Is there a Future for Accelerationism?

Abstract

Accelerationism emerged from the insatiable market of ideas, a market that it attempts to intensify and ultimately repurpose in its own image. It is, however, an idea with consequences. The logic of accelerationism is not simply to exacerbate an inherent crisis of capitalism, either in order to provide a remedy in a more speedy fashion or consign it to its doom as a merciful gesture – putting it out of its misery, as it were. The process of acceleration underpinning the theory, of speeding up or intensification, is instead an active component of a re-imagined (post-)capitalism. This re-imagining is *hyperstitional* – a performative fiction invoked to overturn many seldom-questioned assumptions held across the academic spectrum. In attempting to foment the approach it both craves and envisages renders accelerationism almost unrecognisable as a serious contribution to academic debates on organisations and their management, even from critical perspectives. This article is not an attempt to accelerate nor to exemplify accelerationism, but instead contributes to the debate by identifying, examining and connecting core features of the conceptual framework underpinning the different approaches to accelerationism. It will focus in particular on Deleuze and Guattari's contribution to this framework (desiring production; deterritorialisation; Body Without Organs, etc.) and examine their version of assemblage (*agencement*) as a way of conceptualising both the transformation of the machinery of capitalism and as a mechanism for the transition from extant forms of capitalism.

Introduction

> The accelerationists strive not only to theorize the possibility of a post-capitalist tradition, but also to construct a new political imaginary appropriate for our times (Gardiner 2017: 30)

In his influential work on Accelerationism, Benjamin Noys addresses the theorizing of the concept, identifying the core ideas and texts associated with its different waves. The first wave is encompassed by a trinity of texts from the French poststructuralist tradition, each responding in its own way to the events of 1968: Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy*; and, Baudrillard's *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Noys characterises the relationship between these theorists – and by extension their texts – as antagonistic:

> each accuses the other of not really accepting that they are fully immersed in capital and trying to hold on to a point of escape: desire, libido, death. Each also embodies a particular moment of capital: production, credit, and inflation (Noys, 2014: 5).

Noys concludes that Deleuze and Guattari's focus on an axis of desire and production, Lyotard's axis of libido and credit and Baudrillard's axis of death and inflation help to frame the debate on acceleration. In addition they enable clearer analysis by positioning the relationship between acceleration strategies and the forces of capitalism. Noys argues that each of these three approaches serves a provocative purpose but leads ultimately to a point "where any way to distinguish a radical strategy from the strategy of capital seems to completely disappear" (Noys, 2014: 5).

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A second wave discussed by Noys (Noys, 2014: 49-59) is centred on the work of Nick Land, including his provocatively titled *The Thirst of Annihilation* (1992), and the activities of the University of Warwick's Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccru), co-founded by Nick Land and Sadie Plant in 1995. These activities include the 1994-1996 Virtual Futures conferences, which provided a platform for a diversity of concepts covering many accelerationist themes. The focus of this wave can be summed up by Land's "aggressive championing of the sociopathic heresy urging the 'ever more uninhibited marketization of the processes that are tearing down the social field' – the acceleration, rather than the critique, of capitalism's disintegration of society" (Land, 2012: 3) and the acceleration of the obsolescence of humankind.

The final wave upcycles the concept to the present and is characterised by the use of the term "accelerationism" to name a type of strategic response to emerging features of contemporary (i.e. post-financial crisis) capitalism. This usage is embodied by the 2014 publication of *#Accelerate#: The Accelerationist Reader* (Mackay and Avanessian, 2014) and most clearly defined by Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek's *#Accelerate Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, which is included within the *Reader*'s collection of articles. This collection of articles is also bookended by other notable events, including the eponymous 2010 Accelerationism symposium at Goldsmith's College, London (featuring Noys, Williams and Sricek, Ray Brassier and Mark Fisher, among others), and the growing response to the arguments encompassed by the term "accelerationism" – a term coined earlier by Noys himself (see Noys, 2010: 4-9). This wave includes a division between left and right orientated approaches to accelerationism, and an evaluation of the potential contours of a political programme (see Noys, 2014: 93-104).

To return to the quote at the beginning of this article, these waves embody counter-hegemonic political thinking, each characterised by their approach to assembling and coupling entities. Beyond the simple slogan that "capital should not be resisted but accelerated" these different accelerationist approaches are united in their diagnostic and strategic purpose. They are diagnostic in suggesting that the intensification of core features of capitalism affords a fundamental transition of its character, a transition that leaves nothing unaffected. They are strategic in suggesting that by stoking the forces of capitalist excess it becomes possible to break through its limits:

> Instead of rejecting the increased tempo of capitalist production they argue that we should embrace and accelerate it…the only way out of capitalism is to take it further, to follow the lines of flight or deterritorialization to the absolute end, to speed-up beyond the limits of production and to rupture the limit of capital itself (Noys, 2014: i)

The assumptions that underpin this diagnostic and strategic purpose will help to position the accelerationist logic of capitalist production in terms of its relationship with libidinal desire, i.e. the capitalism/schizophrenia conjunction used by Deleuze and Guattari to subtitle two volumes of their collaborative work. This conjunction will be examined in more detail in section three, but before this can be tackled, a more immediate question poses itself: what is accelerated in accelerationism?

Accelerate what?

Paul Virilio argues that speed is the new motor of change and, as such, is fundamental in shaping contemporary experience. As speed accelerates it changes the conditions of events and organisations, as embodied by new technologies:

> [Speed] does not simply allow you to arrive at your destination more quickly, rather it enables you to see and foresee. To see, yesterday, with photography and cinema, and to foresee, today, with electronics, the calculator and computer. Speed changes the world vision. (Virilio, 1999: 21)

Speed therefore has a political edge as those possessing greater speed tend to dominate those without it, determining who has control and access to resources (territory, information, money, etc.). While Virilio emphasises the challenges posed by such compression, others emphasise the opportunities. Identifying these opportunities and developing strategies to exploit them against the 'business as usual' interests of capitalism allows us to position different strands of accelerationism. Andrew Culp provides a useful tripartite account of such patterns, each based on its own dialectic: 1) the boomerang pattern of the rebound from the nadir of crisis; 2) the fascist addiction to speed, pursuing its chemical worship from one high to the next; and, 3) the techno-science technological fix paradigm, cherry picking only the beneficial means (see Culp, 2018: 161-163). While there is a tension associated with each strategy – "the boomerang tends towards recuperation, the chase of the high eventually leads to lower lows, and careful selection as technocratic anti-communism" (Culp, 2018: 163) – this categorisation highlights the variety of ways in which the logic of capitalism can be resisted, and potentially, subverted by accelerationist strategies. Addressing the concept in this way helps to clarify what purpose accelerationism is meant to serve, what it responds to, what it doesn't do, and applies a little context to the three waves presented in the previous section, although it requires a little repurposing.

The rebound approach is aligned with the view that a crisis is an opportunity to make systematic reforms. It is a view described by Culp as both "the position most commonly attributed" and one for which "few advocate such a position other than…Žižek" (Culp, 2018: 161). Accelerationism of this type seeks to compress the intervals between crises within capitalism as a way of speeding up its reform. This serves to upgrade capitalism in order to further the goals of modernity and, by cultivating these goals, further enhance and intensify capitalism. Capitalism and modernity are thus perceived to be interdependent, with each project intertwined with that of the other.

The two other versions of accelerationism view modernity and capitalism to be fundamentally incompatible. Each version pursues one project, abandoning the other, as will be examined in detail later in this article. The neo-reactionary oriented paradigm, as exemplified in Land's work (see Land, 2012) and often termed right-accelerationism, embraces the project of capitalism. In contrast, the techno-fix paradigm, termed left-accelerationism, adopts the modernity project, as exemplified in the work of Williams and Srnicek (2014). This division also helps to clarify what is to be accelerated and how. Right accelerationism seeks to accelerate techno-capitalism itself, in its absolute form. Left accelerationism views capitalism as a structure unable to release the productive forces of technology or indeed as a structure that channels its forces into systems of oppression. Capitalism can be adapted to serve transformative ends but this requires collective action, directed (technocratically) towards emancipatory ends. It is thus the *transformation* of capitalism to be accelerated – a restrained acceleration of techno-capitalism – that characterises left accelerationism.

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In addition to Culp's tripartite division there is one final, darker, theoretical category of accelerationism, a nihilistic approach abandoning both capitalism and modernity. This version endeavours to accelerate not to reform, transform or intensify capitalism, but to expedite its annihilation. As this version has yet to attract attention beyond its use as a science fiction trope, it will not be examined in this article, leaving three options as the focus for accelerationism: to reform, to transform or to intensify capitalism.

These three approaches address the "inestimable threat and liberatory promise" (Gardiner, 2017: 32) marking the contemporary political and theoretical challenge posed by capitalism in very different ways. Each approach emphasises different tensions that its version of accelerationism is invoked to tackle. Evaluating how elements from accelerationism's prehistory guide the arrangement and reassembly of components to address these tensions is crucial in understanding the logic of each version of accelerationism. These themes will be examined in the following two sections.

Deterritorialising Capital/ism

> Deterritorialization is the only thing accelerationism has ever really talked about (Land, 2017)

The different strains of accelerationism in the different waves assemble their components from a common and restricted pool of concepts to very different effects. Accelerationism is a strategic response to the perceived failure of any of the variations of capitalist systems to deliver on its promises, particularly the efficient and appropriate distribution of resources. It is not, however, a unified theory converging on a specific diagnosis of contemporary

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capitalism. Nor is it a means to address the implied political and organisational malfunctions of capitalism, nor does it provide a vision of the ultimate destination to which it transitions. It is equally, as Gardiner observes, an attempt to "shake up a moribund Left that cannot envisage an end to neoliberal hegemony, or else foresees an ever more apocalyptic turn marked by ecological collapse, societal breakdown and a resurgent neo-fascism" (Gardiner, 2017: 30). Accelerationism constitutes a techno-political imaginary as much as a strategic break with neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has become synonymous with modernisation, but market forces are proving unable to unlock the revolutionary potential afforded by emerging technologies. Information and communication technologies, initially developed under the auspices of the military, are being commercialised and exploited to produce powerful corporate monopolies, often focussed on distributing trivially differentiated goods and services or serving primarily as advertising platforms for the promotion of such products. The sloganistic longing to end capitalism by intensifying capitalism seems paradoxical, but reflects the very reasonable view that contemporary capitalism represents not dynamism but stagnation. This argument needs to be made with a degree of nuance and turning to Deleuze and Guattari will be helpful at this point.

Deleuze and Guattari's work has been highly influential in the emergence of accelerationism in each of its iterations and their re-evaluation of capitalism – a core theme of accelerationism – is at the centre of their project. This project is in many ways a manifesto of revolutionary striving. It is, however, a revolution in rethinking social and political institutions, an approach that begins by developing new perspectives on desire, movement, production and the relationships they afford:

> But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? - 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, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, […] 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. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 239-240)

For Deleuze and Guattari, relationships in contemporary capitalism are mediated or measured through a single territory – capital, which reduces all other entities to commodities to be exchanged i.e. it quantifies each entity to the uniform territory of capital, and facilitates their circulation through a single system of exchange. The exact nature of these flows is of less relevance – anything can be commodified – it is instead that the *process of exchange* is unfaltering that is of most importance. Unlike Marxism, for Deleuze and Guattari the focus is not on overthrowing capitalism, but subverting the force through which capitalism maintains its structure. This reemphasis draws on the very tension at the heart of capitalism i.e. that it grounds all the intensities of experience into a single flow but, at the same time, it is a flow that can be repurposed to open up new possibilities for thinking as its capacity for decoding increases. Deleuze and Guattari address this firstly by rethinking the connections through which entities are organised and assembled. For example, labour power can be deterritorialised from the means of production but is also subject to reterritorialization by being rerouted to an alternative means of production, such as 'self-employed' taxi driver. Secondly, their focus is on expenditure and excess for its own sake, in order to unleash desire from the coded flow of production that reterritorialize it merely for the sake of private surplus accumulation and the interests such accumulation process serves:

The more the capitalist machine deterritorializes, decoding and axiomatizing flows in order to extract surplus value from them, the more its ancillary

apparatuses, such as government bureaucracies and the forces of law and order, do their utmost to reterritorialize, absorbing in the process a larger and larger share of surplus value. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 34-35)

While for Deleuze and Guattari there is no single concept on which their analysis pivots, this is a useful place to begin in evaluating their contribution to the conceptual underpinning of accelerationism. Their analysis of desire, which serves as a critique of psychoanalysis and a critique of contemporary modes of thought in general, draws their argument together. For Deleuze and Guattari, the unconscious is akin to a factory: it is productive and machinic. Desire, as unconscious, does not therefore possess representative substance and consequently does not lack an object to satiate any such depletion of satisfaction. The object I desire is not something I lack, but embodies an interruption in connectivity. This is because for Deleuze and Guattari desire is not a discrete sensation regarding/towards an object but is instead a continuous, creative force expressing productive and assembling characteristics:

Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is rather the subject that is missing in desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 26)

As the argument unfolds in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari indicate that the deterritorialising/reterritorialising features that characterise capitalism embody the only approach able to effectively channel and harness the productive forces of desire. Capitalist – and hence *social* – production is thus impelled by desiring production. This is a crucial argument for accelerationism, both left and right. As much as Deleuze and Guattari's approach to desiring production helps to underpin accelerationism, accelerationist assumptions help to shape the various conceptual innovations in Deleuze and Guattari's work – Body Without Organs (BWO), intensity, desiring-machines, coded flows, assemblage, etc.,

– and provide a framework to explore and revive the more radical implications that remain dormant. This interdependency will be examined in the next section.

Components assembled?

The literature examined in the previous sections of this article cover many complex themes in rather broad strokes. Williams and Srnicek do not unpack and justify the philosophical underpinnings of accelerationism in any detail, nor does Noys unpack and critique them, certainly not to the demanding requirements of those hoping to map (as a critical cartography?) its ontological contours or model key features of its assemblage. This is partly because of a lack of consensus concerning how such a system fits together, and partly because accelerationism is as much an aesthetic and political thought experiment as a philosophical or political programme to be held up to rigorous scrutiny (see also O'Sullivan, 2017). Nevertheless, there are a number of key concepts and components able to provide more clarity to the workings of an accelerationist paradigm. The scope of this article is to sketch some of the connections between these components and provide some sense of the bifurcation points between the different forms of accelerationism. As discussed earlier, Noys has identified three axes of concepts. Noys presents them as predominantly antagonistic, but they also represent different ways of synthesising Freud and Marx into a type of libidinal manifestation of theorising.

Attempts to synthesise Marx and Freud was not a product of the events of 1968 – Frankfurt School intellectuals such as Marcuse and Fromm, in addition to other prominent thinkers such as Althusser, had produced a variety of alternative versions in the 1950s and early 1960s. The difference in the post-'68 syntheses can be characterised in the features to be

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captured and operationalised by a specific fusion of conceptual constituents, not least through the lens of Nietzsche's growing influence, as filtered through Heidegger or Bataille, or through emerging scholarship, as exemplified by Klossowski and Deleuze.

This blending of conceptual elements enables Baudrillard to identify limitations with the prevailing economic analysis of capitalism, enabling him to address these limitations by focussing on the way desire is channelled through symbolic exchange. For Baudrillard, it is consumption rather than production that is the main driver of capitalism i.e. the ideological genesis of needs precedes the production of goods to meet those needs. In the age of digital code, sign value and symbolic exchange, opposites begin to collapse and features thought essential for consumer goods – utility, functionality, beauty – are no longer relevant in consumer choice, if indeed they ever were fundamental characteristics and not merely fetishized social relations. Instead, in accordance with their libidinal values inseparable from the intensities embodied by desire, consumers become seduced by the object of fascination and accordingly converge towards system extremities. The social escalates to hyper-conformity, the real to hyperreality, sex to pornography, movement to speed, ugliness to the monstrous, and truth accelerates into the truer than true, i.e. simulation. These and other aspirations leading to excess exemplify Baudrillard's fatal strategy, unfolding from the world's oldest profession: the commodification of coupling.

This transformation, complexification or intensification of capitalism occurs because desire itself is complex, carrying within it inhuman, machinic and masochistic predispositions. The exploitative character of capitalism isn't resisted but often finds willing submission; it isn't merely endured but enjoyed. Lyotard, for example, develops this argument through the libidinal character of capitalism and detailing the machinic fragmentation generated by

capitalist processes. The implications are that capitalism both shapes and feeds off the desire materialising from its oppressive tendencies, but, following Klossowski, Lyotard also concludes that the exploited worker participates willingly, enjoying "the mad destruction of their organic body which was indeed imposed upon them" (Lyotard, 1993: 111)

These libidinal manifestations of theory relate very well with Deleuze and Guattari's attempt to examine the relationship between bodies. As with the body of capital, a human body is defined in terms of its dynamic and kinetic capacities, rather than the functioning of the organs that comprise it. Using the Artaud-inspired notion of Body without Organs (BwO) Deleuze and Guattari, redefine production and organisation, linking them to the processes (folding; evolving; stratification; etc.) that constitute desire, such that "orientations, axes, speeds and rhythms are primary to the organization and structure of any body" (Young *et al.,* 2013: 52). As with many of their key concepts, explaining the relevance of BwO requires positioning it within Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual scheme, an undertaking which goes far beyond the scope of this article; nevertheless, a number of relevant observations can be made at this stage on its relevance to accelerationism. The BwO is a virtual plane from which the assemblage of the fragmented elements of any specific body emerges, but without reducing the relationship to a predetermined functionality or unity. Additionally, the concept is used in order to capture the intensity of attracting and repelling forces ascending from this virtual plane. The BwO is neither a body nor an image but represents an embryological conception of the body that distinguishes the dynamic components of the body that generate and channel flows that exceed the body, including the flow of desire that becomes deterritorialised by capital:

> Capitalism tends toward a threshold of decoding that will destroy the socius in order to make it a body without organs and unleash the flows of desire on this body as a deterritorialized field (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 33)

The BwO has its own mode of organisation: a well-constructed BwO is productive through its *inertia* by allowing flows and intensities to intersect it without interruption or resistance. In this way, flows of desire remain engaged in a continuous process of becoming.

The final component to be examined is derived from Georges Bataille's attempt to engage Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. Bataille developed a number of concepts with which to challenge prevailing assumption and theory; however, here the focus will be on how he addresses the often-unquestioned assumptions within the ideology of economic thinking. A key assumption is that the modern economy functions effectively by efficiently processing scarce resources into marketable commodities, which are distributed through markets, as coordinated through the price mechanism. Bataille frames this set of assumptions as a 'restricted economy' paradigm and contrasts this with his own evaluation of flows of energy, expenditure and practices centred on excess, which represent a 'general economy' paradigm:

> the extension of economic growth itself requires the overturning of economic principles – the overturning of the ethics that grounds them. Changing from the perspectives of restrictive economy to those of general economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking – and of ethics. If a part of wealth (subject to a rough estimate) is doomed to destruction or at least to unproductive use without any possible profit, it is logical, even inescapable, to surrender commodities without return (Bataille, 1988: 25)

Rather than scarcity, the general economy is defined by its abundance, in particular the excess of (solar) energy and the profusion afforded by the chemistry of life. This energy provides for growth and development, but there are limits to expansion for each ecological system and, eventually as it expands, an organism, an organisational arrangement or social group (or other such assemblages) will encounter these limits. This implies that part of the economy is to be surrendered on base matter. This part – the 'accursed share' as referred to in the title of Bataille's work – is the part to be lavished either on frivolous luxuries, such as spectacles and monuments, or squandered on much darker purposes, such as the destructive sacrifices of war. The way an organisational arrangement or culture is able to channel energy to serve its growth and renewal expresses much detail about its structure; however, for Bataille, it is how the *excess* is directed that characterises and defines it. How base materialism is synthesised with libidinal materialism and how Bataille's general economy defines (and is defined within) the contours of a libidinal economy will be examined in terms of the different approaches to accelerationism in the following section.

Accelerationism and/as critique

> Accelerationism is simply the self-awareness of capitalism, which has scarcely begun. ("We haven't seen anything yet.") (Land, 2017)

Returning to accelerationism with a clearer perspective on key aspects of its conceptual underpinnings helps in assessing the type of critique to which it is susceptible. This also enables a clearer assessment of the value recuperated from it and the components able to provide insights into theories relevant to management, marketing and organisations.

Firstly, the type of accelerationism premised on the need to hasten the pace at which the inherent contradictions of capitalism appear, in order to provoke an inevitable – and irrecuperable – crisis, one which enables it to advance to a new and preferable form of post-capitalism, would merely be redundant. Canonical Marxism requires no additional 'supplements' to make this argument. It is also unclear how retrofitting accelerationism to a fairly adequate account of a dialectical unfolding of capitalist logic contributes to dialectical materialist thought or, indeed, how such thought informs accelerationist logic.

Secondly, accelerationism, both left and right, can be characterised in terms of the conceptual location(s) from which they pivot in their acceptance or rejection of the facets of modernity and capitalism and their prioritisation. I will present the argument through a limited number of texts, focussing on the work of Nick Land to illustrate right accelerationism contrasted with the work of Williams and Srnicek as the clearest example of left accelerationism.

The work of Nick Land prioritises above all *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984) and particularly its vocabulary and conceptual framework for mapping productive desire onto cybernetic-productive processes. Land aligns himself with the machinic against (the ethics of) anthropocentricism:

> Machinic desire can seem a little inhuman as it rips up political cultures, deletes traditions, dissolves subjectivities […] This is because what appear to humanity as the history of capitalism is an invasion from the future by an artificial intelligent space that must assemble itself entirely from its enemy's resources (Land, 1993: 479)

These forces do not accelerate towards a post-capitalist future, but instead to a specific intensification of capitalism. For Land, capitalism isn't a system defined by commodity form or its mode of production, but a convergent undermining of conservative social forces, including "the collapse of productive mode or form in the direction of ever incomprehensive experiments in commodification, enveloping, dismantling, and circulating every subjective space […] melting the earth into a body without organs" (Land, 1993: 479). Land's attention is therefore focussed on the flow of matter though the mechanosphere of abstract machines in shaping its emerging anastrophe or confluence. This fusion of cybernetics and capitalism serve to feed the process of socio-historical acceleration, transforming everything into capital, leading (inevitably) to an apocalypse for humanity, but this is, at the same time, an antihumanist anastrophism.

> Naturally – which is to say completely inevitably – the human species will define this ultimate terrestrial event as a problem. To see it is already to say: We have to do something. To which accelerationism can only respond: You're finally saying that now? Perhaps we ought to get started? In its colder variants, which are those that win out, it tends to laugh (Land, 2017)

Following Bataille, Land's conclusion is that any species persists only as long as it feeds off and *feeds into* the organisational arrangements channelling energy: "The primordial task of life is not to produce or survive, but to consume the clogging flow of riches – of energy pouring down upon it…[and in this way] Energy is put in the *service* of the future" (Land, 1992: 33-34) For Land, as for accelerationists left and right, the deterritorialising consequences of capitalism will engineer its breakdown. The difference between the approaches is the degree to which the breakdown is a break *through*. For Land, acceleration is and must be, ever deeper into itself: capitalism's implosion implies modernity's explosion:

> [Capitalism] has no conceivable meaning beside self-amplification. It grows
> in order to grow. Mankind is its temporary host, not its master. Its only
> purpose is itself…The point of an analysis of capitalism, or of nihilism, is to
> do more of it. The process is not to be critiqued. The process *is* the critique,
> feeding back into itself, as it escalates. (Land, 2017)

Land concludes his analysis by returning to the familiar accelerationist mantra: the only way forward is through, which means penetrating further and deeper.

In contrast, left accelerationism is premised on developing a politics of the unconscious able to reorient relationships and connectivity: hierarchy is replaced with meshworks, with dominant forms (literally) decentred, such that potential desiring connections are multiplied, with all productions of the unconscious made equivalent and their connectivity pursued:

> Every abstract machine is linked to other abstract machines, not only because
> they are inseparably political, economic, scientific, artistic, ecological,
> cosmic—perceptive, affective, active, thinking, physical, and semiotic—but
> because their various types are as intertwined as their operations are
> convergent. Mechanosphere (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 514)

Williams and Srnicek's manifesto for an Accelerationist politics (MAP) posit such a post-capitalist agenda. They identify a series of crises, each of which is urgently in need of substantial coordinated political action. They contrast this urgency with the inactivity, ambivalence or inappropriate responses proposed, in particular the more-of-the-same solution offered by a new (and unimproved) *neoliberalism 2.0*. The alternative MAP proposal is to repurpose capitalism in order to direct resources, socio-political attention and technologies towards addressing existing crises, serving the collective good and reform implementation.

The repurposing involves rejecting the 'folk politics' of traditional (and ephemeral) social-movement-type protests, with their emphasis on the human scale, reaction to change, personal, local, single issue, involvement. Instead it emphasises larger, ambitious and complex strategic responses. In this way they focus on experimentation to provide examples for cultural hegemony strategies and, ultimately, a resonant vision of a future 'promethean' modernity: a technologically enhanced post-work, post-exploitation, postcapitalism. Some additional detail of this transition is presented in *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without work* (Williams and Srnicek, 2015). They suggest a positive vision of modernity based on dismantling hierarchies, promoting universal human values, expanding automation of work and labour-saving technology and decoupling work from income. The prominence they give to a universal basic income and on de-emphasising the work ethic draws on a post-scarcity economy, which like Bataille's general economy is defined by its abundance, but an abundance squandered by the negligence of (neoliberal) capitalism. The opportunity to ensure this wealth is circulated is by making capitalism responsive to, and expanding on, its broader successes through applied technology, appropriate investment and an expansion of digitisation and other factors supporting the sharing economy/platform capitalism. In addition, Williams and Srnicek suggest greater investment in scholarly research and modelling the impact of potentially supportive policies as part of the promotional and directing process in building a popular movement firmly on the left of the political spectrum, although failing to address the question posed by Shaviro (2015), of how exactly to facilitate the transition to such a post-capitalist future.

Returning to Noys' *Malign Velocities* (Noys, 2014), there are a number of key observations to address the challenge posed by these different versions of accelerationism. Noys begins his conclusion by claiming that Williams and Srnicek's approach to accelerationism is merely

a reworking of "Nick Land's '90s vision, suggesting that we need to split speed from acceleration" (Noys, 2014: 95) and, as such, an accelerationist critique of accelerationism; however, Land makes the more astute observation that Williams and Srnicek have been successful at awakening the conceptual underpinnings of accelerationism, although unsuccessful in addressing an ideologically alternative. It is not speed that is the issue, Noys' evaluation misses a far more important issue: left accelerationism depends upon an artificial distinction between capitalism and modernistic technological acceleration and, in addition, the need to reinsert human agency and (traditional) socialist politics to operationalise this distinction and render it 'navigational' (see also Land, 2017).

> If we want to counter accelerationism, as I do then we have to address how an alternative political sensibility might define itself not simply as a mode of misery (Noys, 2014: 101)

Noys' response is to propose a break with the forces of acceleration by introducing a friction able to interrupt "the fundamental accelerationist fantasy of smooth integration" (Noys, 2014: 103). This is a friction (or resistance) able to sustain different types of struggle but at the same time without offering false consolation, misplaced hope, empty cynicism or despair. Noys also emphasises attention to the *aesthetic* of such moments of friction, "which encode the tension accelerationism wishes to dissolve" (Noys 2014: 104). This is, however, exactly the type of friction Williams and Srnicek identify with folk politics, the type that for Nick Land provides a futile gesture in the face of an absolute horizon that is closing in. Indeed, it is exactly the type of friction and resistance culminating in the "May '68" events whose failure inspired the first wave of accelerationist in the first place, and a friction that offers little more than a reterritorialization of the forces of desire, libido and death that each wave of accelerationism attempts to unshackle.

As Noys himself observes: "the few scattered anti-accelerationist critiques of our present moment often seem to leave untouched the libidinal core of accelerationism" (Noys, 2014: 94). Since the publication of Noys' book, accelerationism has received more critical attention and yet its libidinal core remains largely intact. It is from this core (rather than the various political programmes and neo-rational manifestations, which are largely the focus of Noys critique) that the real transformation emerges, and to which the article will now turn.

Well, is there a Future for Accelerationism?

> "the only true image of revolution: a future so different that it no longer resembles the present" (Culp, 2018: 168)

The future for accelerationism has not been cancelled due to lack of interest. If, however, it fails to engage with (and foster) concepts, then it becomes little more than a passing fad, a has-been politician proclaiming "I was the future once" as they exit the political stage. This article is thus not an attempt to accelerate itself or exemplify accelerationism but to interrogate the conditions and features (and conceptual underpinnings) appropriate for promoting accelerationist strategies. This is an important distinction because the implications of accelerationism for management, marketing and organisational research are not so much in its political manifestation but instead through the insights afforded by its conceptual underpinnings, particularly in addressing the challenge of commandeering capitalism's mechanisms without conforming to its prevailing ideology.

Accelerationism provides many entryways to address this challenge, from Mark Fisher's critique of the machinery of self-surveillance and business ontology (Fisher, 2009: 80), Nick

Land's viral "planetary technocapital singularity" (Land, 2003: 479) or the MAP's three point plan of media reform, intellectual infrastructure development and the reconstitution of class power (Williams and Srnicek, 2014). This article's entryway will be to focus its analysis on the underlying conceptual theme of assemblage, a concept of fundamental importance in shaping accelerationist implications for organisational research. In particular, it will focus on Deleuze and Guattari's mapping of assemblages as an attempt to reimagine production and transformation and use this analysis to address Shaviro's question concerning the process of transition to a post-capitalist future:

> We think the material or machinic aspect of an assemblage relates not to the
>
> production of goods but rather to a precise state of intermingling of bodies in
>
> a society (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 90)

Connecting material features this way implies a new type of organisational structure to displace simple hierarchies, markets and networks. Unlike neoliberal narratives of commodified production and exchange, to capture the material flows and machinic relationships requires positioned them within their underlying assemblages (*agencement*) – each of which is defined not merely through its heterogeneous composition, but the constructive process organising its specific arrangement of flows.

Conceptualised this way, assemblages (and the assemblage concept) supplant exchange structures and as a consequence, appropriate some of the machinery of capitalism and enhance assemblage connectivity beyond exchange relationships. Perceived this way, the assemblage concept offers a useful means of conceiving and operationalising a variety of facets envisaged by accelerationism. If the first volume of capitalism and schizophrenia (*Anti-Oedipus*) characterises the logic of accelerationism, the concept of 'assemblage'

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provides a general logic of Deleuze and Guattari's second volume (*A Thousand Plateaus*), which in turn presents their detailed response to the challenge posed by their earlier characterisation. Accelerationist strategies and tactics are thus enhanced by a better understanding of the assemblages that they aim to transform:

> Once we understand how the assemblage functions, we will be in a better position to perform diagnosis: to direct or shape the assemblage toward increasingly revolutionary aims (Nail, 2017: 37)

Indeed, where Guattari is most explicit about the shaping of post-capitalism, he refers to a "third type of processual Assemblage" (Guattari, 1995: 105) structuring the new aesthetic paradigm. This paradigm encompasses certain types of (assemblage) relationships within and between science, technology, philosophy and culture, which reside in embryonic form within our extant experience. Although Guattari fits awkwardly into the accelerationist canon, the route he plots to a post-capitalist future is a transition between assemblages that works with/works through technoscience paradigms: "It is installed transversally to technoscience because technoscience's machinic Phylums are in essence creative" (Guattari, 1995: 107).

Clarifying the relevance of the assemblage concept for addressing accelerationist themes is made more pressing by the growing body of literature that seeks to appropriate assemblage theory to serve the purposes of mainstream business and management (see Buchanan, 2015). The emergence of this body of literature is largely due to DeLanda's Assemblage Theory (2006; 2016). DeLanda attempts to provide a system capable of explaining and modelling patterns of change emerging through the interaction of different types of entity. This approach serves to detail and describe the synthetic processes sustaining, shaping and modifying network-like entities, but as DeLanda freely admits:

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I will give my own definitions of the technical terms, use my own arguments

to justify them and use entirely different theoretical resources to develop

them…Readers who feel the theory developed here is not strictly speaking

Deleuze's own are welcome to call it 'neo-assemblage theory' (DeLanda,

2006, p. 4)

DeLanda's (neo-)assemblage theory provides a 'tracing' of the assemblage concept, i.e. a

ready-made configuration, a system for organising, stabilising and neutralising its

components. In contrast, Deleuze and Guattari insist on mapping assemblages, i.e. convey

the diagram of the code of its operation and additionally *foster* its connectivity: "Make a map,

not a tracing" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 12).

Conceptualised as mapping, assemblages have only contingent and singular features and their

productivity is interdependent with the relationships formed within a network of socio-

historical processes. As such, vast networks of processes shape the mechanisms of

capitalism, including: i) what these mechanisms might become; and, ii) defining the

relationships they are capable of forming. This provides clarity for accelerationist

approaches in focussing their efforts on mapping the appropriate types of assemblages in

order to simultaneously harness capitalist mechanisms and to subject them to the appropriate

type of transformation. The more promising routes for accelerationist thinking can thus be

drawn from: i) the type of structure; ii) the assemblage typology; and, iii) its modes of

transformation.

Of the different typology of assemblages, characteristic capitalist assemblages can be

recognised by their tendency to decode relationships through the privatisation of social

entities, repackaging them into marketable commodities and ultimately globally

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exchangeable quantities. These will offer the clearest opportunities to launch any transition to the formation of relationships appropriate for post-capitalist politics.

Turning to the transition of such capitalist assemblages means focussing on a second set of features i.e., assemblages are also constituted by combinations of different processes of change, or modes of deterritorialisation. These can be distilled into four transformation types: i) "relative negative" processes that change an assemblage in order to maintain an established assemblage; ii) "relative positive" processes that do not reproduce an established assemblage, but do not yet create a new assemblage; iii) "absolute negative" processes that do not support any assemblage, but undermine them; and, iv) "absolute positive" processes that do not reproduce an established assemblage but instead create new assemblages (see Nail, 2017: 34). Accelerationist tendencies are thus best harnessed through absolute positive deterritorialisation:

> The most deterritorialized element causes the other element to cross a threshold enabling a conjunction of their respective deterritorializations, a shared acceleration. This is the abstract machine's absolute, positive deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 142)

Crossing this threshold amplifies and accelerates connective processes at work within existing assemblages to form new assemblages. The purpose of this type of transformation is prefigurative and, to a degree, hyperstitional: it "constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 142) and as such constructs the new types of political imaginary, the theme with which this article begins.

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To conclude, then, theorising the diverse possibilities of post-capitalism and promoting an appropriate political imaginary implies exploring the many entryways afforded by assemblage mapping. The 'becoming revolutionary' of an assemblage requires a situational rethinking specific to its features. The future of accelerationism, *as a future*, means reengaging with the approaches embodied in the various waves and, following Nathan Widder's suggestion, consider that: "here are some strategies that have been used [in the unfolding of the relevant assemblages] … now go invent your own" (Widder, 2014, p. 304). This should not focus just on speeding up the machinery of capitalism, but also to examine/map other possibilities of its transformation and their implications for the libidinal core underpinning the theory:

> Absolute deterritorialization is not defined as a giant accelerator; its absoluteness does not hinge on how fast it goes. It is actually possible to reach the absolute by way of phenomena of relative slowness or delay (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 56)

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