

Highly Derivative: Accelerationism's Inability to Make a Clean Break

Review of *The Manifesto For Accelerationist Politics* and *The Accelerationist Reader*

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There's an increasing sense of crisis in the far left today. Having lashed itself to an implicit primitivism over the course of the twentieth century now that that ship is sinking much of the left is desperately looking for a way off.

The *Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics* by Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek is one of a number of recent attempts by those resisting capital to free themselves from this deadweight and chart a course forward that is actually — in its words — “at ease with a modernity of abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology.” While largely failing to draw attention from on-the-streets radicals, the MAP has still emerged as a significant document for a certain set of ‘anti-academic’ academics with cachet in radical circles. And in many respects this Left Accelerationist project has brought a much needed gust of sanity. A voice finally calling out the emperor's nudity when it comes to the absurdly lazy and sweeping dismissals that have grown popular in the left. As *The Accelerationist Reader*, published a year later, put it,

Hegemonic neoliberalism claims there is no alternative, and established Left political thinking, careful to desist from Enlightenment “grand narratives”, wary of any truck with a technological infrastructure tainted by capital, and allergic to an entire civilizational heritage that it lumps together and discards as “instrumental thinking”, patently fails to offer the alternative it insists must be possible.

Having long ago rejected the disconnected dinosaurs of mass political organization, the far left has increasingly accepted as the only alternative a retreat to the willful disconnect of reactionary localisms. But both directions are effectively characterized by a turn away from the future and, increasingly, from all forward-seeking and path-finding vigilance. As a result the left as a whole has grown in many respects confused, even traumatized, by our changing world. Today it often appears confined to just prettying up the walls of its prison cell and pretending that having “no future” was totally its plan in the first place. What little resistance it still offers has shrunk down to mere rejection, a ritualized and empty suspicion that often defaults on viewing the

history still before us as more of a storm to be weathered than something to be determined. The resulting insular death spiral has been largely characterized by attempts to recapture *sensations* and *aesthetic trappings* through “reactionary obsessions with purity, humility, and sentimental attachment to the personally gratifying rituals of critique and protest and their brittle and fleeting forms of collectivity.” (ibid)

But — as the internet has come to saturate our everyday life — the left’s holdouts have finally been dragged into a world that has largely advanced without them. Witness the frantic attempts to catch up to *all this technology stuff*; to assure everyone that there’s nothing paradigm-smashing in the last century of scientific discoveries, or that one should basically be able to get by with some cliffnotes. Frequently this is phrased in terms of “cybernetics” — the eyeroll-deserving way a certain brand of leftist tries to dismissively wrap up all the computer science, neuroscience, game theory, etc (ie virtually every advance in scientific paradigms since the 50s) they weren’t alerted to in their undergrad courses. Note, for instance, Tiqqun’s wingnuttly meltdown about vitalism or the Invisible Committee’s belated concession in “To Our Friends” that maybe they do need to understand all this technology stuff, as well as their deeply embarrassing (for all parties) attempt to lecture hackers at the 31st Chaos Communications Congress.

For anarchists it’s worth watching these spasms because this moment of reconfiguration will set the stage for whatever new metamorphoses are ahead of the left. Can it reinvent and free itself from a nihilist vs. organizationalist quagmire? Can it integrate the insights of the last century and not only adapt to our present landscape but restructure itself to blaze a path forward through all the complexities and changing contexts still before us? Can anything be salvaged from the non-anarchist left?

Sadly in the case of Accelerationism it appears we will have to keep waiting for an answer. This minor academic fad may finally open some windows but the “fresh air” it brings is thick with the dust of corpses.

In its very best moments this Accelerationism says exactly what anarcho-transhumanists and virtually everyone else with any direct knowledge of the situation have long argued, “Our technological development is being suppressed by capitalism as much as it has been unleashed. ... these capacities can and should be let loose by moving beyond the limitations imposed by capitalist society.”

But this much should hardly warrant praise and Accelerationism’s direct failings are far more concerning: Firstly, it fails to accurately diagnose the root forces driving progress within society today as *immediately* liberatory and thus it poses a false or confused tension whereby “the bad” must be intensified for progress to be made — when in fact what must be intensified is the already present good, once accurately identified, as well as the stakes. Second, it tries to sneak in alongside the repudiation of *localism* a repudiation of the *bottom-up* (as if those were remotely equivalent), and in so doing reveals itself as merely the latest carrier for a sort of left-liberal academic elite that despises decentralization and hungers for a return to a context where they can once again rule as de facto technocrats.

Accelerationism is an old slur in certain circles and obviously any use of the term itself assumes that *something* must be “accelerated,” but from what I’ve seen the “left accelerationism” heralded by the MAP has not yet been particularly clear or settled on what that is — outside of some sweeping abstract and impressionistic language. And it rather steadfastly avoids grappling with any real particulars in how this is all supposed to work out.

In contrast, accelerationism, making a different analysis of the ambivalent forces at work in capital, will insist on the continuing dynamism and transformation of the human wrought by the unleashing of productive forces, arguing that it is possible to align with their revolutionary force but against domestication, and indeed that the only way “out” is to plunge further in

It’s easy to read this in a very positive sense, but the language is worryingly broad. While it would be nice to know just what direction inward “in” denotes, a hell of a lot more turns on the use of quotes around “out”. What exactly is being set as the things we’re trying to escape? And to what degree are we serious about this? One suspects the lack of clarity is intentional, a rhetorical move to pull people in without actually committing to a perspective. But in practice what this has accomplished is allow folks like Benjamin Noys to characterize the position as a demand to “work more, produce more, and consume more.”

Even still Left Accelerationists have remained loathe to actually tackle the details or provide substance. And when they do swing near what this process would actually look like they sometimes end up confirming everyone’s fears: an ever deeper dispossession leading to some kind of breaking point. In other words precisely the well-worn position of “make things worse until they break” that we all know has *totally worked* throughout history like when Congolese villagers were having their hands macheted off and slaughtered in the millions by Belgian task masters. The strategy to push capitalism and the effects of it to become ever more visible and obviously rejectable — to raise consciousness through immiserations — is some “Punx in Hummers” shit and is hardly new or a heresy, but a banality. A particularly cardboard entry in the grand old tradition of leftists incapable of conceiving of any motivation save the apocalyptic.

Of course not every Accelerationist writer makes the mistake of engaging all too closely with what exactly the process to be accelerated is. And some say quite anodyne things. The MAP put its most explicit focus on technological development, which, sure, great! Although I should note that presently the most significant technological innovation and creativity is already arising outside the increasingly tight shackles of capitalism. And I’m not sure that deepening this by say organizing and empowering ronin PhDs and autodidacts through hackerspaces and radical centers around the world really reflects anything like the notion that “the way out is through”.

But by the time the Accelerationist reader came out the focus had broadened to “accelerate [capitalism’s] uprooting, alienating, decoding, abstractive tendencies.” At best this sort of hand-wavey language sometimes boils down to nothing more than appeals for more rationality and strategy — which it must be admitted sadly qualifies as a revolutionary position. But there’s good reason to be suspicious of the hazy and sweeping language, as well as the choosing of terms with traditionally negative connotations. Accelerationism has historically meant deepening the horrors of capitalism until a breaking point was reached and this has rather inescapably centered all other “Accelerationisms” around that perspective. Whatever other arguments folks want to make, this association with “make things worse” has been the primary lens through which Accelerationism has been approached and sits at the core of nearly all discourse on it.

Such a framing hardly represents a clean break with the primitivist rot of the left. An enthusiastic embrace of rationality, scientific reductionism, strategy, and technological development — in short the brightest expressions of our creativity, vigilance, and agency — should hardly have to be posed as “making things worse before they can get better.”

One of the keys here is that Accelerationism retains the same tendency towards dismissive lumping famously at play in “civilization” within their own use of “capitalism.”

But “capitalism” — in the sense of macroscopic tendencies of capital accumulation, normalized wage labor and attendant dynamics — is if anything radically *opposed* to innovation and meaningful growth. It’s not a matter of capitalism having internal contradictions so much as capitalism and the market being radically different creatures. The accumulative and centralizing tendency of capitalism is only one force among many at play in our society, and it is in no way inherently emergent from the microdynamics of exchange. Yet Accelerationism inherits the Marxist — which we might call the *proto-primitivist* since the one so clearly descends from the other — tendency to sweepingly characterize the entirety of existing society as a single beast of tightly integral parts and a teleological arc rather than a messy battlefield.

This blithely anti-reductionist tendency that prefers loose impressions to radical analysis is perhaps the most noxious characteristic of an insular brand of academics in the humanities to which Marxism fled when it couldn’t put up a fight anywhere else. An academic graveyard all the cool kids now hang out in. It has long been sympathetic to the aristocracy’s primitivist inclinations. Like all abusive ecosystems of power this academic enclave is deeply hostile to any hint of cleansing objectivity or clarity that might leave no room for the gaslighting and strategic-noncommunication that underpins power dynamics. It wants anything but firm and universally accessible ground for the disenfranchised, much less the dissolution of the various scarcities of information that provide a ladder for social hierarchies. Primitivism is, at root, an ideology that embraces the mysticism so strongly emergent in the last century of Marxist academia.

Any clean break with primitivism must then include a break with these monsters of obscurantism and anti-reductionism, and yet Accelerationism ducks its head in submission to many of their rotten assumptions, implicitly painting rationality as something partially negative that we must nevertheless embrace or push through. The language of modern accelerationists is persistently implicitly apologetic, using disturbing wordings for things that should be emphatically positive:

the only radical political response to capitalism is not to protest, disrupt or critique
... but to accelerate its uprooting, alienating, decoding, abstractive tendencies

Most irritatingly and forebodingly the accelerationist says “we should embrace science and rationality” without ever really bothering to actually making an argument for *why*. Despite coming from a context in which both are widely demonized! As a consequence it seems like one is either supposed to embrace science and rationality for no good reason whatsoever — as a matter of situational expediency or random quirk or because it’s now fashionable — or one is revealed to have been waiting all along for some kind of allowance. And if the latter then the question becomes if one was already persuaded *why did one need an excuse?* There are certainly good arguments for an enthusiastic embrace of science and rationality, so this kind of timidity is disturbing. It’s a lot like finding a cult survivor hesitantly and flinchingly suggesting that “maybe, kinda sorta it’s not actually good, perhaps maybe to eat babies. sometimes.” Sure you can agree with them that eating babies is bad, but the main result of their denunciation should be an inclination to keep your eyes on them around nurseries.

Of course one can be more charitable. And there are moments in which one just wants to hand some anarchist economics to the poor malnourished academics brought up in the Marxist tradition. After all it’s easy to salvage the anti-oedipal language by distinguishing deterritorialization

in terms of market forces and reterritorialization in terms of capitalist forces. Of course Deleuze and Guattari effectively took them as part of an integral whole, but this is both true and not true. Not only do capitalism and markets reflect dramatically different underlying concepts and dynamics, but in the real existing world they are often separable dynamics or in serious conflict. There are certainly ways in which the liberatory market forces are structurally harnessed — as a kind of liquid fuel in the engine of state/capitalist power. But there are other respects in which the situation is far less solid or resolved, in which one force is not co-opted and enslaved by the other, but in which they are orthogonal processes or at war with each other.

Expanded beyond just what market anarchists term the “market” to more expansive things like science and rationality, such deterritorializing flows can be seen as the emergence of a hive mind — of minds straining to poke more holes through the walls of the cages that keep them localized into a more fluid connection or blending. In which context traditions, cultures, and other memetic cruft are rejected as ossifying, fossilizing impositions upon society just as they are upon an individual’s mind.

I’m certainly a fan of the fluidic metaphors this discourse provides. But that’s because such better reflect the *complexities* at play. And that really is the operable word missing from this discourse. The most important guides and constraints in these processes are information theoretical.

When the MAP asserts,

We may be moving fast, but only within a strictly defined set of capitalist parameters that themselves never waver. We experience only the increasing speed of a local horizon, a simple brain-dead onrush rather than an acceleration which is also navigational, an experimental process of discovery within a universal space of possibility.

You can tell they’re flailing for some critical distinction distinction. They’re explicitly ditching the concrete definition of acceleration in terms of the second derivative of motion that more closely matches the subject of Nick Land’s project, and letting the term bleed out into a very loose and evocative notion.

But this loses sight of the main issue, complexity. We should certainly be proactively conscious and vigilant in our exploration and agency in struggle, but these are not particularly insightful distinctions. Sure we can act in specific conscious ways to better further and direct the social singularity we’re all participating within, but it is nonetheless happening.

And it is this global feedbacking cultural, memetic and intellectual complexity at the core of our experience of the internet era that is of most revolutionary import. A reality accelerationism ignores almost entirely.

The MAP declares that “what capitalist speed deterritorializes with one hand, it reterritorializes with the other. Progress becomes constrained within a framework of surplus value, a reserve army of labour, and free-floating capital.” But capitalism is decidedly *not* succeeding at reterritorializing. The complexities of our world are growing ever more out of control. Partially in the sense of a social-technical infrastructure that is being monkey-patched and expanded upon in greater depth by anarchist hackers faster than the NSA can keep up, but primarily in the sense that our perception of the world has catalysed into a feedback loop of awareness and nuance that is straining the inherently rigid structures and mechanisms of power. It is here that anarchists and transhumanists have identified the most fertile point of pressure.

In the same sense that there are inescapable material realities that constrain and partially determine social dynamics, there are also inescapable computational realities. And this is in no

small part why the market has been seen by an explosion of interest from radicals since the early 70s as a critical component of the fight against power.

Marxists have struggled deeply with this inescapable reality since Hayek and the default reflex has become to throw away all of “cybernetics” as a tainted ideological pseudoscience. But if the more rational primitivists are right to highlight the fundamental constraints placed on societies by dynamics of energy, libertarians are also right to look to the fundamental constraints placed on societies by computer science. Both are matters of physics. And just as you can’t shuffle around carbon costs and pretend to have erased them, you can’t simply shuffle around matters of information and calculation and pretend they’re no longer a problem.

A project seeking to make a clean break with the irrational primitivism of the left should damn well tackle the way it has systematically disregarded computational complexity, much less its failure to step up and actually embrace an analysis grounded in such. The left has rather — with its deepening corruption by the primitivism always lurking within it — embraced *simplicity*. Its managerial tendencies making a perfect synthesis with the primitivist aversion to intellectual vigilance (“we tried thinking/technology before and look at where that got us”). Again and again systems are critiqued in terms of being “too complex” to understand/control, often while simultaneously derided as *mechanical* rather than *organic*. But the only substantive distinction between the mechanical and the organic is one of fluidic complexity. Does it make sense to inveigh against the biosphere for being “too complex and too hard to entirely understand and control”? Of course not. And yet the more organic, the more complex and fluidic the market, our technologies or our culture have gotten, the more conniptions Marxist theorists have gone into. We should be deepening the vibrant, rich, lush complexities of human interrelation in the internet era, not just because as we do this power structures like the state and silicon valley tech giants falter and find themselves less and less capable of control, but because such complexity is inextricably tied to expressions and experiences of liberation.

To unleash the flows of liberated desire in our discourse, economics, etc is not to turn into that which is terrible and double down, but to resist it.

Like the tentative cult survivor, Accelerationists are always making the excuse that “there is no escape.” But the truth is there may very well be an escape from the present situation in localist, luddite, or anti-rationalist terms, *and that escape towards primitivism is what power wants*.

The neoliberal focus on crisis and capitalism’s increasing appeals to it as a way to flatten and reduce the complexity of society is very much of this vein. When the normal modes of management have become untenable power frequently falls back on just lobbing nukes at its own populace in hopes that apocalyptic destruction will bring the situation down to something more manageable once again.

What we are in fact seeing, with the gradual demise of primitivism, is the rabid turning of capital and the state *against* technological innovation and information technologies. Hence the stark images of politicians and chiefs of police calling for the outright abolition of cryptography and the internet. And their hostility to any glimmering of markets freed of the chains of capital is, of course, a longstanding tradition. Power abhors complexity.

Yet accelerationists of all stripes share a sad tendency to wax back into characterizing the market and rationality as a kind of death. This baggage sorefully needs to be shed off. And the rejection or deliberate ignorance to the calculational problems that the market grows from — the stubborn tendency to continue portraying the market as a dead “mechanical” thing or as creating death rather than being fundamentally organic in violent struggle against the mechanical death

of capital — leads to embracing centralized, overly simple and inorganic solutions like “universal income”. Everyone these days shares a certain sympathy for universal income — certainly no one should have to work to live — and universal income schemes may well be an alleviative reform, but to tackle the artificial (that is to say violently simple) scarcities and capital concentrations of our present hellscape through the imposition of even more clunky artifice is a dangerous approach to say the least. And to champion it inexorably leads to an authoritarian turn.

The MAP sadly doubles down on this, embracing both artificially simple praxis and an artificially simple image of capitalism as an attractor in the phase space of possible human relations with near universal reach:

We believe that any post-capitalism will require post-capitalist planning. The faith placed in the idea that, after a revolution, the people will spontaneously constitute a novel socioeconomic system that isn't simply a return to capitalism is naïve at best, and ignorant at worst.

We should of course, as radicals pursuing uncompromising visions of a better world, seek to map the possible, to explore paths forward and alternative dynamics, to better understand the lay of the land and our options, in any possible context, not just our present one. But “planning” carries with it a very specific legacy of temper tantrums against complexity, the entitled edicts of supremely unimaginative committees. Truly radical paths must be blazed from the bottom up, not from the Jacobin reading group on down. Planning assumes a certain about control over what is possible. It implies starting from a block of granite and chipping out a pre-visioned figure, rather than letting one's path to a more fundamental goal fluidly respond and adapt to what is possible. Planning does not reflect a creative navigation but rather the same old Marxist need to impose an arbitrary theoretical order rather than actually do any sort of actual scientific inquiry.

I mean, I swear to fucking god, I'm not making this up, the MAP itself *actually positively cites Cybersyn*. One is tempted to be charitable and envision the left's deepening turn to primitivism over the last fifty years as a kind of visit to Narnia, from which the survivors now emerge still wearing bell bottoms and wondering when dinner will be served. But in truth there is no excuse for this kind of science denialism: “That both of these were ultimately unsuccessful can be traced to the political and technological constraints these early cyberneticians operated under.” I cannot fathom the studious mental labor it must involve to take this excuse seriously. Or maybe ‘success’ is being measured not in terms of the rich and diverse subjective desires of actual human beings, but in terms of some clunky parameters and measured against one of the zombie capitalist states contemporaneous with 1970s Chile. I readily grant that a modern Cybersyn might manage to build a socialism capable of avoiding the mass starvations of the Soviet Union, because the variables to food production are relatively small compared to advanced technologies and human hunger or nutritional needs relatively constant. But really? Such noble aspirations.

How I wish I could report that the MAP's authoritarian turn was limited to writing dubious economic historical fanfic about Allende on his Star Trek bridge, but the MAP makes very clear that it wants to chuck out anything resembling horizontalism or decentralization alongside localism.

Secrecy, verticality, and exclusion all have their place as well in effective political action... We need to posit a collectively controlled legitimate vertical authority in

addition to distributed horizontal forms of sociality, to avoid becoming the slaves of either a tyrannical totalitarian centralism or a capricious emergent order beyond our control.

...Which I'm sure will totally work because as we've already established this fictional universe runs on magic.

It's not entirely clear what's going on here. Are the authors swallowing at face value the ridiculous claim that the only avenue for anti-authoritarianism or resisting the expansion of state power is a localist luddism? Are they somehow muddling the expansion of state power with the acceleration of feedbacking technological development? Whatever the case, this analysis is no more a rejection of the primitivist ideology than donning an evil mustache and joining a fracking company might be.

One is left wondering if the authoritarian impulse is the driving force or whether the authors, as academics, are so deeply twisted by their class status that when pressed for paths forward they can imagine no other means than establishing an "intellectual infrastructure" or vanguard elite — complete with a request for government funded think tanks, I shit you not — to drive it. It's a farce that anyone might claim to be shedding off the primitivist infection of the 20th century while never once engaging with the anarchist and now internet-era drive to make *every-one* the intellectuals. Yet again accelerationism belies the same primitivist and statist tendency to suppress complexity rather than embrace it.

If, indeed, as the MAP declares, "sectarianism is the death knell of the left" then I say we should have as much of it as possible. If something is to be accelerated let it please be sectarianism. A fractal sectarianism until the corpse of the left is finally dissolved away and anarchism released. Developing an acid strong enough to eat our own rotten power structures has always been a prerequisite to eating capitalism and the state. Only our spineless timidity has held us back.

But of course we should not be surprised by Left Accelerationism's embrace of managerial elitism, their highly palpable hunger for a technocracy of humanities academics. As with virtually every discourse derived from Marx, the goal has never been to actually achieve a better world.

The term accelerationism has a long history and yet it has only ever appeared in academic writings and never in real-world application. It is — we must address the elephant in the room — fundamentally an academic position. Unintelligible outside a discourse of continental philosophy that is inextricably an expression of class. A pure concentrated bourgeois elitism matched with a total lack of earnest sincerity or reductionism/radicalism. An arena where enthusiastic obscurantism has encouraged the enfranchising of new hierarchies, new ecologies of power relations, competitive games of positioning via masturbatory clouds of language utterly attenuated from anything rooted.

This discourse or community is not just relatively disconnected from the sciences, it has emerged in no small part from a desperate need to define itself in contrast with the sciences. And partially as a result it is inclined to perpetuate antiquated lenses rather than to just start over or drastically restructure an analysis. In a very real sense theories and models never die in continental discourse; the humanities it speaks to champion an append-only system of notes upon notes. And as such, unlike the sciences, it offers an inherently elitist system. It creates and fetishizes artificial economies of intellectual capital, forcing people to slog through an only ever growing canon without ever actually simplifying the actual points down again and restructuring appropriately. Great for the hipster academic who wants to treat social analysis like building a

record collection — the bourgeois twentysomething trending bohemian and looking for opinions to champion at dinner parties where the glassware is mason jars. But while these traditions have come to strongly influence the playschool modes of *activism as a personal phase* and/or *radicalism as currency for community-forming* that characterize a lot of the modern left, they have had absolutely zero impact on the ground.

The reality is — the reality that Accelerationism and the rest of the spasming left are so obviously responding to — the people presently blazing the future are not continental academics and humanities majors at rich private liberal arts colleges. They're anarchist hackers and direct actionists. Or scientists and engineers.

I suppose it's cool and all that some folks within the continental tradition have completed a long arc back towards rationality and a rigorous "modernity", but while y'all were away we were getting shit done. And I'm not sure y'all have much to contribute to that. Besides holding doors open to others trapped in the same discourse seeking to escape a sinking ship.

There's a deep division between radicalism and the kind of endless network traversing and circles upon circles analysis that is frequently necessary to get a fragmentary lay of the land in discourses that waft on top of complex underlying dynamics. The latter can quickly grow cancerous, reflecting the sort of thing David Graeber has called out as a professional obsession with 'interpretative depth' rather than actual relevance.

Accelerationist theorists are often of a Marxist genealogy and so they borrow the Marxist tendency to talk in terms of sweeping macrostructures or other large-scale epiphenomena, refusing to tackle an underlying ethics. This is part of a broader annoying tendency to try to derive normative conclusions from ones intuitions in response to certain sweeping impressions rather than from any sort of foundational ethical orientation. Like so much of leftist/primitivist discourse they seem incapable of formulating any sort of ethical appeal that isn't just setting up rather obvious intuition pumps. See for example the dominant mode of argumentation in the left today whereby a given thing is proven bad by being able to associate it in some nebulous manner with big bads like imperialism or sexism. How tenuous or irrelevant this connection is hardly matters. We have a vague bundle of impressions of "capitalism." That bundle is bad. And thus anything we can pattern match to any aspect of that bundle is likewise bad.

Most of us can recognize how ludicrous this mode of argumentation is when hit in the face with it, but it still has an insidious appeal to those indoctrinated with a hostility to reductionism. Asking "what exactly are the specific problems at core with this huge array of things we're calling capitalism?" is a sacrilegious act. Where more radical traditions want to break words apart into distinct and clear concepts, the continentals correctly surmise that kind of clarity would undermine the aristocratic game of much of the humanities.

And thus time and again this continental orientation leads — despite its proclamations of anti-essentialism — rather inexorably towards reactionary attempts to determine and embrace some kind of irreducible "human nature" or "human experience" that can't truly be taken apart or reconfigured, and thus has no real latitude.

It's no weird quirk that the continental philosopher Nick Land is both a founding figure of modern Right Accelerationism and of Neoreaction. It is precisely his continental roots that provide a foundation for such fascism. Forming a model of the world through a very sweepingly abstract and macroscopic analysis and embracing the first explanations or narratives that fall out rather than looking deeper for ways to reshape and change things is the very polar opposite of radicalism. Even in those moments where concrete language is adopted, the neoreactionary impulse has

consistently been to make quick claims about what is and ignore all other possible explanations. Of course neoreactionaries as a whole come from many directions, some former transhumanists who recoiled from much of technology when they realized the inescapable liberatory conclusions of giving people *more means*, but Nick Land's project is very much one still in the vein of the worst tendencies of continental philosophy. And we should not be surprised. Accelerationism as a term has a nihilist history, a context Land and in the process other accelerationist writers are consciously calling upon.

Nihilism, like God, unleashes mental stress by ultimately acting as a cognitive stop, a get-out-of-thinking-free excuse — to be desperately invoked rather than reflected on. And so it either inherits or forms arbitrary feedback loops to protect this state of brain death. In neoreactionaries this finds expression through their hunger for the quickest ways to provide models. Invoking cognitive science to 'explain away' rather than to radically probe. Everything can be quickly dismissed as signalling or ritual or IQ or race or whatever. Looking for dynamics only insofar as one can quickly create a taxonomies or just-so-stories to slap on things and impede any further examinations that might lead to competing hypotheses or radically new possibilities.

In contrast to this reactionism one might pose an actual, full-throated embrace on many levels of "deterritorialization" and "unleashed flows" — not as a nihilist position that gives up and accepts whatever drifts its way — but instead as a position of Full Vigilance. Such vigilance is ultimately the only solid thing in the conceptual or computational landscape — as a direction rather than a point. It is adamantly not an abyss. For vigilance to signify an endless nothingness one must adopt the nihilist position that all arguments or perspectives are equally mappable into one another once you cast off all arbitrary attachments. That there is no metastructure or universally unique points in the flows of meta-desire. Such a perfectly flat situation would of course be an astoundingly ordered one and thus an unlikely random topology, but the nihilists cling to this delusion of flatness or meaninglessness as an excuse to get out of vigilantly exploring any further. To just default on whatever instincts or impulses they're currently prone to without much examination. Sometimes this leads to a bunch of burnouts collectively trying to hold onto the friendships and aesthetic trappings of their former anarchist life. Other times it leads to nerd neonazis talking about how whites and 'alpha' men will rule after the collapse of civilization. In either case the surrender is one of conceptual-localism — wandering in happenstance circles or sticking to a current position merely because you happen to reside there and deriding any world-traveling or diligent exploration as a waste. Both are caught in the pull of an increasingly irrational rejection of the universal, the cosmopolitan, the earnestly curious.

I bring up the worst mutations of Right Accelerationism because I am not convinced that Left Accelerationism can be separated from its darkside. I'm not sure that it can truly mark a break with the primitivism that practically defines today's left without breaking with much of the baggage of the continental and Marxist tradition. And yet it's also unclear what would even remain of Accelerationism without that baggage.

For example, the notion of "alienation" that is often so central in accelerationist texts is, frankly, so often a silly, detached and merely evocative impression. Everything is alienation; nothing is. A universe without alienation of any sort would be an empty and homogeneous universe, undifferentiated. Even if we go back to a supposedly more concrete traditional Marxist version, one is tempted to scream that neither the pre-capitalist artisan nor the capitalist factory worker should have necessarily chosen to psychologically identify with the products of their labor in the first place. And yet of course here too is "human nature" invoked.

I strongly suspect it's impossible to define "alienation" concretely with any sort of substance while still bearing a resemblance to how the term is presently used. I'm far more aligned to the Xenofeminist Manifesto's relatively dismissive approach: "okay, we are alienated, but have we ever NOT been?" We have never really had much agency in our conditions, material or social. Homo sapiens, like all creatures, have always been forced to do stuff. And the saccharine tale of an ideal state lost is a reactionary one.

Yet if you held a gun to my head and demanded I conjure some definition for the word "alienation" I'd probably preserve its negative connotations. However I would argue that the currents of technological development and engagement at play within our society today are *minimizing* not accelerating alienation. And "natural conditions", or the primitive homo sapiens hunter gatherer state — no matter how enmeshed with the surrounding environment — still represents an incredible degree of alienation. After all our neural networks are deeply imprisoned within our skulls. The default human form allows only the tiniest of pinholes of channels to interact with the broader universe. In such a picture the accelerating richness and complexity of our understanding and capacity to reconfigure ourselves or communicate with one another is anything but a deepening of alienation. Science and technology ultimately *decrease* alienation. Without technics or tools there would be no way to extend the depth, immediacy and rootedness to our engagement with the universe. Technology/language, for instance, expand the bandwidth and scope of our capacity to communicate with one another, a long slow climb whose summit might be cast as true electronic telepathy or mind-merging.

To even speak of such aspirations or dynamics would, of course, seem wildly out of place in Accelerationist discourse, which wants to maintain sufficient distance from transhumanism to avoid appearing earnest and uncool. And that's basically the problem. There's nothing new here, just a kind of whiny attempt at excusing a return to relevance that is at the end of the day more concerned with justifying and looking hip before one's peers than actually returning to relevance.

Accelerationism is in short the same old antiquated Marxist and Continental garbage. A mixture of insular elitism and the very anti-intellectual currents of localism and immediacy inherent to those lenses they're now claiming to break with.

My first read when Williams & Srnicek published the MAP was a very bemused "well obviously" at a number of points, tempered by an irritation at its lack of guts to go further. It's a position still-born, almost certainly destined to die in a tiny corner of academia as a mildly interesting fad. And no flood of papers can give it life.

There is a widespread sense by many today that the future is "coming at us," like a train to a tied up damsel. At its very best Left Accelerationism offers the hope that we might reverse the identification of inertia in this portrait and reinvigorate within people the notion that it is *we* who are accelerating at the future. At its worst, however, accelerationism presents either a kind of nihilist surrender or a vision of an authoritarian and elitist Left that might yet still survive through parasitism. Through latching onto rationality, technology, etc so as to keep fed a stultifying, sedentary space of "human life" — the subject of so much continental discourse, now built up like layer upon layer of hardened scum that its practitioners are loath to get started scrubbing it away and in doing so admit their failures.

The strands of leftism ready to abandon their marriage to primitivism will no doubt continue searching for a path forward. A course-correction capable of dragging them into the post-Turing

era. I await that day. In the meantime, to misuse Nietzsche, the truth is that we still haven't seen anything yet.

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William Gillis
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Review of The Manifesto For Accelerationist Politics and The Accelerationist Reader
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