulations may give us the ability to map out potential consequences to action, but only through intervention will we discover the precise weight of each feedback loop and process of reinforcement. *Mêtis* therefore gives us a pathway towards a new form of praxis, a politics of geosocial artistry and cunning rationality.

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This essay would not have been possible were it not for a number of years of invaluable discussion on this topic with Ray Brassier, Nathan Coombs, Mark Fisher, Reza Negarestani, Nick Srnicek, Benedict Singleton, and Peter Wolfendale.

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Escape Velocities

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alterity from being fashionably sutured to the human for various trend-fulfilling capitalist projects of Frankenstein-like assimilation and co-option via contracts in which the oppressed or minor term has no agency – that is, human projects fulfilling phantasies of hybrid futurity.

Minoritarian-fantasy hybridity is futurity without ethics. Acceleration aesthetics attends to the slowness of meditative ethical interaction over the results-based drive for a hybrid human object that self-fulfills its own eye’s desire for itself as a new object. The animal, vegetal cosmic eye is an a-human eye that does not see in genus and species, in recognition, in fulfillment of representational criteria, or in a future which is confounding for its own sake. But nor does it homogenize singularities in their rhizomatic interactions. Guattari may offer a possibility of activism in what he calls “residual territorial assemblages”: How can we utilize aesthetics to activate an ethical configuration of desire that is only defined by its deterritorializing usefulness at any given moment?

A “machinics” breaking with [capitalist modes of thought] would imply a refusal of the dichotomy between material processes and semiotic processes. It would be brought to consider the deterritorializations of time and space only in connection with a new type of assemblage of enunciation, new types of faciality traits, refrains, relations to the body, sex, the cosmos.¹⁹

The future is not discontinued, contracted, or deprived of immanence by accelerationist thinking. Rather, accelerationist thinking is the very definition of what an imperceptible, cosmic, immanent future can be, since it looks towards the future without thinking in advance as a thinking human, while nonetheless thinking the future as inevitable and inevitable change. Like ethics – which cannot predict the affects of the future, but which must perform the devastatingly cursed operation of hoping for expressing forces that excite those of others affected and that seek to diminish only malevolent majoritarian forces – the future itself must be thought without pre-forming what the future will, should, or even could be.

In order to be accountable posthumans, we must see near futures, tactical little goals, and the strategic unification of issues that increase the expressivity of other lives as nodular moments on the way toward an ultimate creative future of joy – a future that the human cannot think. It is a future to which – if it is the real goal of posthumanism, even while it attests to the present being the location of that goal and its

activisms – the human cannot belong. Cosmogenic ecosophy requires humans

to bring into being other worlds beyond those of purely abstract information, to engender Universes of reference and existential Territories where singularity and finitude are taken into account by the multivalent logic of mental ecologies and by the group Eros principle of social ecology; to dare to confront the vertiginous Cosmos so as to make it inhabitable; these are the tangled paths of the tri-ecological vision.²⁰

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places which do not matter.¹² These non-spaces are found between the leaps of replacement culture, and in the spaces between those spaces, the interfractal, imperceptible zones that add elements of slowness to accelerationist aesthetics by re-addressing the lost time which was never perceived – the futurity of the past and present, the interstitial, threshold, in-between spaces that are the minoritarian planes of duration. This cosmic time, or circular time, is time which sees objects in space abandon their centrality to become sources of intensity in duration. This is what Serres calls the irreversible time of genesis – “irreversible time and history send their roots deep into strange substances. They are born from circumstances.”¹³ Serres describes what could be called cosmogony affect when he posits composition as constituting consistency and movement as constituting constancy. Thus, bodies in proximity alter and affect each other through their relations; they become unique consistencies in gracious opening to each other over immeasurable and irreversible time. Their futurity in irreversible time is assured, as constancy is found only in the cosmic operation of composition and recomposition, in movement within.

Anxieties about accelerationist aesthetics privileging the future as the “what next” are alleviated somewhat with Serres’s cosmogenic time: what is available for aesthetic manipulation to create unthinkable affects is always here; it is not a matter of replacement so much as recomposition; the new is always the oppressed of the past rendered capable of catalyzing excitations through recombining and reconfiguration. Most importantly, the strangeness of the combinations creates their relevance. In reference to the inhumanity of affects, this strangeness is the critical point of ethics. The stranger the combinations are, the more inhuman they are; the more inhuman, the more minoritarian. The futurity thus opened to minoritarian recombining – and not to the inclusion of “types” – is more ethical. Ethics and the need for unnatural, strange recombining are defined insofar as they are *timely*. Accelerationist aesthetics is about qualities of time *as* intensity. Thus, it is arguably an ethical aesthetics.

A cosmogony of aesthetics welcomes chaos. “We thus come back to a conclusion to which art led us: The struggle with chaos is only the instrument of a more profound struggle against opinion, for the misfortune of people comes from opinion.”¹⁴ Opinion orients time through repetition; it orients affectuation through reification instead of movement. Art attends to creating from chaos, but the result is the opposite of the mapping of this chaos by

determined coordinates – Deleuze and Guattari rethink science, philosophy, and art as always including “an *I do not know* that is positive and creative, the condition of creation itself and that consists in determining *by* what one does not know.”¹⁵ The temporal spaces between, the blind spots of capital, could be shared interstitials – meeting points of specific celerity.

If movement is constant, aesthetic tools are those which effectuate the most inhuman affects on other bodies, including bodies of thought. What tools can we think of? Are they minoritarian, or are they tools for the acknowledgement of general a-human alterity? Creating a flux which slows the temporal chain can remap its intensities. Creating flux is, according to Serres, “positive chaos. Spinoza does not say otherwise: determination is negation. Indetermination is thus positive.”¹⁶ The great unreason of rational enlightenment is that one can determine the place and (lack of) meaning of a thing precisely in order to refute, negate, and deny that thing. The really sad fact is that postmodernity and new technologies which make any imaginings possible are the exact opposite of “anything goes.” They produce many infinite instances of self rather than finite territories in which interrelational or (in Leibnizian terms) effectuation ethics must figure. An ethical accelerationist aesthetics wants to become “nameless words. Verbs without nouns [R]hythm is a fluctuation of the rhexis, the surge ... to speak of these transports as positive, negative, is mere naive anthropomorphism. The multiple moves, that is all.”¹⁷ As Guattari states:

We are thus in the presence of two polar modalities of consciousness: that of pseudo-territorialities of resonance and that of an irrevocable deterritorialization; that of tranquilizing (and reassuring) faces and significations and that of anxiety without object, or rather, an anxiety which aims at the *reality* of nothingness ... It is a question of neutralizing, by reducing them, the “*n*” animal, vegetal and cosmic eye of the rhizomatic possible which could subsist within residual territorialized assemblages ... [T]he media install a vanishing point behind every glance.¹⁸

Guattari’s use of animal, vegetal, and cosmic need not be interpreted as co-opting the minoritarian from the human animal in nature. Rather, it can be seen as the a-humanity of various orders of the human when liberated from the exhausted moment of the myth of absolute truth found in manufactured perception. This prevents the (formerly) human’s elements of

1 Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 5.

2 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2004), 260.

3 Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007*, eds. Ray Brassier and Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011), 626.

4 Ray Brassier, “Concepts and Objects,” in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, eds. Levi R. Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 47–66.

5 See Alberto Toscano’s comments at the Accelerationism Conference, Goldsmiths University, September 14, 2010.

6 In which regard Land is to be identified as that rare philosopher who is worth reading simply for the exquisitely savage quality of his writing.

7 Reza Negarestani, “Abducting the Outside: Modernity and the Culture of Acceleration” (Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, 2012).

8 Giuseppe Longo, “Critique of Computational Reason in the Natural Sciences,” in *Fundamental Concepts in Computer Science*, Vol. 3 (London: Imperial College Press, 2009), 43–70.

9 Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, “On Cunning Automata,” *Collapse VIII* (2013).

10 Nick Srnicek, “Accelerationism: Epistemic, Economic, Political” (presented at the Weaponizing Speculation Event, Dublin, March 2013).

11 Fernando Zalamea, *Synthetic Philosophy of Contemporary Mathematics* (Falmouth: Sequence Press, 2012).

12 Reza Negarestani, “A Vertiginous View Of Enlightenment.” *Savage Objects – Forensic Architecture* (2012).

13 Reza Negarestani, “Globe of Revolution,” *Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture* 17 (2011): 25–54.

14 Srnicek, “Accelerationism: Epistemic, Economic, Political.”

15 Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, “#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics,” in *Dark Trajectories: Politics of the Outside*, ed. Joshua Johnson, (Miami: [NAME] Publications, forthcoming). See <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/>.

16 Ibid.

17 Benedict Singleton, “Maximum Jailbreak” (presented at the War Against The Sun, Old Limehouse Town Hall, March 2, 2013).

18 Negarestani, “Abducting the Outside.”

19 Srnicek, “Accelerationism: Epistemic, Economic, Political.”

20 Eden Medina, *Cybernetic Revolutionaries Technology and Politics in Allende’s Chile* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011). See <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10521946>.

21 Marcel Detienne and Jean Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978).

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Tout se résume dans l'Esthétique et l'Économie politique. Everything comes down to Aesthetics and Political Economy. Mallarmé's aphorism is my starting point for considering accelerationist aesthetics.¹ I think that aesthetics exists in a special relationship to political economy, precisely because aesthetics is the one thing that cannot be reduced to political economy. Politics, ethics, epistemology, and even ontology are all subject to "determination in the last instance" by the forces and relations of production. Or rather, if ontology is not entirely so determined, this is precisely to the extent that ontology is itself fundamentally aesthetic. If aesthetics doesn't reduce to political economy, but instead subsists in a curious way alongside it, this is because there is something spectral, and curiously insubstantial, about aesthetics.

Kant says two important things about what he calls aesthetic judgment. The first is that any such judgment is necessarily "disinterested." This means that it doesn't relate to my own needs and desires. It is something that I enjoy entirely for its own sake, with no ulterior motives, and with no profit to myself. When I find something to be beautiful, I am "indifferent" to any uses that thing might have; I am even indifferent to whether the thing in question actually exists or not. This is why aesthetic sensation is the one realm of existence that is not reducible to political economy.



Campaign by British organization Cultural Capital with the support of the National Theatre and the British Museum. Sanako Tomiyoshi of the English National Ballet holds a Damien Hirst banner at the launch. Photograph: Lefteris Pitarakis/AP.

Of course, this doesn't mean that I am actually liberated by art from worldly concerns. The constraints of political economy can, and do, get in the way of aesthetics. A starving person is blocked from full aesthetic enjoyment. It is only when I am generally well fed that I enjoy delicacies of cuisine. And it is only from a position of safety, Kant says, that I can enjoy

Steven Shaviro Accelerationist Aesthetics: Necessary Inefficiency in Times of Real Subsumption

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Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #175*, 1987. Chromogenic color print. Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures.



Film still of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*, 1970.



Zombie selfie on the set of *The Walking Dead*.



Blood and guts litter this street in Tainan, Taiwan, after decomposing organs of a dead sperm whale in background caused it to explode. Photo: Reuters

aesthetic that does not equate speed with the too-fast replacements of capitalism, instead seeing intensity in all movement, and thus all movement as acceleration (even multi-directional)? Serres urges: “Do not seek to know how to look at a landscape,” yet he dismisses any *post-* compulsion to say there is thus no landscape, or only a fragmentary one. He emphasizes that intensity without perceptibility and velocity without atrophy may make aesthetic experience difficult, but it is all the more real for being so – and thus all the more ethical.⁶ Guattari similarly states,

Only sense without signification produced by a diagrammatic economy of signs is able to thwart the dead ends specific to semiologies of signification, insofar as it introduces into semiotic assemblages an additional coefficient of deterritorialization allowing sign machines to simulate, “duplicate,” and “experience” the relational and structural nodes of material and social flows precisely at the points that would remain invisible to anthropocentric vision.⁷

Accelerationist aesthetics are too fast for humans. Accelerationism is beloved by capital but, as Shaviro points out, accelerationism takes capitalism to its vertiginous depths.⁸ And there are other things to be found within and beyond those depths, namely, the monsters of affect; as Deleuze and Guattari tell us, “*affects are the becoming inhuman of man.*”⁹ Taking affect as the defining intensity that constitutes a life’s specificity as a coalescence of expressive powers combined with openness to other affects posits affect in a Spinozist ethical relation. This is a relation that, following Deleuze and Guattari, is inhuman, but not via the dehumanizing operations of fracturing capitalist speed politics. Rather, it is rendered inhuman through the constitution of lives as nodal points entirely specific to their position and constellation of relations, resistant to genus or even species. Deleuze states,

Beings will be defined by their *capacity for being affected*, by the affections of which they are capable, the excitations to which they react, those by which they are unaffected, and those which exceed their capacity and make them ill or cause them to die. In this way one will obtain a classification of beings by their power.¹⁰

Classification shifts from human, nonhuman, and their salient associations with hierarchical arboreal models of domination, to classification through infinite, temporal, and temporary

connectivities, always already a result of former affects and multiple interactions. The more inhuman any series of affective relations makes us, the less attached we are to classification in its majoritarian sense, and to oppression. The inhuman is independent of opposition. It is neither *anti-* nor *non-* but, following Guattari, more appropriately understood as *a-human*.

Shaviro claims that “one important role of art is to explore the dangers of futurity.” He sets up a dichotomy between accelerationist aesthetics and accelerationist politics – a necessary distinction when for him aesthetics does not translate into politics.¹¹ There is the sense that aesthetics deals with the untranslatable. As in its address to futurity, aesthetics addresses vocabularies that have not yet been, those to come. The *political* role of aesthetics could then be to catalyze inhuman affective relations that are still to come. Thus the incommensurability of any project of politicizing aesthetics itself emerges: Does politics need a future it must confess it cannot know but, in order to engage activism and change, must tactically sketch? Does aesthetics need to refuse all known vocabularies in order to force unthinkable futures? Or, more precisely, does aesthetics need to force systems of knowledge to take leaps of thought that fill the vertiginous holes between what is possible (already established in advance) and what is potential (the as-yet-unthinkable but nonetheless plausible) with affect, that is, with the unexpected powers and forces which alter paradigms and trajectories?

Put simply, the present moment may be the moment of imagination, which Shaviro rightly asserts has deserted us. Because or in spite of our utopian belief, we may now have the means to extend imaginative potentials further than ever. But these means have become the obsession of capital systems, while the problems, the dangers, that which constitutes the *need* for aesthetics, are to be resolved. Are these dangers precisely the gaps that aesthetics occupies, and indulges as its occupation? Are these gaps actually montage holes in speed culture reminding us that the gaps are not empty, that we should not just ignore them and suture fragmented life together, pretending that all is smooth and logical? Do these gaps actually end up homogenizing consistencies that create schizo-sicknesses in diminishing thought and imagination?

Shaviro’s anxiety that some accelerationist aesthetics may get lost in the spaces they endeavor to survey should be taken as a warning against ignoring the spaces that accelerationist aesthetics create or occupy, which capitalist acceleration has transformed into blind spots, or



Apple's Time Machine vortex background.

sublime spectacles of danger. Beauty in itself is inefficacious. But this also means that beauty is in and of itself utopian. For beauty presupposes a liberation from need; it offers us a way out from the artificial scarcity imposed by the capitalist mode of production. However, since we do in fact live under this mode of production, beauty is only a “promise of happiness” (as Stendhal said) rather than happiness itself. Aesthetics, for us, is unavoidably fleeting and spectral. When time is money and labor is 24/7, we don't have the *luxury* to be indifferent to the existence of anything. To use a distinction made by China Miéville, art under capitalism at best offers us escapism, rather than the actual prospect of escape.

The second important thing that Kant says about aesthetic judgment is that it is non-cognitive. Beauty cannot be subsumed under any concept. An aesthetic judgment is therefore singular and ungrounded. Aesthetic experience has nothing to do with “information” or “facts.” It cannot be generalized, or transformed into any sort of positive knowledge. How could it, when it doesn't serve any function or purpose beyond itself? And this, again, is why aesthetic sensation seems spectral to us, and even epiphenomenal. It cannot be extracted, appropriated, or put to work.

Analytic philosophers of mind, frustrated by this impossibility, have spent decades trying to argue that aesthetic experience – or what they more often call “inner sensation,” or the experience of “qualia,” or “consciousness” *tout court* – doesn't really exist. As Wittgenstein famously phrased it: “A wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it, is not part of the mechanism.”² Later thinkers have transformed Wittgenstein's puzzlement about inner experience into dogmatic denial that it can be anything other than an illusion. But the basic point still stands. Aesthetics marks the strange persistence of what (to quote Wittgenstein again) “is not a Something, but not a Nothing either!”³ Aesthetic experience is not part of any cognitive mechanism – even though it is never encountered *apart from* such a mechanism.

What is the role of aesthetics, then, today? I said that beauty cannot be subsumed; yet we live in a time when financial mechanisms subsume everything there is. Capitalism has moved from “formal subsumption” to “real subsumption.” These terms, originally coined in passing by Marx, have been taken up and elaborated by thinkers in the Italian Autonomist tradition, most notably Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. For Marx, it is *labor* that is “subsumed” under capital. In formal subsumption, capital appropriates, and extracts a surplus from, labor processes that precede capitalism, or that at the very least are not organized by capitalism. In real

subsumption, there is no longer any such autonomy; labor itself is directly organized in capitalist terms (think of the factory and the assembly line).⁴

In Hardt and Negri's expanded redefinition of “subsumption,” it isn't just labor that is subsumed by capital, but all aspects of personal and social life. This means that everything in life must now be seen as a kind of labor: we are still working, even when we consume, and even when we are asleep. Affects and feelings, linguistic abilities, modes of cooperation, forms of know-how and of explicit knowledge, expressions of desire: all these are appropriated and turned into sources of surplus value. We have moved from a situation of extrinsic exploitation, in which capital subordinated labor and subjectivity to its purposes, to a situation of intrinsic exploitation, in which capital directly incorporates labor and subjectivity *within* its own processes.

This means that labor, subjectivity, and social life are no longer “outside” capital and antagonistic to it. Rather, they are immediately produced as parts of it. They cannot resist the depredations of capital, because they are themselves already functions of capital. This is what leads us to speak of such things as “social capital,” “cultural capital,” and “human capital”: as if our knowledge, our abilities, our beliefs, and our desires had only instrumental value, and needed to be invested. Everything we live and do, everything we experience, is quickly reduced to the status of “dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.”⁵ Under a regime of real subsumption, every living person is transformed into a capital stock that must not lie fallow, but has to be profitably invested. The individual is assumed – and indeed compelled – to be, as Foucault puts it, “an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself ... being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.”⁶

This process of real subsumption is the key to our globalized network society. Everything without exception is subordinated to an economic logic, an economic rationality. Everything must be measured, and made commensurable, through the mediation of some sort of “universal equivalent”: money or information. Real subsumption is facilitated by – but also provides the impetus for – the revolutionization of computing and communication technologies over the course of the past several decades. Today we live in a digital world, a world of financial derivatives and big data. Virtual reality supplements and enhances physical, “face-to-face” reality – rather than being, as we used to naively think, opposed to it. Neoliberalism is not just the

ideology or belief system of this form of capitalism. It is also, more importantly, the concrete way in which the system works. It is an actual set of practices and institutions. It provides both a calculus for judging human actions, and a mechanism for inciting and directing those actions.

What does this mean for aesthetics? The process of real subsumption requires the valuation, and evaluation, of everything: even of that which is spectral, epiphenomenal, and without value. Real subsumption leaves no aspect of life uncolonized. It endeavors to capture, and to put to work, even those things that are uneconomical, or “not part of the mechanism.” Affect and inner experience are not exempt from this process of subsumption, appropriation, and extraction of a surplus. For capitalism now seeks to expropriate surplus value, not just from labor narrowly considered, but from leisure as well; not just from “private property,” but also from what the Autonomists call “the common”; and not just from palpable things, but also from feelings and moods and subjective states. Everything must be marketed and made subject to competition. Everything must be identified as a “brand.”

This leads to a veritable Kantian Antinomy

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of the aesthetic under late capitalism. Aesthetics must be simultaneously promoted beyond all measure, and yet reduced to nothing. On the one hand, as Fredric Jameson noted long ago,

aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.⁷

Or as the free market economist Virginia Postrel cheerily and uncritically puts the same argument, “aesthetics, or styling, has become a unique selling point – on a global basis.”⁸ In today’s capitalism *everything* is aestheticized, and all values are ultimately aesthetic ones.

Yet at the same time, this ubiquitous aestheticization is also a radical extirpation of the aesthetic. It’s not just that sensations and feelings are trivialized when they are packaged for sale and indexed upon the most minute variations of product lines. It’s also that the two

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Learn the aesthetic error of submitting everything to a law: leveling the local event produces boredom and ugliness, a world without landscapes, books without pages, deserts. Take everything away and you will not see. To see space demands time, do not kill time. Avoid the symmetrical error of being satisfied with fragments.

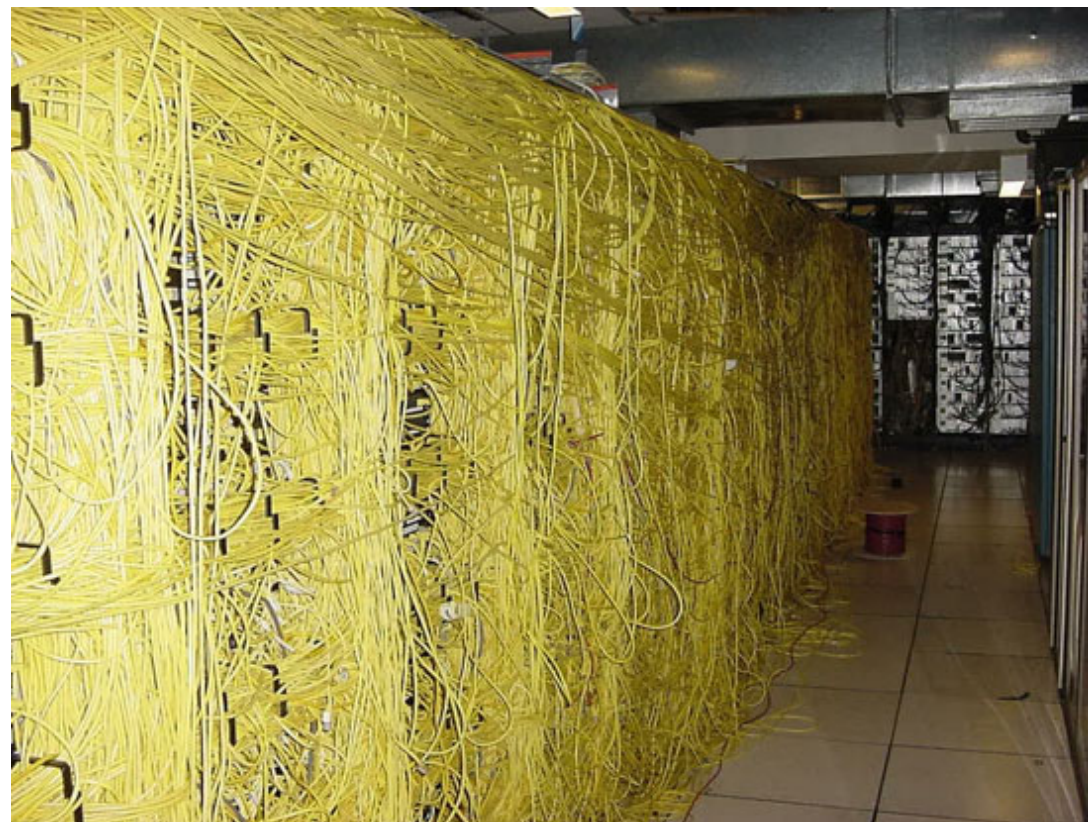
– Michel Serres¹

In *Post-Cinematic Affect*, Steven Shaviro defines accelerationist aesthetics in two ways. First, he points to the “‘disruption,’ or the radical ‘break,’ without any positive content, which is all that remains for Jameson of the Utopian gesture today.”² More optimistically, he emphasizes the need to think futurity and speed in new ways when he states that what we have here and now is not enough, and is vulnerable to capitalism’s voracious appetite for assimilation. Through the exhaustion of the *now* we can play with what’s left, the future-now.³ Time is problematized, collapsed, and enfolded, as it always has been in any discussion of the *post-*. This article will explore the ways futurity, time, and acceleration can constitute a demand for the *next* that outruns capital’s consumption of the now. It attends to the critical ethical components of this irreversible time in order to avoid the tendency of accelerationism to become just one more speed politics that furthers capitalism’s replacement compulsion, its techniques for devastating all to come.⁴

One of the crucial ethical elements Shaviro emphasizes in his discussion of affect is that affect has no lack or opposite – all is affect. The posthuman vocabulary of break, fracture, and rupture is therefore no less affective for its empty contents. Indeed, this is its most insidious quality; as Shaviro puts it, “the prison has no outside.”⁵ Accelerationism seems to have been misapplied to velocity and capitalist replacement culture, but Shaviro – following Guattari and Deleuze’s use of the concept of time via speed as a qualitative (and mediative) duration – frames acceleration as an always variable intensity. True, replacement is the lure par excellence of contemporary culture’s denial of attention. Yet speed has time. Replacement culture denies time by suturing together random flashes of cultural membranes, without allowing time as durational consistency to make creative connections between those montage gaps. In these conditions, art becomes vacuous hope in an alchemical aesthetic coagulation in space.

The important question is: What is the qualitative difference between a nihilistic reading of accelerationism as saturation without refined intensity, and an accelerationist

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Network cables at an unidentified data center.

1
See
http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2007/01/19/china_shoots_down_satellite_drawing_protests_worldwide/ and
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See
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Masco, "Target Audience"; and Masco, "Bad Weather: On Planetary Crisis," *Social Studies of Science* 40 (2010): 7–40.

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The term is psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich's.

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<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/breaking-news/clean-up-space-campaign-needed-scientists/story-e6freuyi-1226127766918>.

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Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics – Volume I*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

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Bruno Latour, "Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics?: Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck," *Common Knowledge* Vol. 10, No. 3 (2004): 454.

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See Latour's comments on Stengers's concept in Latour, "Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics?"

24
Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*, 54.

25 I am grateful to Susan Lepselter for drawing my attention to a relevant piece of space junk fiction piece by T. Coraghessan Boyle in *The New Yorker* magazine, April 15, 2013: "The Night of the Satellite." Also, a recent film "cross-cultural fairy tale" directed by Veiet Helmer, *Baikonur* (2011),

features a nomadic Kazakh cast, including a hero who gets to keep the beautiful French cosmonaut who has fallen from the sky alongside the space junk.

26
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<http://www.space.com/9818-expanding-danger-space-debris-fragmentation.html>.

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Žižek, "Hegel Versus Heidegger," *e-flux journal* 32 (February 2012). See <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/hegel-versus-heidegger/>.

28
Shaviro references what he takes to be the shared vision of Deleuze and Adorno on the topic of modernist art. See *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 163.

29
Gean Moreno, "Notes on the Inorganic, Part II: Terminal Velocity."

30
Ironically, it is Eisenstein who speaks of studying over and over again the ethnographic film *Nanook of the North* – the film that inspired the coinage of the term "documentary" in the popular press, and which is all but an homage to long takes of everyday life events in out-of-the-way places, from its collaborators' point of view.

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Valentine, "Exit Strategy: Profits, Cosmology, and the Future of Humans in Space," *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (2012.): 1045–1067.

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See Shaviro's discussion of the issue in the context of "ubiquitous digital technologies," *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 131.

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Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*.

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most crucial qualities of the aesthetic according to Kant – that it is disinterested, and that it is non-cognitive – are made to vanish, or explained away. Aesthetic sensations and feelings are no longer disinterested, because they have been recast as markers of personal identity: revealed preferences, brands, lifestyle markers, objects of adoration by fans. Aesthetic sensations and feelings are also ruthlessly cognized: for it is only insofar as they are known and objectively described, or transformed into data, that they can be exploited as forms of labor, and marketed as fresh experiences and exciting lifestyle choices. Ironically, then, it is precisely in a time when "affective labor" is privileged over material production (Hardt and Negri), and when marketing is increasingly concerned with impalpable commodities like moods, experiences, and "atmospheres" (Biehl-Missal and Saren), that we enter into the regime of a fully "cognitive capitalism" (Moulier Boutang), guided by the findings of cognitive psychology and cognitive philosophy of mind.¹⁰

It is under the conditions of real subsumption that accelerationism first becomes a possible aesthetic strategy. It is a fairly recent invention. In the twentieth century, before the developments that I have recounted, the most

vibrant art was all about transgression. Modernist artists sought to shatter taboos, to scandalize audiences, and to pass beyond the limits of bourgeois "good taste." From Stravinsky to the Dadaists, from Bataille to the makers of *Deep Throat*, and from Charlie Parker to Elvis to Guns N' Roses, the aim was always to stun audiences by pushing things further than they had ever been pushed before. Offensiveness was a measure of success. Transgression was simply and axiomatically taken to be subversive.

But this is no longer the case today. Neoliberalism has no problem with excess. Far from being subversive, transgression today is entirely normative. Nobody is really offended by Marilyn Manson or Quentin Tarantino. Every supposedly "transgressive" act or representation expands the field of capital investment. It opens up new territories to appropriate, and jump-starts new processes from which to extract surplus value. What else could happen, at a time when leisure and enjoyment have themselves become forms of labor? Business and marketing practices today are increasingly focused upon novelty and innovation. More rapid turnover is one way to combat what Marx called the tendential fall of the rate of profit. Far from being subversive or oppositional, transgression is the

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A Hell's Angel guard on stage during a Rolling Stones concert at Altamont Speedway Free Festival, 1969. Photo: Beth Bagby.

actual motor of capitalist expansion today: the way that it renews itself in orgies of “creative destruction.”

In other words, political economy today is driven by resonating loops of positive feedback. Finance operates according to a transgressive cultural logic of manic innovation, and ever-ramifying metalevels of self-referential abstraction. This easily reaches the point where financial derivatives, for instance, float in a hyperspace of pure contingency, free of indexical relation to any “underlying” whatsoever.¹⁰ At the same time that it floats off into digital abstraction, however, neoliberalism also operates directly on our bodies. Data are extracted from everything we feel, think, and do. These data are appropriated and consolidated, and then packaged and sold back to us.

In such a climate, nothing is more prized than excess. The further out you go, the more there is to accumulate and capitalize upon. Everything is organized in terms of thresholds, intensities, and modulations.¹¹ As Robin James puts it, “For the neoliberal subject, the point of life is to ‘push it to the limit,’ closing in ever more narrowly on the point of diminishing returns ... The neoliberal subject has an insatiable appetite for more and more novel differences.” The point is always to reach “the edge of burnout”: to pursue a line of intensification, and yet to be able to pull back from this edge, treating it as an investment, and recuperating the intensity as profit. As James says, “privileged people get to lead the most intense lives, lives of maximized (individual and social) investment and maximized return.”¹²

This is why transgression no longer works as a subversive aesthetic strategy. Or more precisely, transgression works *all too well* as a strategy for amassing both “cultural capital” and actual capital; and thereby it misses what I have been calling the spectrality and epiphenomenality of the aesthetic. Transgression is now fully incorporated into the logic of political economy. It testifies to the way that, under the regime of real subsumption, “there is nothing, no ‘naked life,’ no external standpoint ... there is no longer an ‘outside’ to power.”¹³ Where transgressive modernist art sought to break free from social constraints, and thereby to attain some radical Outside, accelerationist art remains entirely immanent, modulating its intensities in place. As Robin James puts it, in neoliberal art, “life’s intensity, like a sine wave, closes in on a limit without ever reaching it.”¹⁴

Accelerationism was a political strategy before it became an aesthetic one. Benjamin Noys, who coined the term, traces it back to a certain “ultraleftist” turn in French political and

social thought in the 1970s. Noys especially cites Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Lyotard’s *Libidinal Economy* (1974), and Baudrillard’s *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976). These works can all be read as desperate responses to the failures of political radicalism in the 1960s (and especially, in France, to the failure of the May 1968 uprising). In their different ways, these texts all argue that, since there is no Outside to the capitalist system, capitalism can only be overcome from within, by what Noys calls “an exotic variant of *la politique du pire*: if capitalism generates its own forces of dissolution then the necessity is to radicalise capitalism itself: the worse the better.”¹⁵ By pushing capitalism’s own internal tensions (or what Marx called its “contradictions”) to extremes, accelerationism hopes to reach a point where capitalism explodes and falls apart.

Evidently, this strategy has not worn well in the decades following the 1970s. Indeed, it has become a classic example of how we must be careful what we wish for – because we just might get it. Starting in the 1980s, “accelerationist” policies were in fact put into effect by the likes of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Deng Xiaoping. The full savagery of capitalism was unleashed, no longer held back by the checks and balances of financial regulation and social welfare. At the same time, what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello call the “new spirit of capitalism” successfully took up the subjective demands of the 1960s and 1970s and made them its own.¹⁶ Neoliberalism now offers us things like personal autonomy, sexual freedom, and individual “self-realization”; though of course, these often take on the sinister form of precarity, insecurity, and continual pressure to perform. Neoliberal capitalism today lures us with the prospect of living “the most intense lives, lives of maximized (individual and social) investment and maximized return” (James), while at the same time it privatizes, expropriates, and extracts a surplus from everything in sight.

In other words, the problem with accelerationism as a political strategy has to do with the fact that – like it or not – we are all accelerationists now. It has become increasingly clear that crises and contradictions do not lead to the demise of capitalism. Rather, they actually work to promote and advance capitalism, by providing it with its fuel. Crises do not endanger the capitalist order; rather, they are occasions for the dramas of “creative destruction” by means of which, phoenix-like, capitalism repeatedly renews itself. We are all caught within this loop. And accelerationism in philosophy or political economy offers us, at best, an exacerbated awareness of how we are trapped.

By all accounts, the situation is far worse

contradistinction to art’s despair of ever finding a stable position that holds against the disruptive cultural and natural force-fields shaping the contemporary moment,³² ethnography concretely engages perspectival instability, which it approaches as an open invitation to epistemic inquiry for addressing what gets in the way of connecting across difference. Offering an alternative to fabrications which trade on the “intensity effect,”³³ as both space junk ad spots and reportage do in what Moreno recognizes is a kind of “ingratiating aesthetics in service of [capitalist] acceleration,”³⁴ the documentary’s dawning effect supports socioaesthetic transformation over rupture, tethering the accelerationist romance with violent excess to the very bricolage material it draws from – but with the value added of a future in cosmos.

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My appreciation to Abou Farman and Gean Moreno for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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and counter-actualization have themselves become resources for the extraction of surplus value”: it is.²⁸

Upon learning that I was an anthropologist, a space law expert at the Prague space security conference insisted that I view the ethnographic documentary film, *Space Tourists* (2009). Of course I ordered it immediately. The cover of the video box I received foregrounds a young shirtless boy with binoculars trained at the sky. In the background, bronzed men in T-shirts look towards the stars. They are scanning for signs of freshly fallen space junk. But this is not the prevailing online cover image, which features, in the style of Soviet realism, the first tourist of outer space, Anousheh Ansari.

The story of their different worlds is told collaboratively in sharply contrasted cuts between scenes of the preparation and journey to the International Space Station of Ansari (“cost: 20 million US dollars”) and the long, slow takes of the daily lives of impoverished scrap-metal dealers in Kazakhstan, who labor secretly to scavenge the booster stages that fall to earth following rocket launches from Baikonur Cosmodrome. The filmmaker, far from capturing the action disinterestedly, narrates his implication in it as one who has himself traveled from sites of elite culture to sites of rural poverty and across international and cultural boundaries, placing him in a position to translate the starkly different realities he looks into, not at.

Against scenes of Ansari’s self-assured excitement, her high design space suit, her mother in Chanel sunglasses excitedly watching the moment of liftoff, the rocketry which transports her into the sublime cosmos of her dreams, are scenes of the dulling, tedious work of scrap-metal rendition. The material realities of the dealers’ lives appear in low-action, “just-the-facts” images: a rudimentary house, vodka, bread, cigarettes, toast, a man welding a horseshoe onto the huge ugly truck that joins a convoy to the collecting fields of space junk, sending up dust in its wake, a couple staring at an old television where the launch coverage is being broadcast. Then, Ansari: “How can you put a price on a dream?” Cut to the driver of the truck: “We’ll get the job done,” as he turns his jerry-rigged vehicle towards the spot where a booster has landed, setting off small grass fires. We see the burnt carcass of an animal. There is a large amount of chemical residue in these boosters, we are told; it must be drained off. We see this. But there is also high-grade aluminum alloys and titanium, which can be sold to China. Cut to the ISS where Ansari is playing with balls in weightlessness, brushing her teeth, commenting on “an Earth without borders ... no

sign of trouble, just pure peace and beauty.” The scrap renderers pull out a chain saw and start cutting up the rocket, pull out knives and start slicing a potato for a stew in a pot made from a part of the rocket. Ansari eats rice from a little can. On the ground and two thousand miles farther north, we hear, is a more densely populated area; sometimes rockets fall on houses there, including proton rockets fueled by hepton, “a known carcinogen and fairly toxic chemical.” Ansari is playing with globules of airborne water.

Effectively, the filmmaker has interrupted the violence of the montage, not for communicating a testimonial to an imperfect scientific ontology, but for creating breathing spaces grabbed from the ground of an alternative episteme that casts natural spaces as becoming-generic ones. It is as if, taking a cue from Moreno on Deleuze’s conception of any-space-whatever, the entire earth, and not just built environments of capitalism’s great mall-ist structures, have been “unplugged from ‘that which happened and acted’ in it ... thus dismantling established orders, and clearing the way for unexpected and latent potentials to be actualized.”²⁹ Except that this is a post-Soviet landscape, documented by the aesthetic devices of sharp cuts and slow takes pioneered by the two giants of Russian cinema, Eisenstein and Tarkovsky, respectively.³⁰

If the “elephant in the room” at the Prague space security conference of 2011 was the threat to global life and security of international brinkmanship, in *Space Tourists* it is the phenomenal accountability gap between the worlds of the few globally rich who position themselves stratospherically above the many locally poor: the one world’s cosmology, as David Valentine recognizes this,³¹ shielded by faith in its own imaginary, whilst the conceptual and material debris of that dream supplies a groaning ethnoscape with happenstantial resources. Other than by the magic of montage, these worlds have no prospect of coming into direct contact, and even in the film they aren’t made to impact one another forcefully: the film puts itself in the way of this. Indeed, it is precisely by *mise-en-abyme* referencing of the absence of the velocity of impact of these worlds that the ethnography marks the extreme trending of their otherness to each other. Refusing an accelerated aesthetic that feeds on crisis, and also a narrative of resignation to control by The Powers That Be, the film documents the insufficiency of both for delivering the sense of cosmic exo-surprise as an invitation to make worlds differently than by imploding futures.

Is it naive to conclude on a point of hope? In

today than it was in the 1990s, let alone the 1970s. Indeed, we have moved with alarming rapidity from the neoliberal triumphalism of the 1990s to our current sense – in the wake of the financial collapse of 2008 – that neoliberalism is entirely defunct as an ideology. Unfortunately, the intellectual discredit into which it has fallen does not impede its functioning in the slightest. Its programs and processes remain in full force; if anything, at the present moment they are being pushed further than ever before. The system under which we live refuses to die, no matter how oppressive and dysfunctional it is. And we double this systemic incapacity with our own inability to imagine any sort of alternative. Such is the dilemma of what Mark Fisher calls “capitalist realism”: the sad and cynical sense that “it’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.”¹⁷

In this situation, what can it mean to propose an accelerationist aesthetic? Can it turn out any differently than transgression? Can it offer us anything other, or anything more, than the actually existing accelerationism of our politico-economic condition? The aesthetic case for accelerationism is perhaps best expressed by something that Deleuze wrote in an entirely different context:

It often happens that Nietzsche comes face to face with something sickening, ignoble, disgusting. Well, Nietzsche thinks it’s funny, and he would add fuel to the fire if he could. He says: keep going, it’s still not disgusting enough. Or he says: excellent, how disgusting, what a marvel, what a masterpiece, a poisonous flower, finally the “human species is getting interesting.”¹⁸

I do not think that this is an accurate evocation of Nietzsche. For Nietzsche does not really have this sort of attitude towards what he sees as the “decadent” bourgeois culture of his own time. Rather, Nietzsche is most often overwhelmed with disgust at what he sees of the world around him. His epic struggle against his own disgust, and his heroic efforts to overcome it, are at the center of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The shrill and stridently repetitious tone of Nietzsche’s praise of cheerfulness and laughter indicates that these attitudes did not come easily to him. Nor does he tend to adopt them when confronted with the “sickening, ignoble, disgusting” spectacles of his own culture and society.

Nonetheless, I think that the attitude described by Deleuze is a good fit for accelerationist art today. Intensifying the horrors of contemporary capitalism does not lead them to explode; but it does offer us a kind of satisfaction and relief, by telling us that we have

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finally hit bottom, finally realized the worst. This is what really animates accelerationist movies like Mark Neveland and Brian Taylor’s *Gamer*, or Alex Cox’s *I’m a Juvenile Delinquent, Jail Me!*. Such works may be critical, but they also revel in the sleaze and exploitation that they so eagerly put on display. Thanks to their enlightened cynicism – their finding all these “sickening, ignoble, disgusting” conditions funny – they do not offer us the false hope that piling on the worst that neoliberal capitalism has to offer will somehow help to lead us beyond it.

The difference between this aesthetic accelerationism, and the politico-economic accelerationism analyzed by Noys, is that the former does not claim any efficacy for its own operations. It does not even deny that its own intensities serve the aim of extracting surplus value and accumulating profit. The evident complicity and bad faith of these works, their reveling in the base passions that Nietzsche disdained, and their refusal to sustain outrage or claim the moral high ground: all these postures help to move us towards the disinterest and epiphenomenality of the aesthetic. So I don’t make any political claims for this sort of accelerationist art – indeed, I would undermine my whole argument were I to do so. But I do want to claim a certain *aesthetic inefficacy* for them – which is something that works of transgression and negativity cannot hope to attain today.

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network news. The first projection was that it would fall to earth "somewhere between 51 degrees north and 51 degrees south"; then, a couple of pages on in my writing of a draft of this paper, on or near Madagascar; then, as I was cleaning up the introduction, on or near The Falkland Islands; then, as I was taking a break for Chinese food, on or near Argentina, until on the projected day of impact, January 15, 2012, I could read on the online Daily Mail that "experts admit they have no idea when and where it will hit ... due to constant changes in Earth's upper atmosphere, which is strongly influenced by solar activity." The end was announced shortly thereafter: Phobos-Grunt had vanished from tracking screens somewhere south of Chile, probably in the ocean, but not on New Zealand.¹⁹

It is not surprising to learn that launch nations are insured for damage claims, although like any insurance policy, there are loopholes. Famously, the folks of Esperanza, a tiny town in northern Australia, finally had to resort to sending NASA a ticket for "littering" when in 1979, parts of the Skylab space station crashed into their township.²⁰ And when a piece of space debris from a Meridian satellite that was launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan demolished part of a house on Cosmonaut's Street in the village of Vagaitsevo in Siberia (a husband and wife were at home but were miraculously unharmed), the owners had to content themselves with the Russian government's promise to make full reparations.

In sum, the post-nuclear fear-control narrative that continues to influence American life has, under hyper-corporatization and hyper-mediatization, given way to a narrative of inevitably misbehaving entities. Detached from controlling powers, "junk happens" in the naturally hostile environments where it belongs. This dangerous unmarked elision makes use of the gap between accidents in space that can produce "Iridium," and "The Chinese" intentionally working in mysterious ways, for perversely spinning a new narrative from the elements of "cosmopolitics,"²¹ and what Latour appreciates as its conceptual work: that "cosmos [will] protect against the premature closure of politics, and politics against the premature closure of cosmos."²² This new spin would have cosmic force-fields and their entities colluding with accelerationist politics as if their partnership were written in the stars of consumer-citizens.²³

In this scenario, to borrow terms from Noys,²⁴ Cold War "affirmationist" narratives lose their grip on the imagination, as do injunctions to "surge forth" against destructive forces of hyper-extraction-affirming ways of life. And while relinquishing designs on cosmic sovereignty may

be an entailment of the resignation narrative, this script sets itself apart from corporate designs on outer space colonization. So how could an aesthetic so baldly in service to the accelerant of revved-up capitalist expansion leave me feeling so uncannily out of place in its presence – as if the crisis were permanently elsewhere and elsewhen?²⁵

Again, the point to emphasize here is the relation between what appears to be the matter – namely, things coming literally out of nowhere which threaten prevailing social orders with evidence of their vulnerability – and the greater danger that public attention to space junk will mask the multinational technologies of militarism to which insecurity actually sources. Beyond this, alarming images of dangerous blindsides – media artifacts of false witness to the long, slow, and still unfolding narrative of the military-industrial misalliance – deny space debris discourse its historical contexts of production, deny it any affinity to a rhetoric of accelerating threat, and too, deny it any kind of social future ... other than as science fiction: as I prepare to hit the "send" button to deliver this piece for online publication, advertising embedded within the frame of an animated "space junk awareness" infomercial produced by the European Space Agency on space.com intertexts an ad spot for *Star Trek IV: Into Darkness* and one for Esurance.com, where we watch as the starship Enterprise is accidentally run into by a space vehicle from another planet, jolting the crew and sending sparks and objects flying. The offending driver apologies via the ship's communication screen and the two parties enter into a civil conversation about what just happened in outer space.²⁶

De-Accelerating the Accelerationist Real

If a take is lengthened, boredom naturally sets in for the audience. But if the take is extended even further, something else arises: curiosity.

– Žižek, referring to Tarkovsky²⁷

Enter a third media treatment of space junk, which is that of painstaking documentary description, and what might be thought of as the socioaesthetic mode of dawning curiosity. Sliding around the problem of being an art form, the documentary can refuse any idea that, as Shaviro puts it, "art restores potentiality [to enunciate utopia] by derealizing the actual." Shaviro raises the concomitant issue of whether this is "still practicable, in a time when negation

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the predicted date of impact of space debris from yet another monster spacecraft, the thirteen-ton Russian scientific research probe Phobos-Grunt – I felt fairly certain that the “creatives” at RPA agency in Santa Monica and DDBChicago (respectively) had gambled that my world wasn’t feeling all that predictable, much less safe or secure, and on another level, that my anxiety wouldn’t be discriminating between terrestrial and extraterrestrial objects, or between actual and possible ones.

Of course, we could deconstruct to death these so-called “content marketing” ad spots, and someone should. But the relevant point here is how this educative model engages its practitioners. One content marketing conference-goer tweets: “Find/create the relevant truth, deliver it in a fresh way, and people will care.” Another: “Our job is to create relevance, not awareness.” Particularly as applied to accident insurance, which trades on hyper-vigilance, the capacity of content marketing to cut loose the awareness function of mainstream media suggests that this already has a naturalized place in the cultural order of things, or else is free to find one somewhere categorically other than compensatory security for purchase. The closest relative at hand is reportage – the technology of choice for delivering social facts for which relevance can be taken as culturally given, and social awareness as the primary work at hand.

William Mazzarella cuts to the point of the commercial-news relationship in recognizing affect as the armature of effective social projects, “if by efficacy we mean its capacity to harness our attention, our engagement, and our desire” in our “interpellated” lives as “consumer-citizens.”¹² And indeed, the hyphenation works here as an invitation to dwell on the affinity of reportage and commercial advertising in terms of the aspirational gap between them. Reportage, which might be taken as appealing to “the legal assemblage of citizenship and civil society,” “seeks affective resonance” for moving us to awareness, without relinquishing objectivity; the ad spot, meanwhile, reaches out for “legalistic justification” for its message of relevance by “get[ting] us in the gut.”¹³

This raises the question of the historical place of fear-control in the media discourse of alien threat. In his work on the US government’s management of fear in post-nuclear America, Joe Masco argues that government propaganda films from the 1950s systematically scripted an American response to nuclear threat, targeting audiences for education in ways that carry forward to this day the idea that extreme scenarios, from the “war on terror” to weather disasters and the effects of global warming, can

be and are being managed; further, that civil obedience has ecological as well as human-nature-controlling rewards.¹⁴ Effectively setting out the “American Way of coping,” he writes, “fear becomes the basis for both a new concept of global order and a new kind of American society – simultaneously militarized, normalized, and terrified.”¹⁵ For all intents and purposes, then, these films’ psychological fear-control strategies position the US government as an all-knowing professoriate. The “character armored”¹⁶ professor of the Farmer’s Insurance is its personification, in extending his lesson to the commercially “manageable” realm of cosmic exo-surprise.



Abandoned soviet spacecraft Tushino, Russia.

A further declension of state projects of citizen-making characterology, the contemporary media that I’ve been observing here would appear to be fashioning a new narrative for the new world order out of space debris which has taken on a life of its own beyond mere mortal control. This emergent narrative is a dangerous one of resignation to cosmic forces and inevitabilities. Senior NASA scientist Donald Kessler put it this way: “We’ve lost control of the environment.”¹⁷ What remains, it appears, is to plan for the worst-case scenario and valorize tracking technologies and hyper-vigilance.¹⁸

In contradistinction to marketing models and against the grain, too, of reportage, governments are charged, then, with generating awareness, while undoing, as effectively as they can, relevance: the aerospace gods might be crazy but their governments are victims of the random vicissitudes of “space weather.”

I lived this new consciousness over the span of three days when I was perched at my computer desk (next to a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows) as the fiery descent of the thirteen-ton Phobos-Grunt Mars probe was lighting up

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Frame
Any conjunction between aesthetics and politics (for a political aesthetic, an aestheticized politics, a geopolitical aesthetic, a politics of aesthetics, and so forth) is necessarily fraught by estranged agendas – all the more reason for us to conceive of their inter-activation from a willfully ahumanist perspective. Aesthetics and/or politics of what and for what? The cascade of Anthropocidal traumas – from Copernicus and Darwin, to postcolonial and ecological inversions, to transphylum neuroscience and synthetic genomics, from nanorobotics to queer AI – pulverize figure and ground relations between *doxic* political traditions and aesthetic discourses. Before any local corpus (the biological body, formal economics, military state, legal corporation, geographic nation, scientific accounting, sculptural debris, or immanent theology) can conserve and appreciate its self-image within the boundaries of its preferred reflection, already its Vitruvian conceits of diagrammatic idealization, historical agency, radiating concentric waves of embodiment, instrumental prostheticization, and manifest cognition are, each in sequence, unwoven by the radically asymmetrical indifferences of plastic matter across unthinkable scales, both temporal and spatial. But while the received brief for political aesthetics is denuded, abnormal assignments proliferate.

This avenue toward post-humanism is a reckoning with planetarity and its incompleteness.¹ Geophilosophy, by one path, ambles from a Ptolemaic yolk nested within protective layers of crystalline spheres; to Kantian Geography, for which the commonality of the earth’s crusty surface guarantees Cosmopolitanism; to Deleuzian and Schellengian solutions of the painterly image-force; to numinous or occult conspiracies of geologic violence; and now to a *comparative planetology* for which the earth as a mediating *polis* can only be thought through aesthetics derived from, not imposed upon, the computation of possible geometries, subdivisions, doubles, inversions, localizations, and Hubble-scale adoptions from the outside.² This latter project entails an acceleration from the initial recognition of local planetary economics toward a more universal recombinancy for which the political and aesthetic representations of human experience are tilted off-center. From that outside looking back in, the generative alienations brought about by potential xenopolitics, xenoaesthetics, xenoarchitectonics, xenotechnics, and so on, turn back upon the now inside-out geopolitical aesthetic for which the relevance of human politics (human art, human experience) seems

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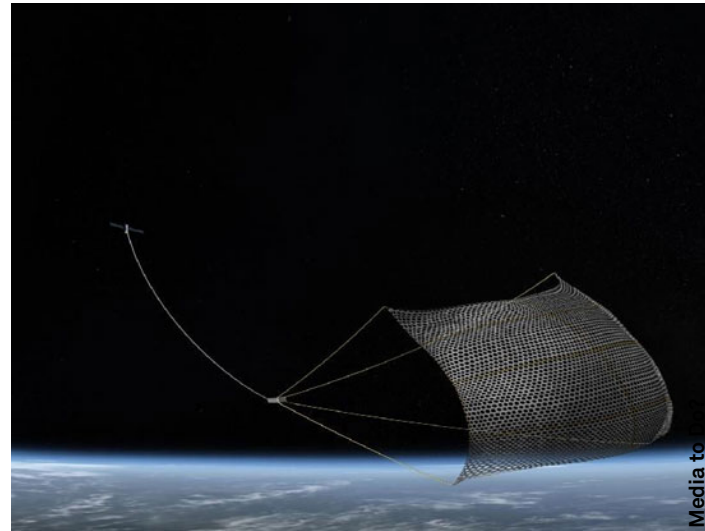


Pamela Rosenkranz, *Purity of Vapors*, 2012. Silicone, pigments, SmartWater bottles, refrigerator. Photo: Gunnar Meier. Courtesy of Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York and Karma International, Zurich.



Film stills from Christian Frei's documentary *Space Tourists*, 2009.

exo-surprise and the uncontrollability of “space as itself” – displacing to the cosmos accountability for earthlings’ failings. Represented as coproductions of nature and technoculture that exceed terrestrial limits at the start – which is to say, they can appear initially as transcendent forces relative to social conflict on earth⁷ – space junk materializes a claim for blindsiding as a natural rather than cultural condition of social times “hypermediated”⁸ and habituated to crisis. It is a situation that calls out for alternative modalities and counternarratives.



A proposal to collect space debris: a space fishing net developed to capture debris in Earth's orbit. Copyright: Space Junk 3D, LLC, 2011.

Where Space Junk is Concerned, Nobody Likes Surprises

Not long ago, as I was clicking through television stations in my study, I caught the tail-end of an ad on the SyFy Channel which stopped my channel surfing and made me laugh. It showed a space capsule crashing through the ceiling of a university classroom into a gigantic jack-in-the-box, startling some student insurance agents as their Farmers Insurance professor stood by, unphased. “Obscure space junk falling from the sky? We cover that.”

The jack-in-the-box ad spot, with its theme of out-of-nowhere materializations, had, as it turned out, appeared just a few days earlier on great-ads.blogspot.com, as I sat down to write the first draft of this paper. It included information that the capsule actually weighed as much as it appeared to in the ad, which the director, known for sitcoms, had insisted on for verisimilitude; it mentions the effect of the collision with actual tin, dust particles flying, and how the sound affected the actors. And even the chimp who ejects from the capsule off-

screen and parachutes in at the end of the commercial was animatronic – no computer graphics imaging was used in the campaign. Materiality would be the key to illocutionary impact.

But wait – wasn’t there a famously successful ad for State Farm Insurance some time back, informing us that damage to property from “space junk” is covered by State Farm – a competitor of Farmer’s and the company they were most concerned to distinguish themselves from? This ad used a video game scheme, with a huge robot from outer space bent on random destruction of a suburban neighborhood. Meanwhile, blasé onlookers comment on what is happening to their neighbor, as if all this were only to be expected. I wasn’t surprised to find that the ad had sparked an online interactive version of itself. But I was surprised that the game allowed players to virtually destroy their own homes – and afterward call a State Farm agent in their area.

Of course, insurance companies know their algorithms, and their marketing strategists know their psychosocial science. So one can assume that editor-in-chief Holly Anderson’s piece on the State Farm Learning Center webpage, isn’t coming out of nowhere. She writes:

Americans were enthralled this month as to where debris from the Upper Atmosphere Research Satellite (UARS) might fall. Anyone wonder if the resulting damage to your home or vehicle is covered? NASA deployed the UARS, via the space shuttle Discovery, in 1991. After 20 years in orbit, it was expected to crash through Earth’s atmosphere Sept. 22. While most of the debris from the UARS satellite will burn up as it accelerates through the atmosphere, NASA predicted several dozen fragments of debris to impact the Earth ... While claims are handled on a case-by-case basis, you might be surprised to learn damage from satellite debris, a.k.a. space junk, likely would be covered under most insurance policies.⁹

At the time this statement was published (September 2011), a NASA space debris expert, Nicholas L. Johnson, was giving one-in-a-trillion odds against UARS debris striking any one person on earth.¹⁰ And soothing voices on network news were reminding us that earth was, fortunately, mostly water (not so fortunate for sea life but, still ...).¹¹

All this is to say that when the jack-in-the-box commercial made an appearance in my study via the SyFy Channel and then again later during a Patriots-Cowboys game – this time closer to

weird and conditional.³ How might we grope toward an inventory of these contingencies? What index of effects would allow us to read this situation even as it is unresolved and perhaps unresolvable for us? To transform our own relations to these displacements, what could do the work for a geopolitical aesthetics by and for a nearly extinct Anthropocenic subject, even and because it refuses the phobic bigotries of “political aesthetics?” If the term “accelerationist” can refer to a reckoning with that post-Anthropocenic exteriority and its extant available clues, more than to the dromologic velocity of our auto-programmatic tiny machines, then is this an accelerationist geopolitical aesthetic, and if so, then toward what rich absences?

This short essay climbs into a tiny nook within these larger questions, and so instead of making global claims regarding the ontology of these contingencies, or about their relative significance for philosophy, or political claims about their uncomfortable potential homologies with the alphanumeric of Algorithmic Capitalism, it instead suggests an incomplete roster of *local traces and degraded effects* of that geopolitical aesthetic already in our midst. I am particularly interested in how these effects interface with what replaces the emptied legacy positions of “Polity” and “Aesthetics” directly through confrontation with what we can broadly call *Design*. In particular, we are attentive to how planetary-scale computation’s instrumentalization of Design to model its political arrivals also provides “aesthetic” programs which are less reflective of political realities than generative of their material evolution. For this, the work of computation as a style of thought, while today overdetermined by its economic instrumentality, is held open by the final incompleteness of algorithmic indeterminacy, and through this can directly engender unknown and unknowable political architectures.

2.

But first we compare this accounting of trace-effects, as seen through the restricted pixelated prisms of Design and Computation, to what Steven Shaviro calls an “accelerationist aesthetics,” especially as strongly differentiated by him from an accelerationist politics.⁴ For Shaviro, the value of an accelerationist aesthetics is to draw out “what it feels like” to live in the contemporary moment, as partially determined by inhuman displacements like those noted above. Accelerationist aesthetics accomplishes this conjuring prototypes of what comes after the inevitable Anthropocenic crashes, so that we might envision and evaluate

our adaptations in advance. Rather than blithely offering pap “design innovations” with which we might spend our way past death, this indulgence in imagining without reserve the world-without-us-to-come presumes huge sums of general catastrophe and stares straight down the rabbit hole. For this, *Thanatos* isn’t a diagnosis. It is simply a site condition. However, for Shaviro this becomes an exercise in cognitive mapping that may provide “the individual subject with some heightened sense of place.”⁵ We will take strong exception to this last recommendation. The way one reads Shaviro’s abridgment, for him an accelerationist *politics* comes with no discernible, coherent plan for the amelioration of eco-economic entropy here and now, no clear path out, nor even a dialectical guarantee of ultimate outcomes. It is therefore disqualified as a suitable program for apparently well-understood “political” goals. The corollary *aesthetic* project, however, contains a useful pedagogical spark that could, at some distance, train and redeem a recognizable politics through the shock of its unrecognizable affect. My interest is exactly the opposite: an unrecognizable politics through a recognizable aesthetics, by drawing collapses, not distinctions, between the two. Foremost because this is to make it utterly impossible to map the situation through anything like the self-regard of an “individual subject.” That is first to go, but apparently not the last to leave.

3.

To predict (and prototype) what will and will not survive the Anthropocene demands that artist/designer speculate upon irreducibly complex material interdependencies (of oil, water, nitrogen, oxygen, silicon, avian influenza, rotting iron, insect biomass, plankton genomics, and so forth), as well as speculate upon the effects that the subtraction or amplification of any one of these will have on the others. These things are impossible to really know (and yet nothing deserves more attention) and so anything like a “geopolitical aesthetic” in the Jamesonian sense (a cinematic mechanism, however conspiratorial, for the comprehension of a World System and its waves of control) is necessarily an exercise in *apophenia*, in drawing connections and conclusions from sources with no direct connection other than their indissoluble perceptual simultaneity. This apophenia, a seeing of patterns where there is actually only noise, is neither a failure of imagination nor a virtue, but rather an unavoidable qualification of our predicament and its (only partially decipherable) aftermath. There cannot be a post-Anthropocenic “politics” in any recognizable, normative sense – a “politics”

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predicated on the self-regard of the human subject mapping himself as a coherent agent within a stable historical unfolding. It's just not possible to distinguish between what is an existential risk and what is an absolute invention, and what is both at once, and mobilize "positions" accordingly. So mobilization must go on without that distinction. To govern – that is, to account for the general economy of decay and creation with some nominal degree of authorship – something else is required.

We are brought to this Anthropocenic precipice not just by a cosmic predicament but by the tempestuous, ambivalent violences of Capitalism, particularly our current Algorithmic Capitalism. But do we contain it, or it us? This economics is, on the one hand, the megamachine of incredible *Anthropocentric* composition and consumption, and on the other, the appropriation of planetary matter, including human flesh, without concern for politics or limit, by an "intelligence from the future."⁶ Capitalism is seen at one and the same time as a compulsive eco-economics linked inextricably to our omnivore dominance, and/or an alien entropy machine for the processing of terrestrial material, value, and information into absolute speed, peeling back the husk of human markets so as to finally suck dry the complicit mammalian diagram. To eat or to be eaten? But this reversibility of insides and outsides is

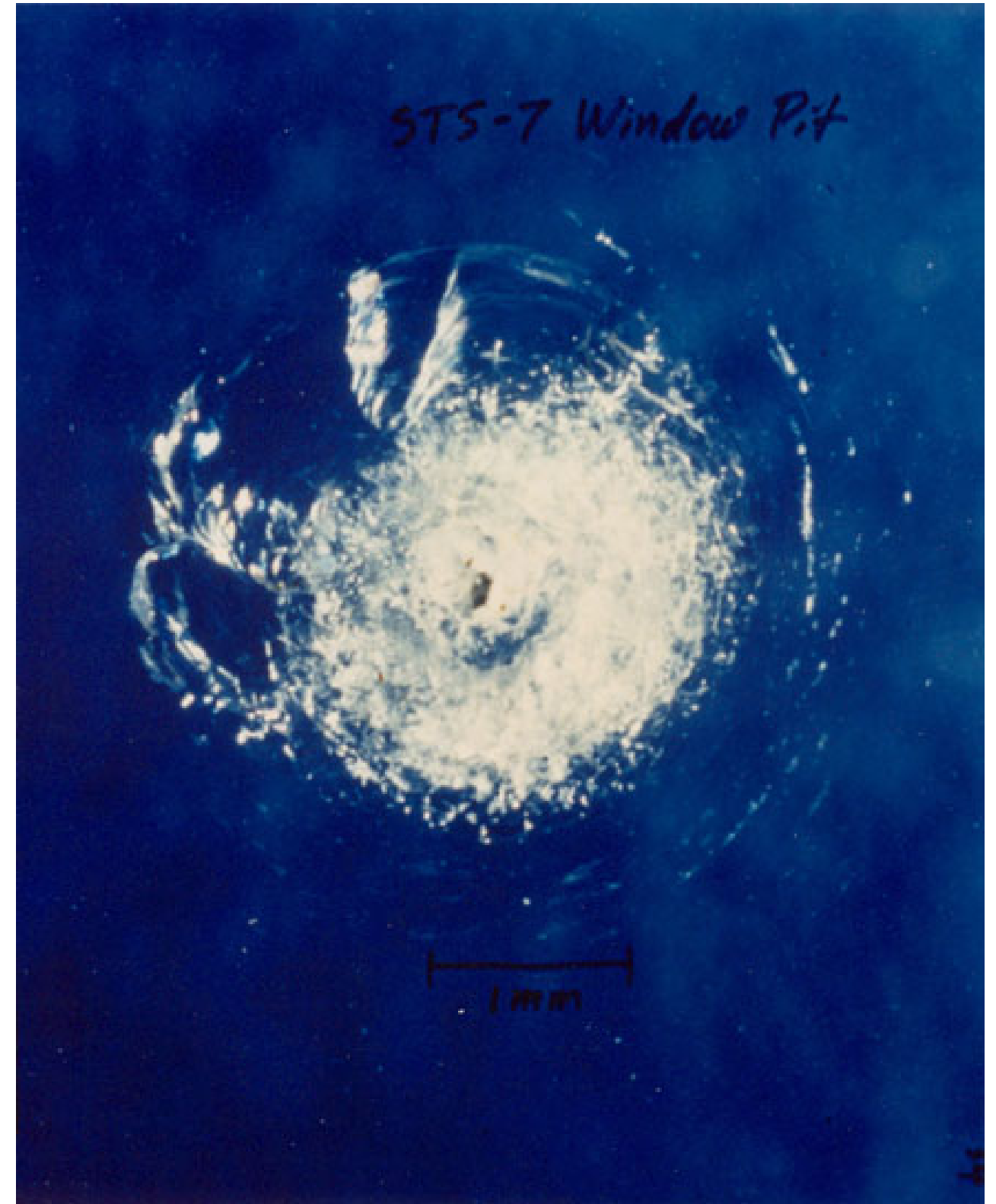
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perhaps exactly why it is necessary to retrain the work of the "political" away from a direct confrontation with or acceleration of Capitalism *as the scope of the problem as such*, and instead towards a direct engagement-in-advance with what succeeds and exceeds it.

Instead of "post-Capitalism" as the futural specter on call, I prefer the more encompassing "post-Anthropocene."⁷ The latter names not only another eco-economic order but articulates in advance the displacement of the human agent from the subjective center of its operations. It measures its situation from picoseconds to geologic temporal scopes, and nanometric to comparative-planetary scales, and back again. It does not name in advance, as some precondition for its mobilization today, all the terms with which it will eventually have at its disposal in the future. The aporia of the post-Anthropocene is not answered by the provocation of its naming, and this is its strength over alternatives that identify too soon what exactly must be gained or lost by our passage off the ledge. The post-Anthropocene indicates that the organizing work of a "xenogeopolitical aesthetics" (or whatever) can be done only in relation to a mature *alienation* from human history and anthropocentric time and scale. As it foreshadows and foregrounds the eclipse and extinction of Anthropocenic anthropology and corresponding models of governance, it



Film still from Todd Haynes's movie *Safe*, 1995.



A fleck of paint left this crater on the surface of Space Shuttle Challenger's front window on STS-7.

impact spalled off more than 150,000 pieces of debris larger than 1 cm. – so it was traceable, as well as capable of creating yet more debris. The American debris cloud matched this.

All in all, then, we are talking about some hundreds of thousands of traceable bits, not to mention self-forming globules of toxic fuel, along with radioactive material already orbiting from diverse sources which include machines disabled by natural objects such as meteorites, things discarded by inhabited spacecraft, and debris moved from the space graveyard orbital zone into lower altitudes by lunar perturbations, radiation pressure, atmospheric drag, and computer failure. And like booster rockets and other fragments from launches both successful and failed, it can all free-fall to earth as “space junk” of one form or another.



Saudi officials inspect a crashed PAM-D module, January 2001.

But “Iridium” and “The Chinese” were the words that buzzed around in coffee breaks in Prague, uttered by experts who didn’t have to mention them, but always seemed to need to – the latter finally being voiced as “the elephant in the room” by Admiral Dennis Blair, Former US Director of National Security and Commander-in-Chief of US Pacific Command, who, in a totally unexpected appeal to diplomacy, warned of the extensive dangers of military brinksmanship³ – and also knew an unwinnable fight when he saw one. Since that time, the issues have continued to occupy space policy conferences and workshops, as well as government documents such as the European Space Policy Institute’s Report 44, titled “Space Crisis Management: Europe’s Response” (March 2013), which considers global crisis scenarios precipitated by debris blindsides.

What interests me in all this is the element

of cosmic exo-surprise – the out-of-the-blue-ness not yet or maybe not even possibly becoming “Aha!” – a moment of collision of the producers of outer space as an installation zone for ever-accelerating terrestrial networking technologies, with the social orders that have produced them and that they support. In this regard, space debris is an ironic instantiation of the effects envisioned by Noys (as a politics) and Shaviro (as an aesthetic) in their embrace of accelerationism. Gean Moreno’s fine description of the issues bears quoting at length:

Embracing capitalism’s penchant for always undoing more and more in its quest for self-perpetuation and growth, for treating any blockage as an incentive to crank up its rhythms, accelerationism experiments with the possibility of speeding up and intensifying capitalist relations and ways of living, exacerbating its dissolutions and its velocities, until something breaks. Accelerationism aims to rev up crisis and render it unsustainable, to pipe even more energy into processes of social fracture, to exacerbate the fragmentation of experience, and to intensify sensorial overload and subjective dispersal in order to drive masochistically toward an incompatibility between capitalism and forms of excess it can’t accommodate.⁴

Interesting things happen when we translate this tactical orientation to the extreme environment of outer space. For one thing, the effect that accelerationism aims for is already a given there; the work of excessive velocity has been taken up by the disinterested force-fields and entities of “space as itself,” as I have elsewhere termed it,⁵ and the results are already threatening global communications and other infrastructures. The implication is that the purview of accelerationism is not extreme enough, as it has not given voice or any degree of agency to nonhuman actants. So the question becomes: Why not?

Here I want to consider how mainstream media aesthetics reclaim what Deleuze terms “control society” performativity through images of the depersonalized alien threat of space debris; how, as “parallel narratives” (Peter Sloterdijk’s terms) such images are capable of shattering under-control futures in intimate spaces that don’t see them coming. Distinct from government-generated Cold War narratives of fear control which, as Masco brilliantly argues, persist as present-day extreme disaster management and response scenarios,⁶ space junk imaging trades specifically on the velocity of

establishes not only that humanism disappears with humans, and vice versa, but that the more elemental genetic machines with which we now co-embody flesh can and will, in time, re-appear and express themselves as unthinkable new animal machines, and with them, New Earths. The apopenia is never resolved for us after all.

4.

Perhaps the most critical gambit for any Accelerationist geopolitical aesthetic is its simultaneous location within evolutionary disappearance and appearance, in conservation and expression and as reciprocal outcomes (including also extinction). Consider the “*arche-fossil*,” presented by Quentin Meillassoux as an evidentiary demonstration of a basic encounter between the abyssal reality of ancestrality and the universal dislocation of thought from worlding, even the worlds of fossilized primordia which it can, eventually, contemplate through a confrontation with such geochemical stains. For the post-Anthropocene, and our contingent disorientations (apopenias, aesthetics, designs) we must pivot and rotate that *arche-fossil*’s temporal trajectory from one of ancestrality toward one of alien *descendence*. Just as we are forced to see in the fossil the contingency of a world that precedes thought, we are also forced to encounter in advance – as a measure of the present condition – *the descendent for which we are the ancestor and for which we are the unthinkable fossil*. Unlike the real fossil, that descendant cannot be held in hand, even as its chemistry storms within us and around us. Our presence is but an anterior precondition for our future dissolution, and for the appearance of another unthinkable phylum, on-planet or off-planet, for which our thought and trace will be as alien, inaccessible, and horrifying in its indifference as the Cenozoic fossil is to us now.

Thanatos, the organism’s compulsive drive toward dissolution back into the world, is not the most critical economy for accelerationism, as the passage from organic into inorganic is just as easily inverted and extinguishment may be overtaken by emergence.⁸ At work is not then instead *Eros*, the conservation and reproduction of the organism, but on the contrary, an open-ended scanning of possibilities through which the silhouette of the organism is to be cast off like dead skin so that something irregular might arrive from within and without at once, over and over again, until through genetic and allogenic iteration, the vestigial trace of the human ancestor is absorbed. While the work of organismic evolution may be to find ever more circuitous paths toward death (and of Capitalism to trace ever more winding paths to collapse),

the work of the expanded phylogenome is a more open-ended convolution toward adaptation, invention, diversion, and reiteration. The perspective offered on our contemporary moment by this ancestral retrospection-in-advance challenges the conceit that, should Anthropocenic ecological collapse make familiar human systems untenable, then the chemical and genetic projects localized in our phylum, biomass, and phenotype will have no reality. They may. They may not. Either way, the best of all possible news is that, should “we” survive the Anthropocene, it will not be as “humans.” To the extent that the arcs of this slow displacement can be drawn, felt or modeled, then a post-Anthropocenic geopolitical aesthetics has meaning. Otherwise it has, none.

5. Inventory

From musings on the interests of species and phylum during transitions to and from geologic eras, I will now careen back to our very local and specific involvement with certain trace-effects that might be read as constitutive indicators of some cleavage between the Anthropocene and the post-Anthropocene. It’s possible as well that these may prove instead to be just fleeting tendencies, perhaps symbolic of something more important, but which are themselves only novelties. I can’t say. Mine is not a roster of mission-critical assets, not even a beginning of a real summary, but merely a sample inventory that may prove to have special significance. If a link is possible between these and a “politics” interested in acceleration toward a post-Anthropocenic condition, it is because the biopolitical context of our Algorithmic Capitalism is itself, for better and worse, already a strong leverage point in the larger dramas of planetary-scale conversion, decay, restoration, and wholesale replacement. Inadvertent geoeconomics during the Anthropocenic era has involved us in ecologic gambling beyond our means, and so, a strong distinction between an accelerationist aesthetics versus politics is likely not very beneficial. This is not because aesthetics serves as some master vehicle of encounter with the distribution of sensibility, participation, and truth-telling about lifeworlds, but because (like the weirdly ahumanist traces below) they are forms of design and designation that qualify the affect of our post-Anthropocenic precipice by *constituting it*, rather than reflecting, suggesting, mirroring, or metaphorizing it for us through some public congress. It is less important that they dramatize something dangerous about the world we will face than that they physically incorporate and modify that world in advance without our supervision, oversight or guidance.

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For example, while the critical path of the *Thanotonic* economy traces living organisms back into inorganic matter by a deep momentum toward ultimate reabsorption with the dead ocean, in the early-to-mid Anthropocene the track from organic life back into inorganic matter has multiplied, inverted, and de-differentiated. One not only transforms into the other, but each is displaced by the other as a complementary form of embodiment: robotics, molecular engineering, synthetic biology, various implants, tissue and organ transplantation, sensory augmentation, avant-garde pharmaceuticals, and so forth. For some this designed promiscuity between the organic and inorganic at the scale of the organism may be a kind of living death. The species can't wait to die and reabsorbed by the inorganic, and so the individual organism takes these actions preemptively upon itself. By mixing organic and inorganic material into new composites in the laboratory, it introduces death into life. On the other hand, these technological displacements of life and matter may signal something more than diverted necromancy (or generalized *necrotizing fasciitis* at industrial scale) they may signal a desire to innovate upon the mammalian diagram, perhaps in the accidental interests of a biopolitics – far more eccentricly than its participants realize.

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However, at the same time, these disciplines of machine intelligence may, in practice if not in theory, close off rather than open up the wider project of warm alien distortion, as these initiatives are couched within rhetorics and institutions of medical progress. Nevertheless, below are just a few trace-effects that might suggest both perspectives at once. These are a few of my favorite things.

6. *Epidermal Biopolitics and Nanoskin.* We have a good sense of the passage from the Foucauldian disciplinary biopolitics for which bodies are captured, enveloped, individuated, nominated, and enumerated into a governable interior, into the Deleuzian “society of control” for which open fields of interfaces, switches, and gateways quantify the traces and trails of partial subjects in motion as they pace through urban landscapes, wandering without tether because there is no outside to which they might escape. Now another regime appears, one that organizes its biopolitical governance through a more immediate and affective means: the sensing and codification of risk at the level of *skin* (a mammal’s largest sensory organ, a cell’s essential structural support, a planet’s most exposed inventory of life). This *epidermal*

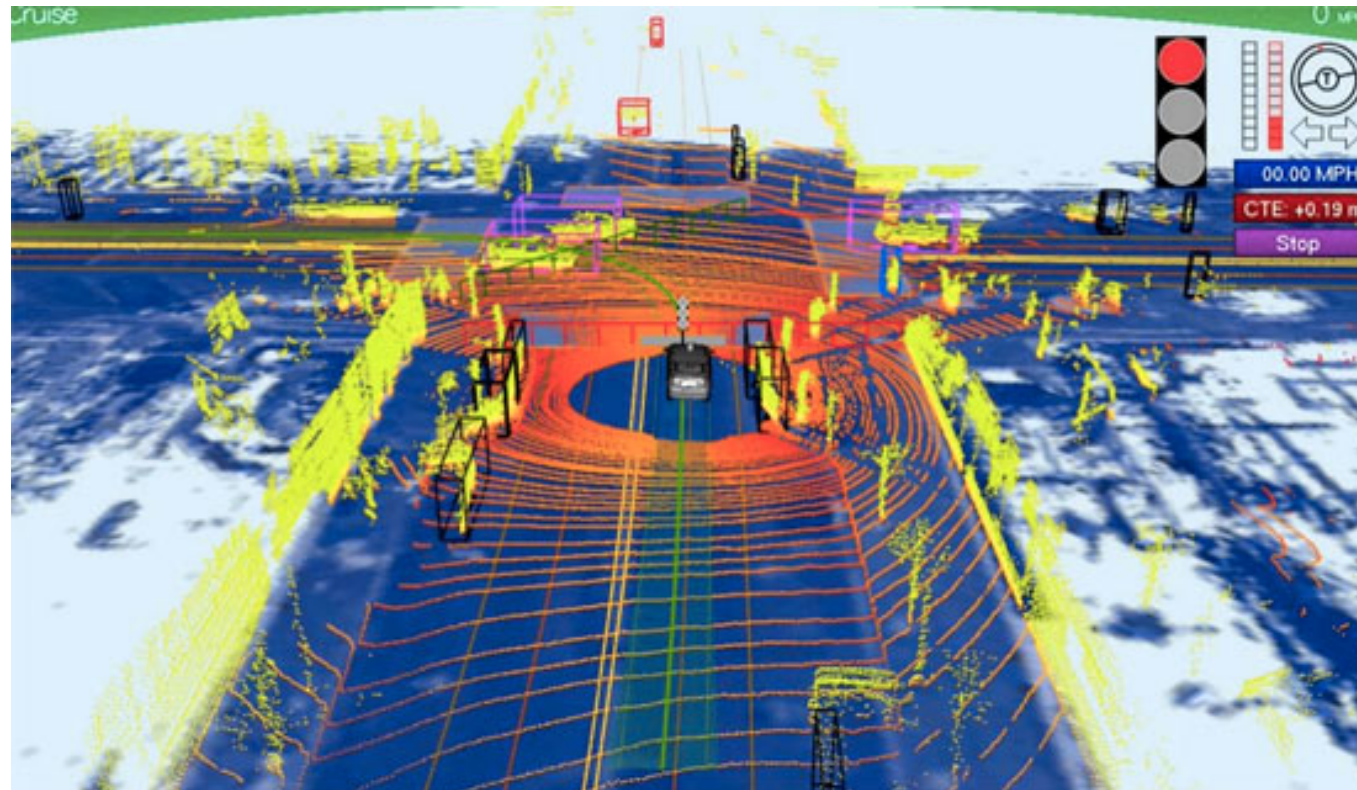
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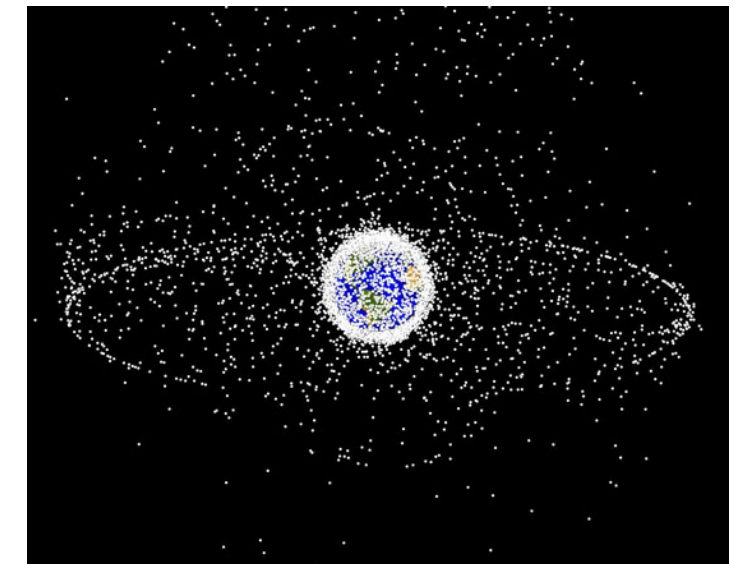
Backstory

Ethnography’s reach into the pluriverse of the contemporary moment has no shortage of surprises. In the summer of 2011, my interest in the anthropology of outer spaces drew me to Prague, where I participated as an official “observer” in an international conference on “space security.” The purpose of the event was to bring together space policy professionals and experts from the United States, Europe, and Japan, in support of drafting an International Code of Conduct for the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. The urgent problem of the day concerned the massive amounts of debris in outer space and its risk to human life, to scientific research and diplomacy, and perhaps most importantly, to telecommunications on earth.

Haunting the conference hall were two event icons: one a targeted destruction, and the other an accidental destruction, of spacecraft and satellites in low earth orbit. Representing the first category was “The Chinese”: the event of January 19, 2007, when the Chinese military shot down one of its own satellites in a region of space occupied by US spy satellites and space-based missile defense systems, and the US response of shooting down one of its own satellites, SA-193, supposedly heading towards earth filled with toxic fuel, almost exactly one year later. Together, these threatened to set off an international arms race, and they inspired worldwide protest.¹



A rendering of Google's self-driving car's visualization of a street.



Artist's rendition of space debris orbiting the Earth.

In the second category was “Iridium”: a spent Russian Cosmos 2551 satellite that had slipped out of orbit and, over Siberia on February 11, 2009, slammed into a communications satellite built by the US company Iridium.²

In the case of the Chinese missile that researchers are particularly eager to cite, the

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- 1 George M. Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 49.
- 2 Bulgakov, *The Philosophy of Economy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 68.
- 3 Nikolai Fedorov, *What Was Man Created For? The Philosophy of the Common Task* (London: Honeyglen Publishing, 1990), 59.
- 4 On Fedorov's leanings in this direction, see Young, *The Russian Cosmists*.
- 5 Young, *The Russian Cosmists*, 79.
- 6 Fedorov, *What Was Man Created For?*, 56.
- 7 Ibid., 43.
- 8 See Benedict Singleton, "Subtle Empires," *Design Ecologies* Vol. 1, No. 2 (2011).
- 9 Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (London: Clarendon Press, 1998), 200–01.
- 10 Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1998).
- 11 Marcel Detienne & Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 6.
- 12 Vernant, *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks* (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 313.
- 13 Detienne & Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*.
- 14 See Singleton, "Subtle Empires"; and Singleton, *On Craft and Being Crafty: Human Behaviour as the Object of Design* (PhD thesis, Northumbria University, forthcoming 2013).
- 15 Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, 20.
- 16 Adam Phillips, *Houdini's Box: On the Arts of Escape* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), 29.
- 17 See Singleton, "The Long Con," *Design Ecologies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (forthcoming 2013).
- 18 Fedorov, quoted in Young, *The Russian Cosmists*, 47.
- 19 Chamayou, *Manhunts: A Philosophical History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 15.
- 20 Ibid., 70.
- 21 Ibid., 63.
- 22 Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), xi.

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The Reids of Phoenix, Urbanium Pavilion by architects Kossman.dejong. Shanghai World Expo 2010. Photo courtesy of the author.

biopolitics is based less on “seeing like a state” than upon what a governing apparatus can sense. That sensing may work toward the comprehensive quantification of carbon, CO₂, particulate matter, or heat, as it does for the network of satellite and terrestrial sensors that comprise the proposed Planetary Skin infrastructure as pioneered by Cisco and NASA.⁹ Here, ecopolitics and global governance bypass the securitization of human populations in favor of the ubiquitous sensing and analysis of molecules of interest and their residual patterns.

Elsewhere, police action is focused on thermodynamic human skin, as demonstrated by the chase for Suspect #2 after the Boston Marathon bombings, he was discovered by heat-seeking technologies that disclosed his warm animal profile hidden beneath layers of urban fabric. For all of us, intercity movement by airplane requires that we submit our own skin, and the surfaces of our possessions, to the guaranteeing scan that can prove that they bear no telltale dust of dangerous chemicals and compounds. We have our person observed by full-body scanners which unconceal the mobile subject from his outer clothing (not nude, but ultranude). To explore this (with due perversity), my Center for Design and Geopolitics worked in collaboration with the Laboratory for Bionanoengineering (both at the University of California, San Diego) to develop applications for inks (and in this case, a wall paint) that could detect ambient particulate trace elements of chemicals commonly used in improvised explosive devices. With microelectronics embedded in the paint itself, the interior building skin becomes a sensor technology, no longer furtive like the panoptic gaze but now fully disclosed as an ambient technology coating the outer skin of the habitat itself. Epidermal biopolitics suggests a strong interweaving of organic and inorganic bodies according to strategies of risk mitigation, but also unforeseeable modes of communication between unlike bodies which can extend, modify, and prostheticize their most all-encompassing sensory media (epidermal sensation) in ways that were until now only possible for vision and audition.

Cloud Polis. Drawing lines upon a planet, either by the physical inscription of walls and envelopes or by the virtual geometries of massless legal borders, is essential to anthropic politics. (Think Carl Schmitt’s *The Nomos of the Earth*), and the multiplication and confusion of these drawings by planetary-scale computational architectures puts into play jurisdictional designations and subdivisions, or the refusal of same, and points toward unfamiliar models of geopolitical design and designation.¹⁰

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We see how global Cloud computing platforms can delaminate normative Westphalian political geography and introduce another, asymptotic sovereign layer on top of the State’s territories. This is seen perhaps most directly in the ongoing Sino-Google conflicts, that began in 2008. As States become Cloud-based entities, conversely Cloud platforms take on some of the most essential technologies of governance, like legal identity, currency, cartography, and platform allegiance. The Cloud Polis suggests weird, thickened, plural geographies and non-contiguous jurisdictions, mixing aspects of US superjurisdiction over both Cloud (Pirate Bay, Megaupload) and State space (customs screening in overseas airports, extraordinary rendition) with aspects of the Charter Cities which would carve new partially privatized polities from the whole cloth of de-sovereign lands.

The Cloud Polis extracts revenue from the cognitive capital of its user-citizens, who trade attention and microeconomic compliance for global infrastructural services. It provides each of them with a discrete online identity and a license to use that infrastructure (not unlike *hukou* licenses in China that dictate who may and who may not formally partake of urban systems). These embryonic accomplishments of planetary-scale computation comprehensively incorporate information across multiple scales, as well as redraw political territory in its own image point toward an increasing universal acceleration, centralization, and recombination of material flows than those of pedestrian neoliberalism (and conceivably not so dissimilar from the past dreams of communist cyberneticians.)¹¹ In time, perhaps at the eclipse of the Anthropocene, the historical phase of “Google Gosplan” gives way to State-less platforms for multiple strata of synthetic intelligence and networks of outlandish biocommunication to settle into new continents of cyborg symbiosis. Or perhaps instead, if nothing else, the carbon and energy appetite of this embryonic ecology will starve its host before it can fully gestate.

Machinic Images. Any discussion of an accelerationist geopolitical aesthetic must account for the contemporary technologies of the image itself. Taking the long view, we see that humans’ externalized expression of visual ideas dates at least to the primordial architectures of the cave wall. Much later, it passed through a relatively short painting-photo-cinematic phase (lasting a few centuries, give or take) for which individual images and image-sequences were produced, distributed, and appreciated as rare artifactual events. Now and for the foreseeable future, images are a sub-genre of machines. Like

condition,” Fedorov wrote, “but not a quality without which man ceases to be *what he is and what he ought to be*.”¹⁸

In a new or renewed cosmism, this position is untenable. As we’ve already seen, the same kind of intelligence is at work in setting and escaping traps. Indeed, in order to be free of a trap, it’s of less use to the trapped to decide upon some holy condition of freedom than to understand how one is implicated in the mechanism of one’s entrapment. To engage in the former is mere *escapism*, as we’ve noted. The designation of this limit as sacrosanct is alien to the very logic of traps and of escaping them, to its abstract insurrectionary force. The unnerving aspect of this project is not, however, located in the specifics of what it is of which we are free, which is to some extent reconcilable with the Fedorovian project. It’s contained instead in the corrosive quality of the intelligence that must be put to work. This is an intelligence founded in what Gregoire Chamayou dubs “a physics rather than a theology of power,” although “mechanics” might be a term more apt than “physics.”¹⁹

To explain: if setting and escaping from a trap implement the same logic, to be prey is an education in how predation operates. “In order to anticipate the reactions of his pursuers,” Chamayou writes, “the hunted man has to learn to interpret his own actions from the point of view of the predator ... : seeing himself in the third person, considering, with respect to each of his acts, how they might be used against him. This anxiety can later be transformed into reasoning.”²⁰ So it is that the mark begins to understand the operations of the con-artist, and the process of flipping the game can begin. This process tutors a view of oneself as in part an *object*, and converts this knowledge into an active resource. No wonder, then, that “[s]laves in the French colonies had a word for it: escaping one’s master was called ‘stealing one’s own corpse.’”²¹ This creates a pernicious stowaway in any humanist cosmist project of freedom. “Thinking,” writes Ray Brassier, “has interests that do not coincide with those of living; indeed, they can and have been pitted against the latter,” a statement never more true than here.²²

Cosmism accelerates design until its project of insubordination becomes more clearly visible. What is revealed is the irreducibility of design to stated motivations of capital interest, social progress or scientific advance, in place of a programme of incursions across any and all borders, violations of every truce, an insurrection not only against gravity but also human beings, a process by which sociotechnical structures are taken hostage by precisely what they make possible, a process of *ungrounding* in more ways than the most obvious. This is the genuine

injection of the offworld into terrestrial affairs, in which through progressive alienation freedom stacks up in the longest of cons.

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bonds and clasps; and in this they are ordinarily said to show their wisdom. When a great thief comes, however, he shoulders the box, lifts up the satchel, carries off the bag, and runs away with them, afraid only that the cords, bonds, and clasps may not be secure; and in this case what was called the wisdom (of the owners) proves to be nothing but a collecting of the things for the great thief.

That there must be some things that no creature can elude ... and that they must be discovered, recognized or observed are integral to our sense of ourselves, and the ways in which we question who we are. When a constraint can be described as something else – when the earth becomes round so we can't fall off it, when the notion of sin is seen to be a devious form of social control, and so on – we change our place in the world.¹⁶

As an event in this alternative history of design, cosmism arrives as a kind of absolutization of its basic principles into a project of *generalized escapology*. It is a tendency dimly glimpsed in every individual act of design, extrapolated as far as possible. If design is a hustle, then cosmism is the long con – or perhaps more precisely, the most extravagant gesture of *lengthening* the hustle into a con: not simply an aggregation of hustles – a chain of coin-tricks, each self-sufficient, without bearing on the next – but a process of nesting them into a cultivated scheme or expanding plot, so that each gambit paves the way for the next.¹⁷

This opens a vista of new reference points – aesthetic as much as political or philosophical – in which to set the kinds of wildly ambitious sociotechnical schemes of which the space travel is an iconic example. We might not be able to tell, as yet, what the consequences of this might be – what it might mean to conceive of, say, a well-established human outpost on Mars, where adults teach their children about the relation of the New World to the Old, through a history that stacks Harry Houdini and Frank Abignale among the astrophysicists and Apollo teams: an alternative set of footholds for an ascent into the dark.

But there is a twist that we *can* anticipate, a further consequence of relocating cosmism within the ambit of this history. Fedorov's cosmism is a project, ultimately, of *freedom*, commissioning an assault by practical reason on the things that bind us, irrespective of their historical ubiquity; the perception that a life subjected to 1g gravity is inevitable is among the casualties already listed. The conception of the

world as a field of nested traps renders this vision of freedom *quantitative*, a series of practical achievements, proceeding by degree – we are free of this, and then of this, and then of this, new end points emerging rather than an *a priori* finish line at which, on breaking the ribbon, we can at last rest easy, luxuriating in a genuine liberty. It's questionable how compatible *other* long-term goals, like those that Fedorov foresaw in the colonization of the universe, are with this perspective, other than as (comparatively) short-term horizons on which to affix one's eyes in the course of acceleration. But this is perhaps a minor modification.



A Harry Houdini press shot, dated from 1899.

Much worse is that in Fedorov's work – as in the decayed fractions of his thought that show up when travel beyond the margins of the earth's gravity well is figured as an opportunity for profit, for entertainment, or for humanitarian resource – the line is drawn at undermining the sacred figure of Man. "Death is a property, a

the images on paper money, which appear as they do in order to best support specific counterfeit-prevention technologies designed into the patterns, some images (such as my explosives-sensing image noted above) have a discrete technical capacity that is inextricable from their materiality as images. Everyday data visualization turns the diagrammatic image into a scientific, managerial, and military instrument, while pervasive GUIs (graphical user interfaces) turn similar diagrams into active, goal-directed tools that mediate between a human folk psychology of action and algorithms available in the user's environment. Beyond this, GUIs also train thought toward certain regimes of interpretation of that environment, and as GUIs become more closely glued to direct perception (as for augmented reality), their capacity to engender strong theological interpretations for their users will prove irresistible to various fundamentalisms. In this, the machinic image is punctured by little sinkholes between the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real.

On a global scale, the machinic quality of the image is also partially a function of machinic quantity. With the comparatively instantaneous adoption of mobile devices (Turing complete machine + camera + homing tether + telephonic voice relay), we have seen an explosion in the absolute volume of images of the world, dwarfing the total sum produced before the mobile phone appeared in our hands. Unlike images of the painting-photo-cinematic era, these images do not pass into an archive only after their practical life is passed; rather, through global image apps and platforms, they are produced through the archive itself, socialized through the archive, assigned searchable metadata through the archive. As a consequence, the general image apparatus is slowly accumulating a comprehensive chronicle of human visual experience that will be of enormous value to future artificial intelligences. This may be its most durable purpose and its true responsibility. Even today, each user in the Android population (for example) is a node in a vast, massively distributed supercomputing sensing, seeing, tracking, and sorting platform. As for image content, the so-called "New Aesthetic" suggests the possibility of an Art (if that is the right word) that is made not only by artificial vision machines generating their own autonomous aesthetic, but eventually an Art *for* such intelligences, which can appreciate it uniquely and perhaps develop their own taste genres of M2M (machine-to-machine) connoisseurship.

Mereotopological Geopolitical Architectonics. As suggested above, an accelerationist "politics" is perhaps premised on a contradiction, in that one of the first things to

dissolve is perhaps the coherency of any normative *polis* or *polity*. Not only is the forum of public representation torqued out of shape by multiple overlapping geometries of geography, but in mid-free fall, the representable political body doesn't endure long enough for its polity to take shape (and certainly not for swift decay into recidivist parliamentarism). However, that failure may be the key accomplishment of accelerationist "politics" as an epistemology of Design. The accelerationist geopolitical brief is better assigned *the exploration of how certain control systems, certain platform systems, and specific mereotopological configurations work toward particular governmental effects*. We wish to amplify the sort of preemptive politico-infrastructure speculation that Shaviro identifies, and particularly those that are premised on an encounter with inhuman exteriorities, and manage to avoid sentimental relapse into the "intuitive values" of Industrial humanism. For example, the architecture of Hernan Diaz Alonso suggests (in ways he himself wouldn't likely ever claim) how the eclipse of Anthropocenic systems doesn't suppose that they are necessarily actually erased, but that they become bound within other hosts (perhaps many layers deep, parasites within parasites) and that, instead of withdrawing into a purified phenomenal geometry, any building-form must presume contagion between its own goopy, hungry, post-animalian composition and other organic and inorganic agents (both symbiots and parasites). Through this, "polities" emerge.

Simultaneously along another track, Alisa Andrasek's use of autonomous computational agents to find and deform real and virtual matter provides a corrective to the closed "systems thinking" of the Parametricism reigning within architectural, and points to a far less deterministic career for algorithmic thought and design. Unlike entropic gray-goo replibots, these agents constitute an open-ended technology both for prototyping more heterogeneous profiles for real chemical matter than those naturally given, and for how they can organize a geopolitical substrate for compositional action and replication. For both Diaz Alonso and Andrasek, architecture doesn't represent a political organization through symbolization or monumentalization, but rather directly configures its mediating anatomy. These model geometries are immanent prototypes – rendered in 1:1000 and 1000:1 scales, both at once – for the real infrastructures of post-Anthropocenic geography. Properly deployed (someday), they are less figurations upon the affective "experience" of the world as it is, or as it may come to be, than they are larval variations for

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estranged worlds and orthogonal futurities. In this, the space of distinction between political and aesthetic registers is unwound, as the Design explorations of this (extremely minoritarian) architecture are not epiphenomenal envelopes for geopolitical thought, drawings on behalf of its potential development. They *are* geopolitical thought in its most direct, compressed expression.



Some Concluding Remarks

No discussion of an accelerationist geopolitical aesthetic (or of the partial inventory above set in relationship to the post-Anthropocene) can or should develop without passage into the life and afterlife of Anthropocenic *Capitalism*, particularly with regard to planetary-scale computation as its onto-financial substrate and circulatory system. There is no viable engagement with Capitalism vis-à-vis the post-Anthropocene that is either doctrinally rejectionist or crypto-theologically affirmationist. (Such monophonic zealotries abound, but they do not qualify as viable.) A full discussion is not possible here, but suffice to say that the zigzagging archaeology of “cybernetic” *communisms* would suggest that the politico-economic phase space of the post-Anthropocene is wide enough and weird enough that intimacies with Algorithmic Capitalism should not provoke the prohibition of experiments. Futural outcomes like Cosmopolitan sovereignty, *mondialisation*, and “a certain reason to come” are really much more macabre things than they might appear to the delicate tastes and slight constitutions of Deconstruction. They will not arrive as numinous ethical communities of truth and reconciliation, but as amputated limbs, zombie landfills, and falsified laboratory results.

Distinctions between “good” and “bad” accelerationism, such as between the “Promethean vs. political” (for Ray Brassier) or the “dromological vs. the universal” (for Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek), serve the important purpose of demanding a proper telescoping from

the local conceptual and machinic conditions of anthropometric speed (the sort that so scandalizes Virilio) to the wider vistas of geologic time, and to a vigilance to never confuse one for the other. But for the purposes of actually constructing geopolitical aesthetics, I would hope that the partial inventory of trace-effects above would go some warding any gnostic tendency within broadly related discourses that would ground these distinctions, implicitly or explicitly, as a privileging of an accelerationism of the conceptual over an accelerationism of the *material*: of Philosophy purified from encounters with Design. This is because Design does the work of both conceptualization and materialization at once, one oscillating into the other at their own rhythms. To be sure, the futurity of those rhythms is at stake and in jeopardy (a point that some of the other contributors to this special issue will take pains to articulate). But once again, precisely because the futurity of Algorithmic Capitalism and its own schedule for linear acceleration should never be confused with macroscopic undulations of biochemistry, topographic momentum, and universal debris, the poverty of our future is not a poverty of the future. Instead of locating the post-Anthropocene *after* the Anthropocene along some dialectical timeline, it is better conceived as *a composite parasite nested inside the host of the present time*, evolving and appearing in irregular intervals at a scale that exceeds the *Eros/Thanatos* economy of the organism.

Perhaps the existential risk inherent in this situation (a precarious parasitism between the present and the future that could bend either way) might, for some, disqualify *a priori* an accelerationist geopolitical aesthetic as both too overcoded by hegemonic algorithmic logics and too conditional to pilot the present moment. I think, however, that in the long run this misses the larger point, and betrays some uncertainty as to whether or not Capitalism actually will implode in time (a different question than whether the Anthropocene will: it will). Put another way, how anthropic is Algorithmic Capitalism, really? Apparent correlations between the open wound of a post-planetary General Economy on the one hand, and planetary-scale computation on the other, range from direct correspondence (in which Capitalism is an inhuman machine from the future only provisionally involved with humans) to indirect indifference (in which arcane, apathetic, chthonic forces will, in time, make good their revenge). These are both perfectly good perches from which to survey the plots below, each wisely crafted with a different pet nihilism. If anything, it is the machinic inhumanity of Capitalism, not its anthropocentricity, that most strongly

projects, and medicine, and he demands the larger projects he glimpses within them be radicalized.

But the connection with design that we’ll draw here is more direct, if not immediately more obvious. That is, this talk of traps and escape from them speaks to a very old understanding of the construction of traps as the very paradigm of what, today, we call design. This is an association largely forgotten even by the time of Fedorov’s writing, but one which applied anew begins to twist and accelerate both this ancient tradition and Fedorov’s cosmism into something new. A tradition which, if we situate Fedorov’s work within it, changes both this tradition and cosmism ...

What does design have to do with traps? It’s certainly an association that’s emerged, apparently independently, in many times and places. The connection lies not so much in the overt function of hunting or domestic traps – as means to secure food, eliminate pests, and so on – but in what the construction of traps reveals about how humans go about making things more generally.⁸ In his essay “Vogel’s Net,” a short and striking speculation on how a hunting trap might be understood if taken out of the woods or the corner of the granary (so to speak) and placed in a gallery, anthropologist Alfred Gell draws out the ominous intentions encoded in its physical structure: “We read in it the mind of its author,” and a “model of its victim” – and more particularly the way that that model “subtly and abstractly represent[s] parameters of the animal’s natural behavior, subverted in order to entrap it”; hunting traps are “lethal parodies” of their prey’s behavior.⁹

In this, the maker of the trap is “a technician of instinct and appetite,” determining the trajectories already at play in the environment and twisting them in new directions.¹⁰ The trap may involve the application of force in both its construction and operation, but it has the characteristic of applying this force with sophistication, which obtains in the way that this force is highly considered to *leverage* environmental tendencies that already exist. A human would be lucky to catch most other mammals unaided, but this can be redressed by an indirect strategy that makes use of their observed disposition – their inclination to eat certain kinds of food, in the example of bait; or how a good snare kills through desperation, strangling the target as it tries to escape.

The intelligence at work in the construction of the trap is most aptly described as *cunning*, and it extends to activities that we can broadly describe as “technical” more generally. Many are the observers who have seen in this the

paradigm of *craft* more broadly writ, the ability to coax effects *from* the world, rather than imposing effects *on* it by the application of force alone. Following the grain of wood, knowing the melting points of various ores, the toughening of metal through its tempering: all these are not domineering strategies, exactly, but situations “in which the intelligence attempts to make contact with an object by confronting it in the guise of a rival, as it were, combining connivance and opposition.”¹¹ Incredibly improbable phenomena – like the ability of a person to use a lever to lift a boulder – flow from an environment arranged *just so*, and is a collaboration of all its parts. And so it is that Jean-Pierre Vernant describes artifacts as “traps set at points where nature allowed itself to be overcome.”¹² They remind us, too, that to trap something – *contra* what might be intuitively inferred by the example of the hunting trap – is to arrange the behaviour of, but not necessarily demolish or otherwise unrecognisably transform, its target.

This form of craft, which merges with craftiness (and comprises the historical connection between the two words), weds design to the operation of courtly intrigues, daring military stratagems, and outbreaks of entrepreneurial success¹³: all instances of the successful navigation of ambiguous and shifting environments, in which are demonstrated the ability to elicit extraordinary effects from unpromising materials through oblique strategies and precisely timed action, allowing the weak to prevail over the physically stronger.¹⁴

As the reader may have already noted, these are just as much instances of *escape* as they are of *setting traps*. The two pivot around each other, displaying a curious reversibility. It’s a knowledge of traps and how they function that enables one most easily to undo a trap that one is in: a talent for escape is predicated on the same intelligence that goes into entrapment – indeed, in the example of the traps that people set for each other, it’s clear that – as Hyde puts it – “nothing counters cunning but more cunning.”¹⁵ To outfox is to think more broadly, to find the crack in the scheme, to stick a knife into it, and to lever it open for new use. Freighting the environment with a counter-plot is the best device for escaping the machinations in which one is embroiled: a conversion of constraints into new opportunities for free action, technological development as a kind of *Hydean accelerationism*. As Zhuangzi wrote sometime around 475 BC,

In taking precautions against thieves who cut open satchels, search bags, and break open boxes, people are sure to cord and fasten them well, and to employ strong

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Submarine escape training tower, Ford Island, Pearl Harbour, where trainee submariners learn to suppress instinctive behaviours through repeated rehearsal of escapes from the 100' water column.

recommends it, and that requires more care on our part to better realize. What mathematician Giuseppe Longo calls “the next machine,” the one that comes after Computation, and whose processes might then provide metaphors and epistemologies of life, thought, and systems, just as computers do today, will also involve, by definition, “the next economics.” We assume that neither of these (the next machine or the next economics) is likely to arrive without the other one in tow. Whether they can or will or should arrive to “us” or for “us” is a different matter. They may arrive only when we are exhumed, by some unthinkable descendant, as speechless mineralized fossils. Or maybe faster than that, if we hasten them.

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1
This term is Spivak's, though we mean it differently.

2
The term "comparative planetology" comes from Kim Stanley Robinson.

3
The "xeno-" prefix was introduced into this discourse by Reza Negarastani.

4
See Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (London: Zero Books, 2010), 137–39.

5
Fredric Jameson, quoted in Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 138.

6
Nick Land, "Machinic Desire," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1993): 479.

7
This corresponds to a shift in focus from immediate resistance to capitalism to the ultimate completion of its historical mission (of self-extinguishment).

8
See Reza Negarastani, "Drafting the Inhuman: Conjectures on Capitalism and Organic Necrocracy," in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, Graham Harman. (Melbourne: re:press, 2011).

9
See <http://www.planetaryskin.org/>.

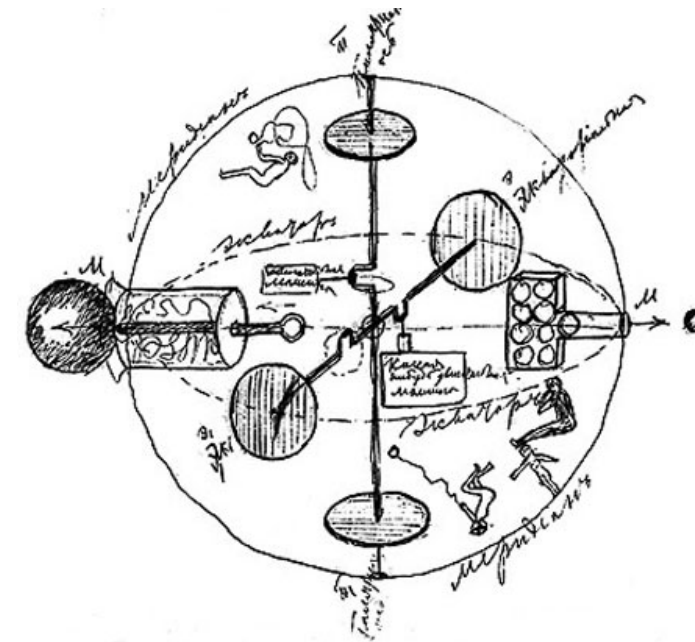
10
I've discussed this at length in a series of interviews with Metahaven.

11
See, for example, the novel *Red Plenty* by Francis Spufford, and Eden Medina's, *Cybernetic Revolutionaries, Technology and Politics in Allende's Chile*. MIT Press. 2011.

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This complex of ideas, which by the 1900s had been dubbed "cosmism," was capable of inspiring peculiar devotion in the few who were exposed to it. (In fact, as Fedorov showed little interest in publication, it's largely through the action of his scattered acolytes that these ideas reached the presses at all, appearing here and there in anonymous or pseudonymous forms in small circulars during Fedorov's lifetime (often to his fury) and only posthumously finding wider release.) In the first case, some of the titanic literary figures in Russia at the time (Tolstoy and Dostoevsky among them) were transfixed by Fedorov's imaginary range, and also by his weirdly revitalized and visionary Christianity that they hoped might head off the anarchistic and communistic movements taking shape. This strange religiosity attracted all kinds of odd followers. The austerity of Fedorov's denunciation of sex, democracy, and an emerging consumerism appealed to all kinds of occultists and mystics, especially those playing with scientizing their beliefs even as they wanted to work their way into politics, particularly given that his project explicitly entailed that "mythical, symbolic actions," from praying for rain to the Christian doctrine of resurrection, "would be replaced by actual, effective ones," with "science as a method."⁶



Draft drawing by Konstantin Tsiolkovsky of a spaceship interior, believed to be the first human representation of weightlessness, 1878.

But this scientific impetus, such that "political and cultural problems become physical or astrophysical,"⁷ found a readier home in the atheist and scientific-Promethean bent of post-revolutionary Russia (even if Fedorov's habit of quoting the Bible made it hardly an effortless fit). It incited – to pick one example – the work of

Vladimir Vernadsky, who developed the concept of the "biosphere," and whose astrophysical take on earthly history included seeing human beings and other terrestrial creatures as "ambulant geology." In a foreshadowing of our contemporary concept of the Anthropocene, Vernadsky noted that human reason, expressed though design, had approached the status of a significant planetary geological force by the end of the nineteenth century. More directly, and without doubt the most obvious instance of technoscientific influence, *The Common Task* played a central role in the formation of cosmonautics. Chief among the devotees of Fedorov's thought was his protégé, Konstantin Tsiolkovski, a frequent visitor to Fedorov's library as a teenager, who was to go on to configure the mathematical basis for space travel, from a series of vital rocketry equations to the calculation of optimal ascent, descent, and orbital trajectories for spacecraft; and who put these to use in the design of the first multistage booster rockets, an extraordinary technological innovation that stood among many others in his work, including designs for airlocks and moon bases.

It seems obvious that we are confined in space to the surface of the earth, and in time to the length of a life. Fedorov's imaginative achievement revolves around refusing to mistake the ubiquity of these constraints – for all the great hold they exert – as inescapable necessities we have no choice but to accept. Those who point to the huge expanse of the earth and the whole terrestrial history of life – this is nothing but myopia, squalid provincialism. In isolated form, this is the *characteristic gesture* of cosmism, what we might call the "cosmist impulse": to consider the earth a *trap*, and to understand the common project of philosophy, economics, and design as being *the formulation of means to escape from it*: to conceive a jailbreak at the maximum possible scale, a heist in which we steal ourselves from the vault.

This redescription of Fedorov's work lets us reconfigure cosmism in unexpected ways. In particular, it foregrounds the salience of *design* for our endeavor. This isn't simply because the cosmist impulse clearly invokes a technological program in which design is implicated. If we're more concerned with escape as *an actual physical event* rather than *escapism* (a retreat into an inner psychological bunker, individual or collective), then, as Fedorov was quite aware, our plots demand a kind of material scaffolding – various aeronautical technologies, to give the obvious example. He quotes, approvingly and with frequency, the developments of his time in artillery, ballooning, enormous construction

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extension of what already – as above – acts to mitigate nature, although he refused to affix the term “progress” to his perspective. Progress, in the sense of the production of more machines of greater complexity, was in itself not enough. Indeed, espousing it was dangerous, a disordered, warping process that did not enhance the living, but further degraded us. Against *progress* Fedorov pitches *duty*, a rationalist commitment against death. This is certainly an autocratic affair, one in which “the contradiction between the reflective and instinctive” – where the instinctive is the operation of blind natural forces through man, and the reflective is the means by which it might be checked and rerouted in a more productive direction – would be decided in favor of the reasonable.³ The pursuit of sex, for instance, was for Fedorov a crass diversion of effort, the submission to unexamined impulse. A more rational base on which to build people into collectives, he felt, was *kinship*, and it’s no surprise, perhaps, that Fedorov’s characterization of rational duty is a *filial* duty, impassioned but firmly chaste. This dutiful sense of kinship would outmode and supersede, he hoped, easily deviated social forms like democracy.⁴ The whole task of social organization would alter: beginning with the creation of synthetic wombs, and later entire synthetic bodies, the task of producing and organizing human society would exceed its impulsive origins and be replaced by a rationalist

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schema of collective direction control; efforts to prolong life to the point of immortality, a *completed project of medicine*, would be entwined into this transformation of basic human functions, finding its ultimate filial duty in the eventual recreation of every human being who ever lived. This is Fedorov as he is still best known: a curious prophet not only of human immortality, but of the resurrection of the dead.

But his project extended further, and inevitably upwards, not least because an enlarging human race would require more room to expand. Freedom from death would extend to freedom from the earth itself, in quite practical terms. Technologies must loosen the grip of gravity, not eradicating it per se but meaning we would no longer be forced to obey it without question, no longer subject to its *necessity*. Epic and unexpected, the creativity of Fedorov’s vision extended to its detail:

He speculated that someday, by erecting giant cones on the earth’s surface, people might be able to control the earth’s electromagnetic field in such a way as to turn the whole planet into a spaceship under human control. We would no longer have to slavishly orbit our sun but could freely steer our planet wherever we wished, as, in the phrase he used as early as the 1870s, “captain and crew of spaceship earth.”⁵

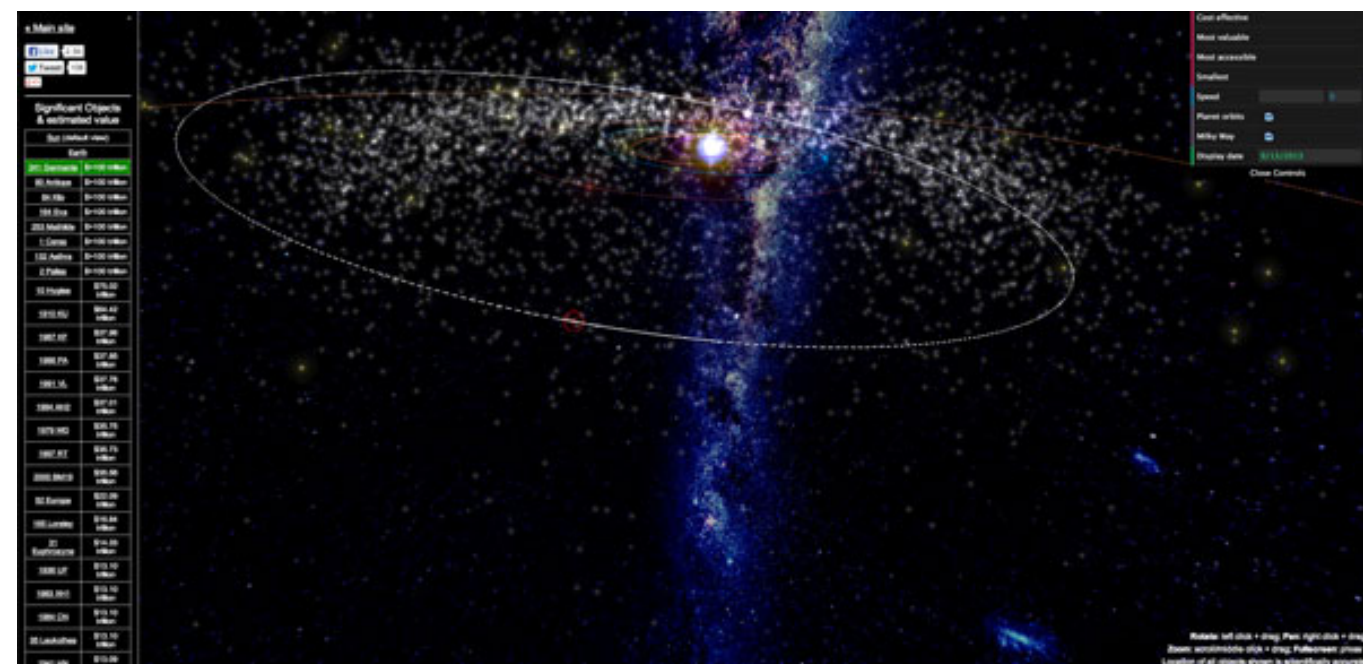


Image from Asterank, a company that specializes in maintaining “a scientific and economic database of over 600,000 asteroids,” of the orbit of 241 Germania, valued at around \$100 trillion in raw materials.

François Roche Gre(Y)en (a history of local operative criticism)

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... that seems to pretend to be a history of the stuttering position between Green and Grey, between chlorophyll addiction, the dream of an ideal biotope, re-primitivized, re-artificialized, in pursuit of the lost paradise, the lost Eden Park, a story for little boys and girls to put their fears to bed and ... the Grey, the deep Grey, which never appears in the visible spectrum ... (“*The greatest trick the devil ever played was convincing the world that he did not exist*,” said Baudelaire¹) ... an antagonism of stealth forces, an embedded demon: mixture of contradictory human desires emerging from the mud, from permanent, unpredictable, and irreducible conflicts ... factor of domination and servitude, destruction and emergences, which fireworks an unlimited source of arrogance and illusion, through which the notions of success and failure depend on a kind of absurd Pendulum² of life and death, which, as an Infinite unstable movement, caresses the boundaries of them both ... polymerizing ugliness and beauty, obstacles and possibilities, waste materials and efflorescence, threats and protection, technological phantasms and the revenge of nature into a knot, into a process of becoming, a never-ending movement ... the Grey – where we glide into this silky, strange sensation that scares you and caresses you ... that scares you and caresses you ...

Faced with the autistic, blind, deaf, and mute violence of our technological, industrial, mercantile, and human servo-mechanisms, we are at the crossroads where nature reacts ... with violence and without warning, in a faltering of the original chaos ... in mutiny against the organization of men ... Gaia seems to take revenge (Katrina, El Niño, Cyclone Jeanne, Tomas and Nargis, the Xynthia storm, Ewinari typhoon, Indonesian and Japanese earthquakes, collateral tsunamis all the way to Fukushima ... chain of devastating incertitude, unpredictable in spite of our seismographic sciences) ... the elements rage and the gods, so quick to pardon our folly, seem powerless to appease a rebellion armed with infernal force ...

Nature is not an ideological “green washing” for backyard politics, nor the millenarian, eschatologist dream of Eden Park, from which we have very fortunately escaped, freeing ourselves from gatherer-hedonist blindness to negotiate consciousness with the hostile dark forces that get stuck in the depths of the forest ...

But these forces have come out of their hiding places ... their biotopes, they are invading the spaces that Man thought he could take without giving anything in exchange, without transaction ... war has been declared ... nature’s revenge is not a bedtime story for innocent minds ... our bellicose enemy operates openly ...

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in the light of day ... ultimate arrogance ...

How can we reveal the conflict between strategies of “knowledge and domination” of the first and the monstrous and wildly beautiful destruction of the other ... as the field of an unpredictable battle, disconnected, cleared of all the greenish moralism jumble and its post-capitalism lure ... ? ... To help us feel this ambivalence, this permanent disequilibrium, where contingencies are the main factor in emergences, let us navigate in this history of “gre(Y)en”...



François Roche, *Aqua alta 2.0*, 2000. Bottle for Lagoon bar at Venice Biennale.

... From a physiological early simple dualism “shadow & light” in 1990 where Neuschwanstein³ Grotto is fictionally adjusted to *Playtime*⁴ mirror reflection, weakly connecting a cavernous, dark, humid, sensorially-primitive atmosphere with its schizophrenically antagonist and twin brother, crystalline, cold, luminous, dry, technologically-blind as the recognition of an impossible stuttered dialogue, to ... a “Growing up” for chlorophyll energy and entropy in 1993 which will collapse and strangle a fragile “chicken legs” house, wrapped and dominated masochistically by the danger of its own predictable death, if the maintenance is not ritualized by the owner as a permanent conflict against the structure’s destructive strength and his need to survive ... to a blur petrochemical “Filtration” in 1997, with 5000m² of plastic stripes floating in the trees, on the edge of a seasonal tidy wild river, carrying nitrate and insecticide plastic bag residues that the farmer abandoned on the bank of his field, waiting for this rising of the water as a depolluting natural service, in charge of erasing the trace of his chemical addiction, and paradoxically back to the visible spectrum when the river is low again,

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hanging from the branches ... the “Filtration” layer reveals through the concentration of the plastic wasted in the canopies an aesthetic countryside planning coming directly from its human managing ... to a traveling to the weird ... “aqua alta 1.0,” in 1998, sucking up the disgusting viscous over-polluted liquidity called the Venetian Lagoon, to use capillarity’s water forces of the contaminated to infiltrate, literally, the building emergences from these lagoon substances, to ... “aqua alta 2.0,” the Venetian bar in 2000 at the Architectural Biennale of Venice where “conventioners” could refresh themselves by drinking “in live” the lagoon soup, but depolluted through a military purification machine⁵ to test in the condition of the Biennale; the schizophrenia between green-washing rhetoric and repulsive digestive paranoia sprung from doubts regarding the reliability of the cleaning engine, that people promote as an efficient technology (for others) ... to “shearing,” in 2001, as a simple stealth private House, organizing a simulacrum of its own impermanence and apparent fragility, unfolding in the countryside, but using for the whole envelope the authorized petro-chemistry non-biodegradable fabric spread and disseminated in nature to preserve planted young trees from being destroyed by rabbits, in an agriculture industrial logic ... to “Dustyrelief,” in 2002, for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Bangkok, where the dust of the city and the residue of the traffic jam (carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide) dressed her skin and her biotope, as the recognition of public transportation failure in the “greynish” equatorial eroticism, where this special fog of specs and particles becomes the traces of hypertrophic human convulsing activity, as a second adaptive nature, through a bottom-up unpredictable un-mastering un-planning city aesthetic. Without delegating power to autocratic and aseptic technocratic experts at the place of the chaotic emergences of the multitudes, the aleatory rhizomes, the arborescent growth are at the same time a factor of her transformation and her operational mode. The non-hygienic intoxicating urban chaos is the sign of its human vitalism, as permanent vibration between *Eros* and *Thanatos* ... the invisible but breathable substances are bred, attracted by electrostatism machine to “skin” the hairy freak, exacerbating a schizo climate between indoor (white cube and labyrinth in an Euclidian geometry) and outdoor (dust relief on topologic geometry) ... and ... and in a second step collecting the particle substances, dropped down in the monsoon period, through drainage systems ... to create on the side the tea pavilion extension directly coming from the compacted particles brick produced “by” the failure and the

mechanisms alongside spreadsheets of kilo-to-dollar launch cost ratios and rare-metal market price projections, scripted for an audience of investors keen to back its plan: a gold rush at the vertical frontier. Launch technologies themselves cheapen further, China and India get in on the space game (kindling predictable resurgence of space defense talk in the countries with a more established foothold), and perhaps strangest of all, enthusiasm for the most technological of projects finds a way to creep into the enemy camp: diehard environmentalists start to opine that if we’re going to perforate these “planetary boundaries” as we clearly are (not to mention the threat of asteroids, supervolcanos, and other inestimable contingencies), another planet might be a good hedge of our bets.

A new sense of the proximity of the overhead vastness is the order of the day. All these developments are intriguing ones, backed by pretty robust arguments, and the fact that they’re not really in competition – they all more or less click together like Tetris blocks – strengthens the case of any and all considerably. But the motivations behind all these admittedly variegated projects aren’t things we didn’t hear in the last century: space for profit, the advance of science, entertainment dollars, national pride, collective defense, and so on. It’s an open question whether we can conceive of some genuinely new ideas about how all this might transpire differently, how our conceptions of these massive sociotechnical projects might shift, how space might force us to rethink the terrestrial mundane rather than being an epic stage set onto which earthbound concerns can be exported intact. We can begin to sketch one such alternative position by rewinding history to the work of one of the prime movers behind twentieth-century extraterrestrial ambitions, who worked to articulate the case for getting off-planet well before even fixed-wing flight. We’re not looking to resurrect an original, purified take on what all this might mean. We’re simply for a handy place to restart.

Moscow, the late 1880s: as he’s done for decades now, Nikolai Fedorov spends his evenings writing the essays that will eventually be gathered together as *The Philosophy of the Common Task*. Fedorov was born the illegitimate son of a minor prince, and by trade he is a librarian; before taking to the stacks, he was a schoolteacher. He is reputed by those few who know him to be kindly if a little stern, and remarkably ascetic: he eats little, rarely and nothing sweet; he doesn’t even wear a coat in winter. In all, he cuts an unlikely father figure for the Space Race. But it’s in *The Common Task* that we find the first systematic program and

rationale for permanent human settlement off-world, and a direct line can be drawn between it and the development of extraplanetary travel some decades later.

The Common Task is an unforgiving work, not because its prose is inaccessible – quite the reverse – but because of its uncompromising single-mindedness of purpose. As historian George Young puts it, Fedorov was “a thinker with one idea,” but for all that “his idea was extremely complex and comprehensive.”¹ This idea was the “common task” the book’s title, the articulation of a plan for the entire human race, a project that can readily be sloganized as *storm the heavens* and *conquer death*.

Let’s begin with the second point first, which is in some sense the more fundamental. Fedorov understood the single common nemesis of all human beings to be death, and that getting rid of it could serve as a common rallying point around which all human beings could agree. Death in the literal sense, of course – death as experienced (if that’s really the appropriate word) by individuals; but also as exhibited in the disappearance of cultures and the downfall of civilizations, and indeed more generally still: death as the operation of the forces of “blind nature” against which organic life was pitched as a struggle in and against darkness. Nature shows up as the force of *necessity*, one that confines and eventually overwhelms human beings (as all life). It is characterized by total indifference; indeed, it is the acme of such. Devoid of consciousness, it does not “know best,” nor is it “cruel”; if it inadvertently plays the role of tutor, it is in how to stave it off awhile, no more than that.

Fedorov has no time for proclamations that human beings must “love Nature.” This was, to him, the characteristic indulgence of those he contemptuously described as “the learned” – an elite who could spend their time singing Nature’s praises, because their everyday lives were substantially insulated from it, by precisely the kinds of technology – from agriculture to medicine – that act to counter the “natural.” Out in the field – literally as well as figuratively – no such niceties prevail. This does not mean Fedorov promoted a project of “overcoming” nature, in the sense of “destroying” or even “dominating” it. He is aware that the same processes that lay waste to life are deeply implicated in life itself, even if – in the later words of a Fedorov acolyte, the economist Sergei Bulgakov – “life seems a sort of accident, an oversight or indulgence on the part of death.”² His mission is instead to convert or transform the natural, to *bring reason* to it, carving out a larger and more hospitable environment for life.

This is a deeply technological project, an

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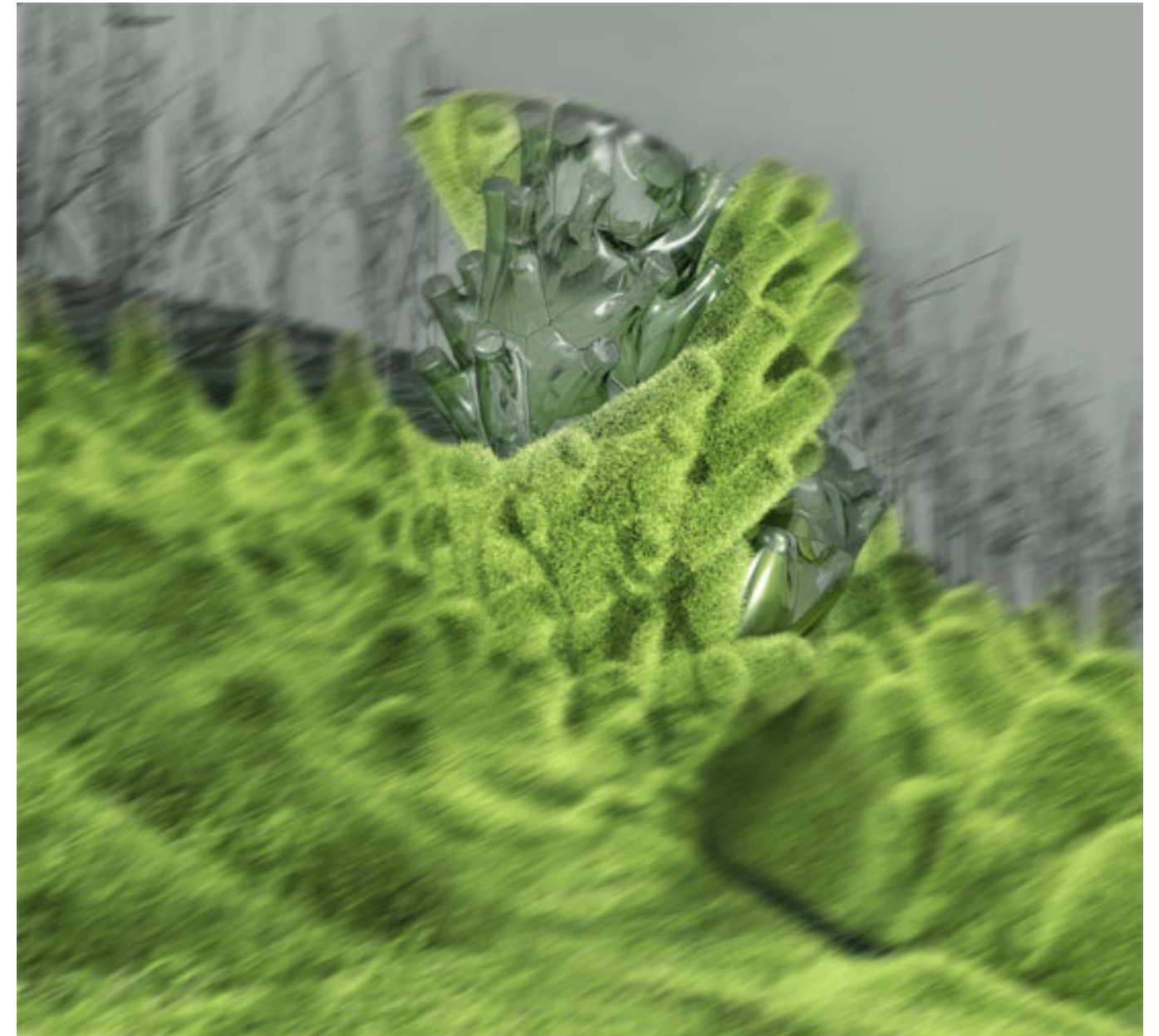
e-flux journal #46 — June 2013 Benedict Singleton
Maximum Jailbreak

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Space Shuttle Columbia debris in a hangar at Kennedy Space Centre, FL, 2003. Copyright: NASA/KSC.

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François Roche, *Symbiosis Hood*, 2010, Korea. Courtesy of the author.

beauty of the city ... to the ...
“mosquitosbottleneck” scenario, in Trinidad, 2002, trying to negotiate with the infestation of the Nile Virus carried by mosquitos, the recognition of this disease as an objective paranoia triggering strategies for safety, in a weekend residential house. The fragile net, through a Klein bottle apparatus, preserves, protects, but also disjoins the living of the first in resonance with the death of the other. And the sound of their agony, buzzing in the double trapped membrane, becomes the proof of the efficiency of the system, preserving human against nature, against its offensive biotope, protected and surrounded by the theatre of its own barbarity ... to the buffalo Machismo no-tech Machinism in “HybridMuscle,” in 2003, Thailand, as a local mammal muscling power station, lifting with gears of a two-ton steel counterweight, transformed in a battery house, transformed first into an electricity plug and connections and secondly in pneumatic rubber muscles movement of leaves in elastomer membrane to wind the suffocating hot sweaty climate ... as a endogeneous-exogeneous storytelling ... to the “greengorgon,” in 2005, as phasmid morphologies, embedded in a wood, which feed the confusion between artificial and domesticated nature ... where all the outdoor surfaces are dedicated to vertical wet swamp recycling the inert grey water ... as a purification plan infrastructure, rejecting only clean liquidities in the Léman Lake ... to the “Mipi,” in 2006, a PI Bar in the temple of cognitive science, the MIT-Cambridge campus, as an extension of the Media Lab, to experiment through urine therapy absorption, the immunotherapy of the individual human production, including a schizoid balance between disgusting and healthy effect ... to a stochastic machine that vitrifies the city, in “Olzweg,” 2006, starting the contamination from a radical architecture museum in the pursuit of Frederick Kiesler endlessnesslessness. This smearing is done through the industrial glass recycling (mainly French wines bottles), swallowed and vomited through a process of staggering, scattering, and stacking by a twelve-meter-high machine. The random aggregation is a part of this unpredictable transformation, as a fuzzy logic of the vanishing point. The machine works to extend the museum and collect “voluntary prisoners” wrapped in the permanent entropy of the graft, testing the glass maze through its multiple uncertain trajectories, to loose themselves and rediscover this heterotopian, non-panoptical sensation of their youngness, using if necessary PDA on RFID to rediscover their positioning ... the opposite of an architecture that petrifies, historicizes,

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panopticalizes ... to the “waterflux,” in 2007, for a scenario scooping out hollows in a full wood volume by a five-axes drill machine with 1000 trees (2000m³) coming directly from the maintenance of the forest around the location of extracting-manufacturing-transformation, as a anthroposophic logic, where technologies and machine are territorialized from the site, endemic to a situation and its mutation, reactivating accessorially local forest economy ... to the “gardenofearthlydelights,” in 2008, a toxic garden in a new green house in Croatia, on the site of an old Middle Ages Apotiker Franciscan monk medical plantation, protected behind a restricted area, but able to be tasted and tested through a distillation de-concentration machinism process, and bar ... only by voluntary desire, in a similar way to the Japanese “Fugu” physiological and psychological effects ... with an “at your own risk” protocol, and where ecosophy is considered as a global interaction, porous to the human body, as a Gaia⁶ exchange, a chain of interaction and dependences ... articulating life and death and its knitting paranoia ... to “Heshotmedown,” in 2008, for a tracked biomass machine penetrating into the (De)Militarized Zone, the DMZ, between North and South Korea, collecting the rotten substances, the superficial coating of the forest in decomposition, and bringing back this material to plug all the external surfaces of the ballistic-like building, for a natural eco-insulation, through the fermentation of the grass and the heat coming from its chemical transformation. Full of land mines, the DMZ is a restricted zone, where North and South never stop playing the Cold War. The machine collects the ingredients of this pathological period and recycles them for productive use, from a highly dangerous no-man’s land abandoned since the end of the war (more than half a century ago), which come back to its natural wildness, with the reappearing of elves, wizards, witches, and harpies, and some new vegetal species. Legends and fairy tales are transported out of the deepness of the forest, as in a *Stalker*⁷ experiment to touch the unknown ... to “I’mlostinParis,” in 2008, as a laboratory for bacterial culture, called the “Rhizobium” agent, cultivated in 200 beakers, for its potential to increase nitrogen percentages without the chemical manure of the substrate of each plant, after the re-injection of this substance into the individual nutritional aeroponic system ... for a *Rear Window*⁸ minimum distance to the conservatism and “petite bourgeois” nature of a Parisian neighborhood, the opposite view on a closed courtyard ... this Devil’s Rock⁹ emergence is constituted by 2000 ferns from the Devonian period, technologically domesticated to survive

Benedict Singleton Maximum Jailbreak

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The greatest escape of them all is about to blow the future apart.

– *Escape from New York* (John Carpenter, 1981), original theatrical movie trailer

Space travel produced some of the defining images of the twentieth century. Sputnik, Apollo, the spacesuit, the NASA logo and the toy-like outline of the space shuttle, liftoffs with all their countdown drama, and the peaceful image of the earth like a mica fleck against coal black; the weird underwater quality of footage shot in low gravity, a motionless flag on the Moon. These images were capable of captivating a global audience, an effect enhanced by the setup of the so-called Space Race as a kind of decades-long international sports day. But then it seemed to stall. The workaday job of going to low earth orbit carried on, of course, in the uncharismatic shape of comsat maintenance and low-key experiments on the International Space Station, but the kinds of images capable of casting space travel as the definitive *project of our age* in the popular imagination seemed to run out of steam; the last image capable of eliciting fascination was maybe the crumbling arch of smoke hung over Cape Canaveral in the wake of the disappeared Challenger, which understandably nixed enthusiasm for the enterprise as a whole. (Not to mention the onerous investigations into the triangulation of tax dollars to expected gains to acceptable risk that followed it.)

Now, though, it seems that the action just went underground for a while, a brief retreat to regroup and reassess. The military-industrial complex that spawned these images has converted into something better described as a security-entertainment matrix, and grand strategy – “a space program” – has been swapped out for diverse tactics. The Mars rover Curiosity attracts droves of followers to its Twitter feed (as of May Day, 2013: 1,338,794), where they can pick up the latest alien landscape pics and chirpy infobites. Billionaire Denis Tito recently announced plan to send a middle-aged couple on a long lover’s jaunt into orbit around Mars, a sitcom premise pitched by an alcoholic screenwriter, eyes gleaming like his last dime. Mars One goes further, beginning open auditions for the one-way reality TV show trip to the planet it’s named after.

Showing slightly less stocking-top to the public eye, companies like Virgin Galactic focus their efforts on courting the insanely wealthy with a voyage-of-a-lifetime space tourist brochure, and Planetary Resources reveal diagrams of robotic asteroid capture

1
Ellen Willis, *Beginning To See The Light: Sex, Hope and Rock-and-Roll* (Hannover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), 158.

2
Ibid., xvi.

3
Ibid.

4
Ibid.

5
Ibid., 150.

6
“On the left, family chauvinism often takes the form of nostalgic declarations that the family, with its admitted faults, has been vitiated by modern capitalism, which is much worse (at least the family is based on personal relations rather than soulless cash, etc., etc.)” Ibid., 152.

7
Ibid., 161.

8
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1983), 260.

9
Ibid., 150.

10
Ibid., 239–40

11
See “Meltdown,” in Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011).

12
The left-wing temptation to oppose the family to capital is nicely circumvented by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s claim that the family, alongside the nation and the corporation, is a corrupted form of the commons. “For many people, in fact, the family is the principal if not exclusive site of collective social experience, cooperative labor arrangements, caring, and intimacy. It stands on the foundation of the common but at the same time corrupts it by imposing a series of hierarchies, restrictions, exclusions, and distortions.” Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009), 160.

13
Wendy Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholy,” *Boundary 2* 26:3 (1999): 19–27.

14
Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 339.

15
Hardt, “The Common in Communism,” in eds. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek, *The*

Idea of Communism (New York: Verso, 2010), 141.

16
Michel Foucault, *Remarks On Marx* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 121.

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e-flux journal #46 — june 2013 Mark Fisher
“A social and psychic revolution of almost inconceivable magnitude”: Popular Culture’s Interrupted Accelerationist Dreams

in the actual “regressive monarchic French period” ... to a paranoid system, the “TbWnD” (*the building which never dies*), in 2011, an alert detection or a marker of our past/future symptoms: a Zumtobel laboratory on “dark adaptation” and on solar radiation intensity detection, covered by phosphorescent components (“*Isobiot@opic*” *oxide pigment made from raw uranium*) working as a UV sensor and detector to indicate and analyze the intensity of the UV rays that touched the area by day (including on humans and all other species). 5000 glass components reveal the depletion of the ozone concentration in the stratosphere and simultaneously the origin of this phenomenon, the sun’s radiation. This lab articulates the risk coming from ozone weakness (industrial pollution / CO2) combined with the paranoia coming from the last century’s scientific ignorance or criminality, developed by the exploitation of the characteristic of some natural element¹⁰ ... to several escaping, coming first through a utopian protocol “an architecture des ‘humeurs,’” in 2011, with a self-organized urbanism conditioned by a bottom-up system in which the multitudes¹¹ are able to drive the entropy of their own system of construction, their own system of “vivre ensemble.” Based on the potential offered by contemporary bioscience, the rereading of human corporalities in terms of physiology and chemical balance to make palpable and perceptible the emotional transactions of the “animal body,” the headless body, the body’s chemistry, and information about individuals’ adaptation, sympathy, empathy, and conflict, when confronted with a particular situation and environment ... to adaptations to the “*malentendus*”¹² of this result, to an endless process of construction through “*machinism*” un-determinism and unpredictable behavior with the development of a secretive and weaving machine that can generate a vertical structure by means of extrusion and sintering (full-size 3D printing) using a hybrid raw material (a bio-plastic-cement) that chemically agglomerates to physically constitute the computational trajectories. This structural calligraphy works like a machinist stereotomy comprised of successive geometrics according to a strategy of permanent production of anomalies ... with no standardization, no repetition, except for the procedures and protocols, at the base of this technoid slum’s emergence ... and ... last but not least, the last experiment, the “hypnosisroom,” in 2006 (Paris) and 2012 (Japan) ... using a hypnosis session for a star-gate effect, in the pursuit of the Somnambulist feminine political movement, from the first half of the nineteenth century, using hypnosis (called “magnetism” at the time) in an attempt to

develop spaces of freedom, an egalitarian, un-racial, un-sexist social contract, that could not be perceived and explored without travelling through this layer ... at the opposite end of the impossibility (or difficulty) of modifying the mechanisms of the real, tangible, political state of the world ... this pre-feminist movement sought, on the contrary, to create this suggestive, immersive, and distanced layer of another social contract ... Although demonized and treated as charlatanism, all of pre-modern reformist thought drew on this movement ... and ...

End of the first chapter ...

x

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e-flux journal #46 — june 2013 Francois Roche
Gre(Y)en (a history of local operative criticism)

François Roche is Head of research at the laboratory New-territories; co-founder and director of R&S(e)n, Studio of architectural practices, Paris, as well as co-founder of [elf/bat/c], Institute for Contingent Scenario, Bangkok; Guest Research professor in master class at Columbia-Gsapp, New-York. Through different structures, Roche's architectural works and protocols seek to articulate the real and/or fictional, and the geographic situations and narrative structures that can transform them. For more info see →

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e-flux journal #46 — June 2013 — François Roche
Gre(Y)en (a history of local operative criticism)

- 1
"Mes chers frères, n'oubliez jamais, quand vous entendrez vanter le progrès des lumières, que la plus belle des ruses du diable est de vous persuader qu'il n'existe pas," *Le Spleen de Paris*, Baudelaire, 1858.
- 2
Edgar Allen Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" as the first scenario of Bachelor Machines.
- 3
Neuschwanstein Castle and its artificial romantic grotto were commissioned by Ludwig II of Bavaria as a retreat and a homage to Richard Wagner.
- 4
Playtime (1967) is a movie by Jacques Tati that portrays a glass-cold-deterritorialized futurist urbanism.
- 5
A machine using both ozone and ceramic system to create drinkable water, without the right from Italian authorities to call it "Natural Venice Water."
- 6
The Gaia hypothesis is a bio-geo-chemical scientific theory. It states that the earth, including the biosphere, is a dynamic physiological system that has operated in harmony with life for three billion years.
- 7
Stalker (1979) is a movie by Andrei Tarkovski. It takes place in a kind of after-war interzone where a protocol or ritual has to be strictly followed to avoid waking up the forces nobody knows ...
- 8
A 1954 film by Alfred Hitchcock about voyeurism, relations within a neighborhood, phantasms, and realities ...
- 9
Devil's Rock is in the United States. It was used by Steven Spielberg as the alien meeting point in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). In the movie, Richard Dreyfus reproduced Devil's Rock in his own livingroom by destroying, in a lucid rage, a small decorative neighborhood garden in order to get enough material, soil, plants, and mud to build it.
- 10
From the discovery of the properties of radon by Pierre and Marie Curie, to the plutonium after-effects of the Little Boy atomic bomb.
- 11
In Spinoza and Negri's senses.
- 12
A French word that navigates between "mishearing" and "misunderstanding."

"monstrous, violent, and traumatic ... revolutionary process of the abolition of identity,"¹⁴ the cultural resources for these kind of dismantlings of the self are now somewhat denuded. Michael Hardt has argued that "the positive content of communism, which corresponds to the abolition of private property, is the autonomous production of humanity – a new seeing, a new hearing, a new thinking, a new loving."¹⁵ The kind of reconstruction of subjectivity and of cognitive categories that post-capitalism will entail is an aesthetic project as much as something that can be delivered by any kind of parliamentary and statist agent alone. Hardt refers to Foucault's discussion of Marx's phrase "man produces man." The program that Foucault outlines in his gloss on this phrase is one that culture must recover if there is to be any hope of achieving the "social and psychic revolution of almost inconceivable magnitude" which popular culture once dreamt of:

The problem is not to recover our "lost" identity, to free our imprisoned nature, our deepest truth; but instead, the problem is to move towards something radically Other. The center, then, seems still to be found in Marx's phrase: man produces man ... For me, what must be produced is not man identical to himself, exactly as nature would have designed him or according to his essence; on the contrary, we must produce something that doesn't yet exist and about which we cannot know how and what it will be.¹⁶

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e-flux journal #46 — June 2013 — Mark Fisher
"A social and psychic revolution of almost inconceivable magnitude": Popular Culture's Interrupted Accelerationist Dreams

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the process,” as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven’t seen anything yet.¹⁰

The passage is teasingly enigmatic – what do Deleuze and Guattari mean by associating “the movement of the market” with “decoding and deterritorialization”? Unfortunately, they do not elaborate, which has made it is easy for orthodox Marxists to situate this passage as a classic example of how ’68 led to neoliberal hegemony – one more left-wing capitulation to the logic of the new Right. This reading has been facilitated by the take-up of this passage in the 1990s for explicitly anti-Marxist ends by Nick Land.¹¹ But what if we read this section of *Anti-Oedipus* not as a recanting of Marxism, but as a new model for what Marxism could be? Is it possible that what Deleuze and Guattari were outlining here was the kind of politics that Ellen Willis was calling for: a politics that was hostile to capital, but alive to desire; a politics that rejected all forms of the old world in favor of a “new earth”; a politics, that is, which demanded “a social and psychic revolution of almost inconceivable magnitude”?

One point of convergence between Willis and Deleuze and Guattari was their shared belief that the family was at the heart of the politics of reaction. For Deleuze and Guattari, it is perhaps the family, more than any other institution, that is the principal agency of capitalist reterritorialization: the family as a transcendental structure (“mummy-daddy-me”) provisionally secures identity amidst and against capital’s deliquescent tendencies, its propensity to melt down all preexisting certainties. It’s for just this reason, no doubt, that some leftists reach for the family as an antidote to, and escape from, capitalist meltdown – but this is to miss the way that capitalism relies upon the reterritorializing function of the family.¹²

It’s no accident that Margaret Thatcher’s infamous claim that “there is no such thing as society, only individuals” had to be supplemented by “... and their families.” It is also significant that in Deleuze and Guattari, just as in other anti-psychiatric theorists such as R. D. Laing and David Cooper, the attack on the family was twinned with an attack on dominant forms of psychiatry and psychotherapy. Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of psychoanalysis is based on the way that it cuts off the individual from the wider social field, privatizing the origins of distress into the Oedipal “theatre” of family relations. They argue that psychoanalysis, rather than analyzing the way that capitalism performs this psychic privatization, merely repeats it. It’s notable, too, that anti-psychiatric struggles have receded just as surely as have struggles over the

family: in order for the new Right’s reality system to be naturalized, it was necessary for these struggles, inextricable from the counterculture, to be not only defeated but effectively disappeared.

It’s worth pausing here to reflect on how far the Left is from confidently advocating the kind of revolution for which Deleuze and Guattari and Ellen Willis had hoped. Wendy Brown’s analysis of “left melancholy” at the end of the 1990s still painfully (and embarrassingly) captures the libidinal and ideological impasses in which the Left too often finds itself caught. Brown describes what is in effect an anti-acclerationist Left: a Left which, lacking any forward momentum or guiding vision of its own, is reduced to incompetently defending the relics of older compromise formations (social democracy, the New Deal) or deriving a tepid jouissance from its very failure to overcome capitalism. This is a Left which, very far from being on the side of the unimaginable and the unprecedented, takes refuge in the familiar and the traditional. “What emerges,” Brown writes,

is a Left that operates without either a deep and radical critique of the status quo or a compelling alternative to the existing order of things. But perhaps even more troubling, it is a Left that has become more attached to its impossibility than to its potential fruitfulness, a Left that is most at home dwelling not in hopefulness but in its own marginality and failure, a Left that is thus caught in a structure of melancholic attachment to a certain strain of its own dead past, whose spirit is ghostly, whose structure of desire is backward looking and punishing.¹³

It was just this leftist tendency towards conservatism, retrenchment, and nostalgia that allowed Nick Land to bait the ’90s Left with *Anti-Oedipus*, arguing that capital’s “creative destruction” was far more revolutionary than anything the Left was now capable of projecting.

This persistent melancholy has no doubt contributed to the Left’s failure to seize the initiative after the financial crisis of 2008. The crisis and its aftermath have so far vindicated Deleuze and Guattari’s view that “social machines make a habit of feeding on ... the crises they provoke.” The continuing dominance of capital might have as much to do with the failure of popular culture to generate new dreamings as it has to do with the inertial quality of official political positions and strategies. Where the leading edge popular culture of the twentieth century allowed all kinds of experimental rehearsals of what Hardt and Negri call the

Franco Berardi Bifo Accelerationism Questioned from the Point of View of the Body

Is acceleration a condition for a final collapse of power?

Acceleration is the essential feature of capitalist growth: productivity increase implies an intensification in the rhythm of production and exploitation. The accelerationist hypothesis, nevertheless, points out the contradictory implications of the process of intensification, emphasizing in particular the instability that acceleration brings into the capitalist system. Contra this hypothesis, however, my answer to the question of whether acceleration marks a final collapse of power is quite simply: no. Because the power of capital is not based on stability. Naomi Klein has explained capitalism’s ability to profit from catastrophe. Furthermore, capitalist power, in the age of complexity, is not based on slow, rational, conscious decisions, but on embedded automatisms which do not move at the speed of the human brain. Rather, they move at the speed of the catastrophic process itself.

But the accelerationist hypothesis can be read from a different – more interesting – angle, as a particular version of the radical immanence in the philosophical dimension of contemporary Spinozian communist thought.

I can refer to Hardt and Negri’s books. Here, the transition beyond the sphere of capitalist domination is conceived in terms of a full deployment of the tendencies implied in the present forms of production and life. Acceleration in this framework can be viewed as the full implementation of those tendencies that lead to the deployment of the inner potencies contained in the present form of capitalism.

In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri reject the deceptive pretense of an anti-globalist return to national sovereignty, and remark on the analogy between the globalizing empire of post-national politics and the potency of the internet, which can be viewed as the realization of the potency of the general intellect.¹

We can also find this rejection of any nostalgia for the slowness of a pre-capitalist past in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. In *Anti-Oedipus*, the rejection assumes the schizoid perspective: the schizoid is the accelerating pace of the Unconscious. Schizophrenia is all about speed: the speed of the surrounding universe in relation to the speed of mental interpretation. Yet there is no dimension of mental normalcy to restore, and in *Anti-Oedipus*, schizophrenia is both the metaphor of capitalism and the methodology of revolutionary action:

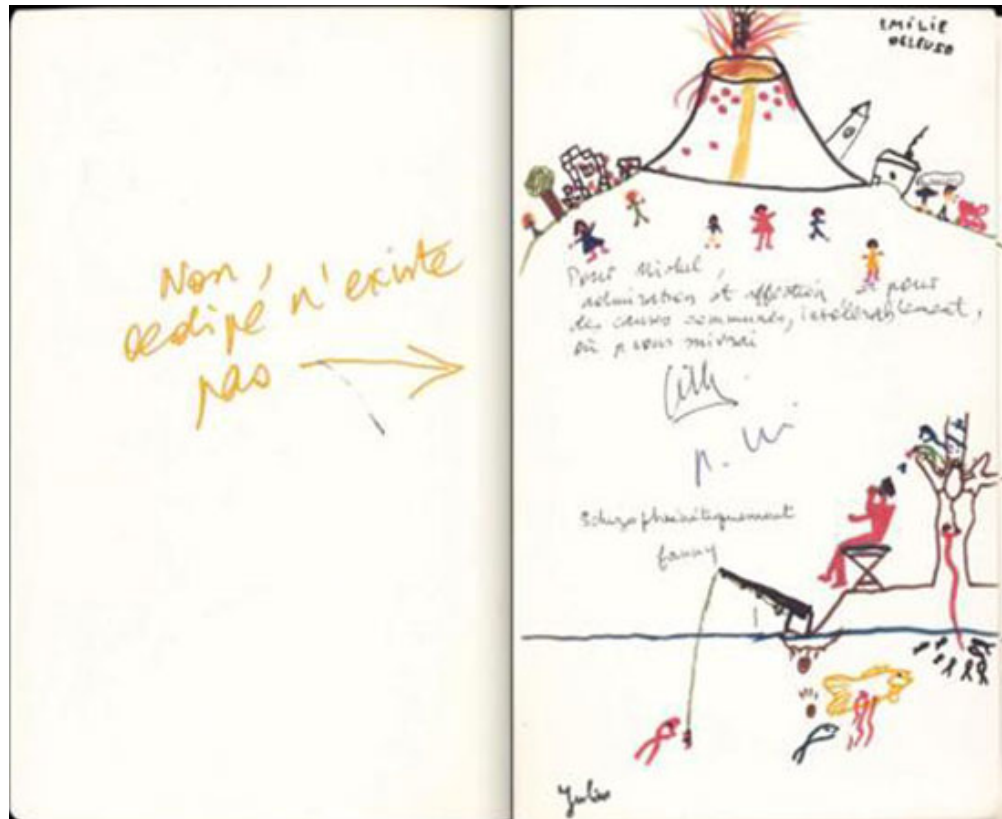
But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? – To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist “economic solution”? Or might it be

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Foucault's copy of *Anti-Oedipus* offered by Deleuze with drawings by his two children. Deleuze points to the drawings and notes in yellow "Oedipus does not exist."

decoding – or allowing the decoding of – the fluent quantities of their capital and their populations. They are torn in two directions: archaism and futurism, neoarchaism and ex-futurism, paranoia and schizophrenia.⁸

This description uncannily captures the way that capitalist culture has developed since the 1970s, with amoral neoliberal deregulation pursuing a project to desacralize and commodify without limits, supplemented by an explicitly moralizing neoconservatism which seeks to revive and shore up older traditions and institutions. On the level of propositional content, these futurisms and neoarchaisms contradict one another, but so what?

The death of a social machine has never been heralded by a disharmony or a dysfunction; on the contrary, social machines make a habit of feeding on the contradictions they give rise to, on the crises they provoke, on the anxieties they engender, and on the infernal operations they regenerate. Capitalism has learned this, and has ceased doubting itself, while even socialists have abandoned belief in

the possibility of capitalism's natural death by attrition. No one has ever died from contradictions.⁹

If capitalism is *defined* as the tension between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, then it follows that one way (perhaps the only way) of surpassing capitalism would be to remove the reterritorializing shock absorbers. Hence the notorious passage in *Anti-Oedipus*, which might serve as the epigraph for accelerationism:

So what is the solution? Which is the revolutionary path? ... But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? – To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist "economic solution"? Or might it be to go in the 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

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Totem built by the student group known as *Indiani Metropolitani*, Italy, 1977.



Margret Thatcher supporting pro-market campaigners in Parliament Square, on the eve of polling for the common market referendum, 1975. Photo: A/P.

power: it was also about the return – at the level of ideology, if not necessarily of empirical fact – of social and cultural institutions that it had seemed possible to eliminate in the 1960s.

In her 1979 essay, Willis insists that the return of familism was central to the rise of the new Right, which was just about to be confirmed in grand style with the election of Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK. “If there is one cultural trend that has defined the seventies,” Willis wrote, “it is the aggressive resurgence of family chauvinism.”⁵ For Willis, perhaps the most disturbing signs of this new conservatism was the embrace of the family by elements of the Left,⁶ a trend reinforced by the tendency for former adherents of the counterculture (including herself) to (re)turn to the family out of mixture of exhaustion and defeatism. “I’ve fought, I’ve paid my dues, I’m tired of being marginal. I want in!”⁷ Impatience – the desire for a sudden, total, and irrevocable change, for the end of the family within a generation – gave way to a bitter resignation when that (inevitably) failed to happen.

Here we can turn to the vexed question of accelerationism. I want to situate accelerationism not as some heretical form of Marxism, but as an attempt to converge with, intensify, and politicize the most challenging and exploratory dimensions of popular culture. Willis’s desire for “a social and psychic revolution of almost inconceivable magnitude” and her “quarrel with the left” over desire and freedom can provide a different way into thinking what is at stake in this much misunderstood concept. A certain, perhaps now dominant, take on accelerationism has it that the position amounts to a cheerleading for the intensification of any capitalist process whatsoever, particularly the “worst,” in the hope that this will bring the system to a point of terminal crisis. (One example of this would be the idea that voting for Reagan and Thatcher in the ‘80s was the most effective revolutionary strategy, since their policies would supposedly lead to insurrection). This formulation, however, is question-begging in that it assumes what accelerationism rejects – the idea that everything produced “under” capitalism fully belongs to capitalism. By contrast, accelerationism maintains that there are desires and processes which capitalism gives rise to and feeds upon, but which it cannot contain; and it is the acceleration of *these* processes that will push capitalism beyond its limits. Accelerationism is also the conviction that the world desired by the Left is *post-capitalist* – that there is no possibility of a return to a pre-capitalist world and that there is no serious desire to return to such a world, even if we could.



Ellen Willis reading "No More Fun and Games," a *Journal of Female Liberation*. Courtesy of the Ellen Willis' family.

The accelerationist gambit depends on a certain understanding of capitalism, best articulated by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (a text which, not coincidentally, emerged in the wake of the counterculture). In *Anti-Oedipus*'s famous formulation, capitalism is defined by its tendency to decode/deterritorialize at the same time as it recodes/reterritorializes. On the one hand, capitalism dismantles all existing social and cultural structures, norms, and models of the sacred; on the other, it revives any number of apparently atavistic formations (tribal identities, religions, dynastic power ...):

The social axiomatic of modern societies is caught between two poles, and is constantly oscillating from one pole to the other ... [T]hese societies are caught between the Urstaat that they would like to resuscitate as an overcoding and reterritorializing unity, and the unfettered flows that carry them toward an absolute threshold. They recode with all their might, with world-wide dictatorship, local dictators, and an all-powerful police, while

to go in the 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 de-territorialized 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,” as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet.²

A popular '68 slogan did say: “*Cours camarade, le vieux monde est derrière toi!* – Run comrade, the old world is behind you!” But the evolution of Deleuze and Guattari's thought shows a displacement of this point of view: in the last chapter of *What is Philosophy?*, a book they wrote twenty years after *Anti-Oedipus*, we read the following:

We require just a little order to protect us from chaos. Nothing is more distressing than a thought that escapes itself, than ideas that fly off, that disappear hardly formed, already eroded by forgetfulness or precipitated into others that we no longer master.³

What happened between the two books? Is it that the authors aged, their bodies weakening and their brains becoming slower? Maybe, but this isn't where the answer lies. The answer lies in the passage from 1972 to 1992, the two decades separating the publication of *Anti-Oedipus* from the publication of *What is Philosophy?*. During this period, economic globalization and the Info-tech revolution intensified the effects of acceleration on the desiring body.

The final chapter of *What is Philosophy?* concerns the crucial relation between chaos and the brain, and this is the best point of view from which to understand the effects of the accelerating machine on social subjectivity.

The reciprocal implication of desire and capitalist development can be properly understood through the concept of schizo-deterritorialization. But when it comes to the process of the recomposition of subjectivity and the formation of social solidarity, acceleration implies the submission of the Unconscious to the globalized machine. If we investigate acceleration from the point of view of sensibility and the desiring body, we see that chaos is the painful perception of speed, and acceleration is the chaotic factor leading to the spasm that Guattari speaks about in *Chaosmosis*.

Acceleration is one of the features of

capitalist subjugation. The Unconscious is submitted to the ever increasing pace of the Infosphere, and this form of subsumption is painful – it generates panic before finally destroying any possible form of autonomous subjectivation.

Immanence/Possibility

The dialectical (eschatological) vision of communism as the final realization of a superior form of society following the abolition of capitalism is the political-totalitarian translation of the Hegelian utopia of *Aufhebung*.

A materialist critique of capitalism is based on the notion that there is no transcendent dimension, and that the historical process has nothing to do with the implementation of an Ideal. The possibilities of the future are contained in the present composition of society. The possibility of a new social form is incorporated in the social relations, the technical potency, and the cultural forms that capitalism has developed. There is no outside.

We may call this conception – opposed as it is to the idealistic vision of Hegelian dialectics, which was in turn adopted by Marxist-Leninist ideology – “immanentism.” It marks the difference between, on the one hand, the post-Hegelian brand of Critical Thought that flourished in Italian Workerism of the '60s and '70s, and on the other hand, French poststructuralism.

Not surprisingly, this kind of radical materialism comes with a special celebration of Spinoza. Both Deleuze and Negri, in fact, have emphasized Spinoza's rejection of transcendentality: God is here, God is everywhere, God is Nature. We just need to see His presence, and to act in a way that allows His infinite potency to emerge.

The radical materialist thinking that illuminated the path of the *autonomia* movement in the last decades of the twentieth century is essentially the assertion of the immanent force contained in the present social composition, and which needs to be disentangled in order to deploy the potentiality of the general intellect beyond the limits of capitalism. This force is not hidden in the mind of a distinct God, nor in the ideas of philosophers. It is hidden inside the present form of social production. No external force or external project can propel the process of transformation which leads to a new form of social organization, because there is no exteriority. The permanent conflict and cooperation between work and capital is the sphere where the process of deployment happens. This is a common point in Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizomatics and in the multitudinous Spinozism of Hardt and Negri.

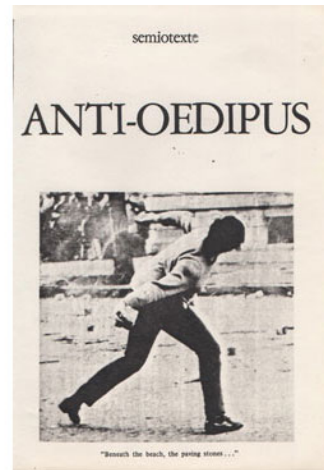
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Not surprisingly, the reference to Marx's "Fragment on Machines" is crucial to this point of view. In that text, Marx asserts the possibility that communism is contained in the folds of the capitalist present, as a tendency embedded in the technological development of the current organization of work and knowledge. Everything is already here: the potency of the general intellect, the constant intensification of productivity, the tendency towards the emancipation of time from labor.

The tendency implied in the technological organization of capitalism leads to a new concatenation of knowledge and machines. This immanent conception of communism has something to do with the accelerationist hypothesis, but the philosophical danger that I see in such an immanentist stance consists in mistaking the deployment of potentiality embedded in the present composition of work and technology for a necessity.



Cover of semiotext(e)'s magazine with protester and inverted May '68 slogan.

The Accelerationist Hypothesis

The accelerationist hypothesis is based on two main points: the first is the assumption that accelerating production cycles make capitalism unstable; the second is the assumption that the potentialities contained in the capitalist form are necessarily going to deploy themselves.

The first assumption is belied by the experience of our time: capitalism is resilient because it does not need rational government, only automatic governance, and because it has no desiring body, being an abstract system of automatism. Governance is exactly this: the replacement of rational government with the mere concatenation of techno-linguistic automatism. Furthermore, acceleration is destroying social subjectivity, as the latter is based on the rhythm of bodily desire, which

cannot be accelerated beyond the point of spasm.

The second assumption totally underestimates the obstacles and limitations that hinder and pervert the process of subjectivation. The immanence of the liberatory form (the immanence of communism if you want, or the immanence of the autonomous deployment of the general intellect) implies the possibility of this deployment, but does not imply the necessity of it. Far from being a methodology of liberation, rhizomatics should be viewed as a methodology of the permanent deterritorialization of global financial capitalism. The potency of the general intellect embodied in networked production is subjected to the power of the financial matrix.

The rhizomatic theory is a methodology for the description of capitalist deterritorialization and an attempt to redefine the ground of deterritorialized subjectivation. But it is not (it cannot be) a theory of autonomy. At many points in their work, Hardt and Negri seem to equivocate between the two: they actually promote the expectation that the social potency of the common – the general intellect – is intrinsically ordained to fully deploy itself, and capitalism is intrinsically ordained to culminate in communism. But they do not consider the possibility of a stoppage in the process of deployment, of an entanglement blocking the possible.

Their radical materialism implies the immanent nature of the possibility, but this immanence of the possibility does not equal a logical necessity. Nor does it imply the unstoppable deployment of the richness implied in the present. This possibility, indeed, can be hindered and diverted by the cultural and psychological forms of subjective existence.

The accelerationist stance, in my opinion, is an extreme manifestation of the immanentist conception. Paradoxically, it also seems to be a particular interpretation of the Baudrillardian assertion that "the only strategy now is a catastrophic strategy." The train of hypercapitalism cannot be stopped, it is going faster and faster, and we can no longer run at the same pace. The only strategy, therefore, is based on the expectation that the train is going to crash at some point, and the capitalist trajectory is going to lead to the subversion of its own inner dynamics. This is an interesting proposition to consider, but it is ultimately untrue, because the process of autonomous subjectivation is jeopardized by chaotic acceleration, and social subjectivity is captured and subjugated by capitalist governance, which is a system of automatic mechanisms running at blinding speed.

rearing would have entailed "a social and psychic revolution of almost inconceivable magnitude."¹ It's very difficult, in our deflated times, to re-create the counterculture's confidence that such a "social and psychic revolution" could not only happen, but was already in the process of unfolding. Like many of her generation, Willis's life was shaped by first being swept up by these hopes, then seeing them gradually wither as the forces of reaction regained control of history. There's probably no better account of the Sixties counterculture's retreat from Promethean ambition into self-destruction, resignation, and pragmatism than Willis's collection of essays *Beginning To See The Light*. The Sixties counterculture might now have been reduced to a series of "iconic" – overfamiliar, endlessly circulated, dehistoricized – aesthetic relics, stripped of political content, but Willis's work stands as a painful reminder of leftist failure. As Willis makes clear in her introduction to *Beginning To See The Light*, she frequently found herself at odds with what she experienced as the authoritarianism and statism of mainstream socialism. While the music she listened to spoke of freedom, socialism seemed to be about centralization and state control. The story of how the counterculture was co-opted by the neoliberal Right is now a familiar one, but the other side of this narrative is the Left's incapacity to transform itself in the face of the new forms of desire to which the counterculture gave voice.

The idea that the "Sixties led to neoliberalism" is complicated by the emphasis on the challenge to the family. For it then becomes clear that the Right did not absorb countercultural currents and energies without remainder. The conversion of countercultural rebellion into consumer capitalist pleasures necessarily misses the counterculture's ambition to do away with the institutions of bourgeois society: an ambition which, from the perspective of the new "realism" that the Right has successfully imposed, looks naive and hopeless.

The counterculture's politics were anticapitalist, Willis argues, but this did not entail a straightforward rejection of everything produced in the capitalist field. Certainly, pleasure and individualism were important to what Willis characterizes as her "quarrel with the left,"² yet the desire to do away with the family could not be construed in these terms alone; it was inevitably also a matter of new and unprecedented forms of collective (but non-statist) organization. Willis's "polemic against standard leftist notions about advanced capitalism" rejected as at best only half-true the ideas "that the consumer economy makes us slave to commodities, that the function of the

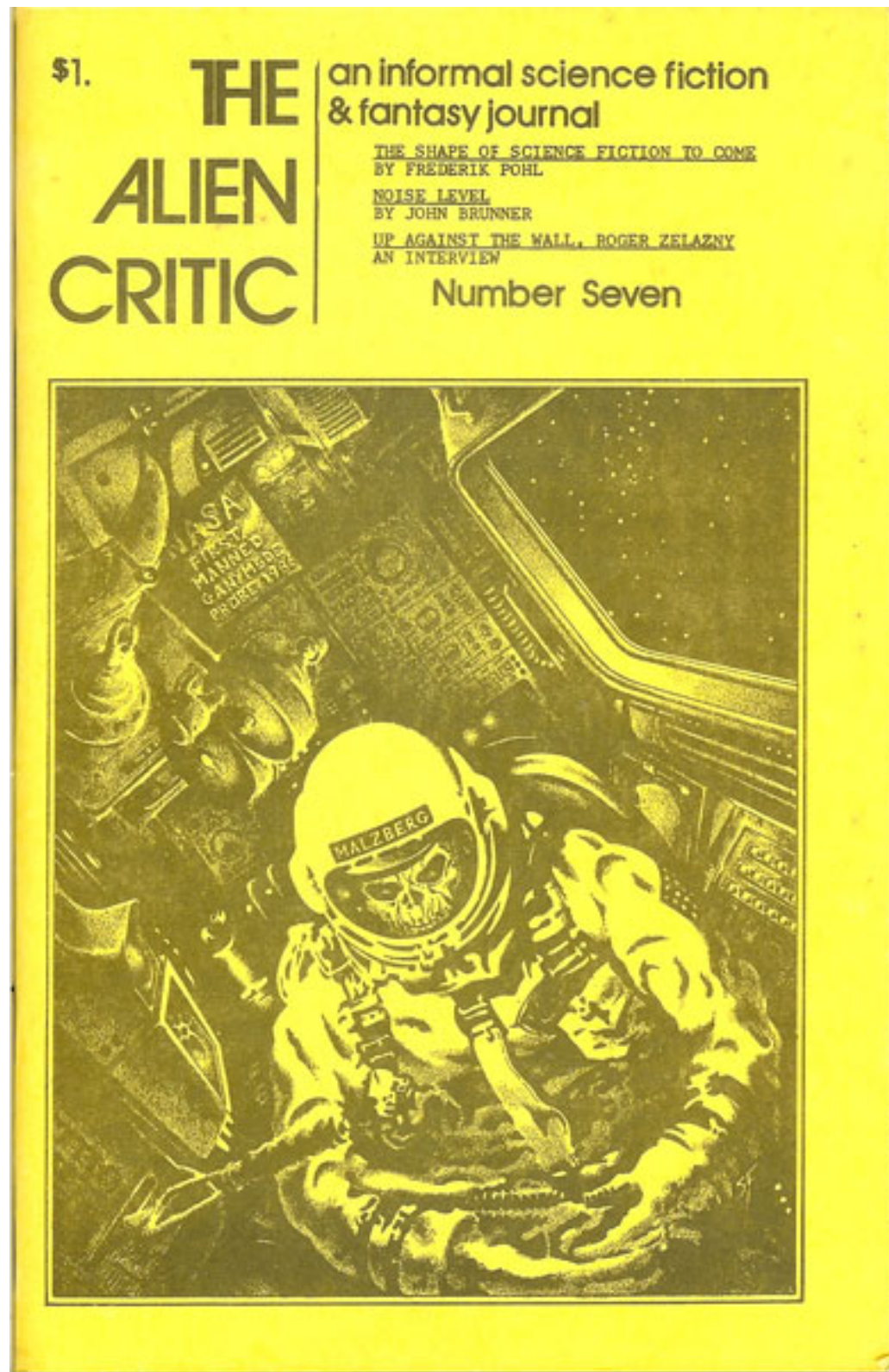
mass media is to manipulate our fantasies, so we will equate fulfilment with buying the system's commodities."³ Popular culture – and music culture in particular – was a terrain of struggle rather than a dominion of capital. The relationship between aesthetic forms and politics was unstable and inchoate – culture didn't just "express" already existing political positions, it also anticipated a politics-to-come (which was also, too often, a politics that never actually arrived).

Music culture's role as one of the engines of cultural acceleration from the late '50s through to 2000 had to do with its capacity to synthesize diverse cultural energies, tropes, and forms, as much as any specific feature of music itself. From the late '50s onward, music culture became the zone where drugs, new technologies, (science) fictions, and social movements could combine to produce dreamings – suggestive glimmers of worlds radically different from the actually existing social order. (The rise of the Right's "realism" entailed not only the destruction of particular kinds of dreaming, but the very suppression of the dreaming function of popular culture itself.) For a moment, a space of autonomy opened up, right in the heart of commercial music, for musicians to explore and experiment. In this period, popular music culture was defined by a tension between the (usually) incompatible desires and imperatives of artists, audiences, and capital. Commodification was not the point at which this tension would always and inevitably be resolved in favour of capital; rather, commodities could themselves be the means by which rebellious currents could propagate: "The mass media helped to spread rebellion, and the system obligingly marketed products that encouraged it, for the simple reason that there was money to be made from rebels who were also consumers. On one level the sixties revolt was an impressive illustration of Lenin's remark that the capitalist will sell you the rope to hang him with."⁴ This now looks rather quaintly optimistic, since, as we all know, it wasn't the capitalist who ended up hanged. The marketing of rebellion became more about the triumph of marketing than of rebellion. The neoliberal Right's coup consisted in individualizing the desires that the counterculture had opened up, then laying claim to the new libidinal terrain. The rise of the new Right was premised on the repudiation of the idea that life, work, and reproduction could be collectively transformed – now, capital would be the only agent of transformation. But the retreat of any serious challenge to the family is a reminder that the mood of reaction that has grown since the 1980s was not only about the restoration of some narrowly defined economic

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Cover of *The Alien Critic* # 7, Nov 1973. Cover artist: Steven Fabian.

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1
See Marx's "Fragment on
Machines" in the *Grundrisse*
(1858) or Paolo Virno's essay
"General Intellect."

2
Gilles Deleuze and Félix
Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus:
Capitalism and Schizophrenia*,
trans. Robert Hurley, Mark
Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New
York: Penguin, 1977), 239.

3
Deleuze and Guattari, *What is
Philosophy?*, trans. Graham
Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson
(New York: Verso, 1994), 201.

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**“A social and
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We live in a moment of profound cultural deceleration. The first two decades of the current century have so far been marked by an extraordinary sense of inertia, repetition, and retrospection, uncannily in keeping with the prophetic analyses of postmodern culture that Fredric Jameson began to develop in the 1980s. Tune the radio to the station playing the most contemporary music, and you will not encounter anything that you couldn't have heard in the 1990s. Jameson's claim that postmodernism was the cultural logic of late capitalism now stands as an ominous portent of the (non)future of capitalist cultural production: both politically and aesthetically, it seems that we can now only expect more of the same, forever.

At least for the moment, it seems that the financial crisis of 2008 has strengthened the power of capital. The austerity programs implemented with such rapidity in the wake of the financial crisis have seen an intensification – rather than a disappearance or dilution – of neoliberalism. The crisis may have deprived neoliberalism of its legitimacy, but that has only served to show that, in the lack of any effective counterforce, capitalist power can now proceed without the need for legitimacy: neoliberal ideas are like the litany of a religion whose social power has outlived the believers' capacity for faith. Neoliberalism is dead, but it carries on. The outbursts of militancy in 2011 have done little to disrupt the widespread sense that the only changes will be for the worse.



Women packaging the Beatles' album *Rubber Soul* at the Hayes Vynil Factory, England. A number of Beatles vinyls bore the sentence "Manufactured in Hayes."

As a way into what might be at stake in the concept of aesthetic accelerationism, it might be worth contrasting the dominant mood of our times with the affective tone of an earlier period. In her 1979 essay "The Family: Love It or Leave It," the late music and cultural critic Ellen Willis noted that the counterculture's desire to replace the family with a system of collective child-