

Cyborg Anamnesis: #Accelerate's Feminist Prototypes

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Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the 1980s" remains a major reference point for twenty-first century cyber- and techno- feminists. However, its broader political and philosophical relevance has become increasingly obscured. The emergence of twenty-first century accelerationism, I will argue, calls for renewed engagement with Haraway's iconic text. Through bringing accelerationism into contact with cyborg ontology, I aim to show how accelerationism might benefit from further engagement with the history of technofeminist thought. Such engagement, I will argue, not only assists in clarifying what accelerationism is, but also contributes to developing what it might be, through providing productive responses to some of its major criticisms. In reconfiguring the cyborg as an "accelerationist prototype," I hope to contribute to the ongoing elaboration of accelerationist politics, as well as demonstrate the continuing and perhaps increasing efficacy of technofeminist philosophy in the twenty-first century.

Introduction

Accelerationism's technofeminist history is being made increasingly apparent. Both Laboria Cuboniks' "Xenofeminist Manifesto"—the latest in a string of techno- and cyber-feminist manifestoes dating back to that of Donna Haraway—and the recent publication of *Dea ex Machina*—a feminist genealogy of accelerationism incorporating texts from Shulamith Firestone, Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Nina Power, and others—represent concerted attempts to re-situate accelerationism “within the rich and provocative context of nearly fifty years of feminist theorizing about sex, gender, and technology” (Avanessian and Hessler, 2015).

Although the ongoing influence of Haraway's cyborg ontology upon twenty-first century technofeminism remains widely acknowledged, her broader political and philosophical import is seldom taken seriously¹. The emergence of twenty-first century accelerationism², I will argue, calls for renewed engagement with her work³. Whilst Haraway's cyborg ontology predates accelerationism by almost 30 years, many of accelerationism's provisions are not only present, but explicitly theorised in her text. Both manifestoes represent a call to technological arms—a future-oriented optimism driven by an appreciation for our essential artificiality. The “illegitimate offspring” of capitalist hegemony, cyborgs and

¹ For an explanation as to why Donna Haraway's more recent work may have caused her to be (unjustifiably) dismissed politically, see Isabelle Stenger's "Wondering about Materialism." In L. Bryant, G. Harman, and N. Srnicek (Ed.s). (2011). *The Speculative Turn: Continental Realism and Materialism* (p. 371).

² Throughout this paper, the use of the word “accelerationism” refers specifically to the contemporary phenomenon of “Left accelerationism,” inaugurated in 2013 with the publication of Alex Williams' and Nick Srnicek's “#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics.” It refers neither to the 1970's French Hyperleft (Deleuze, Lyotard, Baudrillard etc.) identified as “accelerationists” by Benjamin Noys, nor to Nick Land's 1990's techno-determinism (and its evolution) which is sometimes referred to as “Right accelerationism.” See the section entitled Reorientation > Revolution for an explanation of the distinction between accelerationism and techno-determinism.

³ This emergence also calls for renewed engagement with the broader traditions of techno- and cyber- feminism—political/ philosophical traditions pioneered by feminists such as Shulamith Firestone, Donna Haraway, Sadie Plant, and Sandy Stone. Whilst Shulamith Firestone and Sadie Plant have been included in *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, the selected texts are not representative of their more radical technofeminist tendencies. Firestone's analysis of the resemblance between the sex dualism and the two modes of cultural history (the technological mode and the aesthetic mode) is the closest we get to technofeminism in the reader. Plant only appears in collusion with Nick Land and the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU), even though she has written her own book-length history of the intersections between women, feminism, machines and information technology. See Plant, S. (1997). *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women + The New Technoculture*. London: Fourth Estate.

accelerationists see themselves as neither innocent nor revolutionary. According to Haraway, as well as the accelerationists, appeals to nature, authenticity, and “original unity” are symptoms of an impotent left caught in a web of essentialism and fideism. By dispensing with such appeals, we can focus upon regenerating and re-engineering new futures.

Importantly, this paper does not undertake to “expose” (and thereby ordain) Haraway as *the* unavowed archetype of accelerationism—congratulating her for prefiguring a movement. Rather, it is an effort to construct a mutant politics—something which, I will argue, emerges out of the *interaction between* these two texts. What motivates this paper is the incapacity for either Enlightenment humanism or post-modern nihilism to reconfigure the future in the twenty-first century. Through bringing accelerationism into dialogue with Haraway’s cyborg ontology, I aim to show how these “mutants” might hold the key to such a reconfiguration. Of interest are not the endless analogies we could draw between the two texts, but rather, the “mutant insurgencies” they make possible—three of which will be explored in the latter half of this paper. In uncovering these operative philosophical processes, I hope to highlight the continuing (and perhaps increasing) efficacy of technofeminist thought and politics in the twenty-first century.

Reorientation > Revolution

Accelerationism is an attempt to reposition the Left with regard to rationality and techno-social development. Dissatisfied with established Leftisms, which continue to “hold to a folk politics of localism, direct action, and relentless horizontalism,” accelerationists seek to develop new macro-political strategies, capable of navigating and utilising “abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology” (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 354). What distinguishes accelerationism from established Leftisms is the claim that, “the material platform of neoliberalism does not need to be destroyed,” but merely “repurposed towards common ends” (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 355): the future depends upon reorientation rather than revolution. Instead of abjuring technological and scientific advances “tainted” by capital, accelerationists aim to take advantage of these developments and reprogramme them towards post-capitalist ends (Williams and Srnicek, 2014).

Naturally, accelerationism’s proposals have caused controversy. There is something immediately unsettling about the suggestion that we simply “commandeer” capitalist infrastructure and steer it towards newer and better ends. Apart from sounding like a return to naive humanism—the critique of which post-structuralists laboured over for decades—the injunction to “accelerate” elsewhere comes across as a nihilistic call to mindlessly escalate technological development. This latter reading gives rise to the mischaracterisation of accelerationism “as a kind of twenty-first century Futurism, concerned primarily with brute virility and machinic speed” (Avanessian and Hester, 2015). Whilst such characterisations are applicable to particular techno-deterministic variants of accelerationism—specifically the later writings of Nick Land—they cannot be so easily applied to the accelerationism put forward by Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek (2014).

Land’s “hypnotic” techno-determinism maintains “that capitalist speed alone could generate a global transition towards unparalleled technological singularity” (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 351). However, as Williams and Srnicek (2014, pp. 351-352) argue, this kind of “speed” moves only within a “strictly defined set of capitalist parameters that themselves never waver.” Whilst neoliberal capitalism presents itself as the accelerationist system *par excellence*—its “essential metabolism” demanding economic growth, necessitating increased deregulation, and “setting free” social and technological innovation—Williams and Srnicek (2014, p. 355) maintain that capitalism actually *inhibits* acceleration: “patent wars and idea monopolisation,” they argue, “point to both capital’s need to move beyond competition, and capital’s increasingly retrograde approach to technology.” Instead of space travel, environmental innovation, and the exploration of the revolutionary potential of new technologies, “we exist in a time where the only thing which develops is marginally better consumer gadgetry” (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 355). For them, the perceived “speed” of technological innovation under capitalism is nothing more than “the increasing speed of a local horizon, a simple brain-dead onrush” (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 352).

Accelerationism can be distinguished from techno-determinism in the following way: whilst the latter takes capitalist acceleration to be inherently (or perhaps, inevitably) liberating, the former takes

acceleration to be a strategic process, necessitating socio-political action and technological experimentation. Whilst accelerationists acknowledge that technological development is necessary for addressing social conflicts, they also recognise that technology alone is inadequate for this purpose —“Never believe that technology will be sufficient to save us” (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 356). Without socio-political action, both social *and* technological change remain foreclosed. For Williams and Srnicek (2014, p. 360), acceleration is not an inevitable “effect” of capitalism, but rather, the result of an ongoing “positive feedback loop of infrastructural, ideological, social, and economic transformation.” The point of accelerationism is neither to “halt” capitalist momentum, nor to mindlessly “unleash” it, but rather, to engage in a strategic process of reorientation with it.

According to accelerationists, progressive political discourse in the twenty-first century remains incapacitated in the face of the increasingly complex and abstract forces of globally-integrated capital. Up until now, Leftist reasoning has proceeded according to the assumption that “if modernity = progress = capitalism = acceleration, then the only possible resistance amounts to deceleration” (Avanessian and Mackay, 2014, pp. 5-6). Such decelerative reasoning tends to manifest in fantasies of “return”—“return” to Keynesian socialism, “return” to collective organic self-sufficiency, “return” to primitivist localism, etc. In opposition to this phantasmic horizontalism—which tends to fetishise the past and wait for the future—accelerationism attempts to reorientate the present. This necessitates utilising tools and processes ordinarily eschewed by the Left. As Williams and Srnicek write,

Quantification is not an evil to be eliminated, but a tool to be used in the most effective manner possible...The tools to be found in social network analysis, agent-based modelling, big data analytics, and non-equilibrium economic models, are necessary cognitive mediators for understanding complex systems like the modern economy. The accelerationist Left must become literate in these technical fields. (2014, p. 356-357)

Thus, “between the prescription [from the established Left] for nothing but despair and an excitable description [from techno-determinism] that, at most, contributes infinitesimally to Skynet's burgeoning self-awareness,” accelerationists maintain that “a space for action can be constructed” (Mackay and Avanessian, 2014, p. 35). Neither fideistic withdrawal, nor thanatropic ascension, signal a “way out” for accelerationists. It is only through *combining* socio-political action with technological experimentation that we can commandeer the “braindead onrush” of capitalist “progress,” and steer it toward “the universal possibilities of the Outside” (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 362). This means preserving “the gains of late capitalism while going further than its value system, governance structures, and mass pathologies will allow” (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 354).

Whilst accelerationism aligns itself with speculative philosophy—emphasising the importance of future-oriented inventiveness over revision and critique—its prescriptions are only comprehensible in terms of the dissolution of traditional political and philosophical dualisms: capitalism/anti-capitalism, humanism/anti-humanism, rationalism/post-structuralism. Accelerationists are often taken to be endorsing the former over the latter in each of these cases. Such misunderstandings arise from the reader's inability to see beyond polemical categorisations. If accelerationists seek to “preserve the gains of late capitalism,” they must be capitalists, if they advocate for “maximal mastery over society and its environment,” they must be naive humanists, if they promote rationalism they must be patriarchal proto-fascists, etc. Whilst Williams and Srnicek—eager to distinguish themselves from the “contemporary malaise” of the Left—condemn the fetishisation of direct action, openness, horizontality, and localism, they by no means abandon all hope in favour of a dystopian hyper-capitalist future. By contrast, accelerationists seek to develop a new Left hegemony capable of taking advantage of “the technological and scientific advances made possible by capitalist society” (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 356). Such a prescription is only intelligible, however, in light of the dissolution of traditional political and philosophical dualisms. The first chapter of Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* enacts such a dissolution.

Invention > Identification

“From *One Dimensional Man*,” writes Haraway (1991, p. 154), “to *The Death of Nature*, the analytic resources developed by progressives have insisted on the necessary domination of technics and recalled us to an imagined organic body to integrate our resistance.” To Haraway’s disappointment, Leftist political discourse in the latter half of the twentieth century continues to rely upon creation myths that perpetuate phantasmic dualisms: nature/culture, man/machine, material/ideal. According to these myths, “human nature” in all its formulations, “bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour,” is inhibited by the prevailing power structures—i.e. those of patriarchal, colonial, capitalist hegemony (Haraway, 1991, p. 150). Under these circumstances, liberation consists in “unleashing” human nature—that constant source of negativity exceeding any system of oppression—and “harnessing” its transformative potential. Emancipation is thereby a moment of reconciliation, a return to “nature.” Revolution consists in remembering our origins so that we can (re)create, through our social and political institutions, the conditions necessary for the realisation of our original “essence.” The problem with such political discourse, for Haraway, is not *only* that it “misses most of reality” (1991, p. 150) but that it relies upon illusory distinctions—the illusoriness of which becomes undeniable toward the end of the twentieth century.

Leftist creation myths, or “myths of original unity,” rely upon three major dualisms. Namely, (1) the distinction between human and animal, (2) the distinction between organism and machine, and (3) the distinction between the physical and the non-physical (Haraway, 1991). By the late twentieth century, Haraway maintains, developments in science and technology have rendered these dualisms indefensible.

First of all, biology and evolutionary theory have thoroughly breached the boundary between humans and animals. “The last beachheads of uniqueness,” Haraway (1991, p. 152) writes, “have been polluted if not turned into amusement parks—language, tool use, social behaviour, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal.” The transgression of this boundary means that animals and humans can no longer be categorically defined in terms of “nature” and “culture.” This does not, however, resign us to biological determinism. The collapse of the nature/culture boundary, she insists, must not be understood as an appropriation or an incorporation of one category (i.e. “human” or “culture”) into the other category (i.e. “animal” or “nature”). After all, in order for an incorporation to take place, the two categories—and their distinctions—must endure. For Haraway, on the other hand, the collapse of the boundary between humans and animals renders both categories meaningless. What counts as animal and what counts as human is not only thrown into question, but this question itself is henceforth unintelligible—it can no longer be asked. As a result, space is opened up for new questions, new conceptions, and new configurations of life.

The second mythological distinction Haraway addresses is the distinction between organisms and machines. “Late twentieth-century machines,” she writes, “have made thoroughly ambiguous the distinction between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed” (Haraway, 1991, p. 152). The traditional dialectic between idealism and materialism, between “spirit” and “history,” relies upon this dualism of man and machine—the collapse of which ostensibly leads to technological determinism. Again, Haraway refuses to see the transgression of this boundary as an incorporation of one category (i.e. organisms) into the other (i.e. machines). Instead, the collapse of the boundary between organisms and machines challenges oppressive dualisms that continue to pervade dialectical politics—e.g. agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, master/slave. As Haraway (1991, p. 180) maintains, “the machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshipped, or dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines, *they* do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they.” In other words, traditional assumptions regarding the distinction between humans and machine cannot account for late twentieth-century ontologies. Neither the glorification nor the demonisation of technology can assist in developing “a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have [hitherto] explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (Haraway, 1991, p. 181). Most crucially, the mythical ideals of “organic” female embodiment or “natural” (unalienated) labour continue to prevent the responsible construction and deconstruction of new technologies, identities, and political possibilities.

Lastly, Haraway addresses the distinction between the physical and non-physical. “Modern machines,” she writes, “are quintessentially micro-electronic devices: they are everywhere and they are invisible” (Haraway, 1991, p. 153). The miniaturisation and mobilisation of technologies has not only made them portable, it has made them immaterial. “Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are made of nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum” (Haraway, 1991, p. 153). In a world held together by electro-magnetic waves, distinctions between matter and form, physical and immaterial, break down. “Reality” no longer depends upon materiality—it is henceforth fluid, ubiquitous, and invisible. Such metaphysical developments confront politics with major challenges. As Haraway (1991, p. 162) argues, the “movement from an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system” requires that we cease to think in terms of discrete objects, bodies, and spaces and begin to think in terms of “system design.” “In relation to objects like biotic components,” she writes, “one must think not in terms of essential properties, but in terms of design, boundary constraints, rates of flows, systems logics, costs of lowering constraints” (Haraway, 1991, p. 162). Old metaphysical categories must be abandoned if we are to be able to understand and respond to the new forms of domination we face.

The cyborg emerges out of the destruction of Leftist creation myths. Cyborgs are neither human nor animal, neither organic nor artificial, neither physical nor immaterial. In disrupting these distinctions, cyborgs undermine Western traditions of science and politics—i.e. “the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the production of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other” (Haraway, 1991 p. 150). Rather than setting up a “border war” between organisms and machines, cyborg politics takes *responsibility* for the confusion and construction of boundaries. Cyborgs have loose political affiliations—with socialist feminism, with post-modernism, and with utopianism. However cyborgs are not ideological. They are immune from collective identification. They have no origin story and no predetermined destination. As Haraway (1991, p. 180) writes, “A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end; it takes irony for granted.” On the one hand, cyborgs are the end of the apocalyptic telos of Western individualism. On the other, they are the beginning of the possibility for new lived social and bodily realities as well as new political affinities.

Mutant Manifestoes

Despite a thirty-year age gap, Haraway's manifesto resonates deeply with Williams and Srnicek's programme. Both advocate for a techno-literate incursion into capitalist hegemony—an incursion wrought by fragmented bodies and partial identities “spliced” into a collective will for self-mastery. At first glance, the figure of the cyborg looks out of place, even “monstrous,” amongst accelerationism's newly enlightened rationalists. Williams and Srnicek's (2014, p. 360) “positive feedback loop of infrastructural, ideological, social, and economic transformation,” seems eminently sober when juxtaposed with the “spiral dance” of the cyborg—an “infidel heteroglossia...building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories” (Haraway, 1991, p. 181). However Haraway's anti-goddess cannot be relegated to the “tired residue of post-modernity” against which accelerationism pits itself (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 360). Nor can Williams and Srnicek be passed off as part of a new generation of totalitarian essentialists. Whilst Haraway's manifesto was written in the 1980s, at the height of post-structuralism, her reinterpretation of lived experience in terms of technological and scientific materialities—organisms and machines—subverts the tendency for continental philosophy to abjure science and technology. Likewise, whilst Williams and Srnicek associate themselves with enlightenment rationalism, their commitment to harnessing and reorienting the irrational “inhuman” forces of twenty-first century technological acceleration distinguishes their philosophy from “naive” humanism. Accelerationism and cyborg politics are best understood as philosophical anomalies—speculative constructions that break down philosophical border wars. “Mutants” of enlightenment humanism and post-modern nihilism respectively, accelerationists and cyborgs perforate classical political distinctions, disturbing entrenched dogmatism and providing new pathways for thought and action.

The remainder of this paper constitutes a map of “mutant insurgencies.” Both Haraway and Williams and Srnicek, I will argue, deploy conceptual constructions that forge philosophical fault-lines, allowing new political entities to emerge. Three of these “mutant insurgencies” will be considered. Firstly, “prometheanism,” a politics that subverts humanist/anti-humanist, rationalist/post-modernist debates. Secondly, “hyperstition,” a methodology that problematises the relationship between idealism and materialism, fiction and reality. Finally, “oppositional consciousness,” a mode of political identification that prevents essentialist totalisation. Each of these “mutant insurgencies” is made possible in the interaction between Haraway and Williams and Srnicek. Together, the two manifestoes, allow for the elaboration of a new kind of politics—a “mutational politics” that produces inconsistencies by problematising entrenched political and philosophical categories.

Prometheanism

“One is too few, and two is only one possibility,” writes Haraway (1991, p. 180). Cyborg politics replaces the dialectical model of historical transformation with a different model—a model of mutation. Broadly speaking, mutation is a process of permanent change. It is neither natural nor unnatural and consists in deletions, insertions, inversions, or translocations of structural components that produce inconsistencies in replication. According to Haraway, “holistic politics depend on metaphors of rebirth” (1991, p. 181). Cyborgs, she insists, have more to do with regeneration than rebirth. “Rebirth” involves the reification of oppressive essentialisms—not to mention the exploitation of reproductive resources. “Regeneration,” by contrast, is a permanent process of mutation, of change, that induces un-premeditated possibilities. The salamander becomes a kind of “mascot” for mutational politics:

For salamanders, regeneration after injury, such as the loss of a limb, involves regrowth of structure and restoration of function with the constant possibility of twinning or other odd topographical productions at the site of the former injury. The regrown limb can be monstrous, duplicated, potent. We have all been injured, profoundly. We require regeneration, not rebirth. (Haraway, 1991, p. 181)

Cyborg politics is about mutation. It is about disrupting processes of replication, rather than contriving fantasies of rebirth. “The future” will not be “reborn” out of the ashes of the present. In order for there to be a future, the image of the salamander must replace that of the phoenix.

Prometheanism—the political methodology proffered by accelerationism—is “salamander politics” *par excellence*. Abjuring attachments to ideal futures, prometheanism promotes “abductive experimentation” (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 361). “Whilst we cannot predict the precise result of our actions,” Williams and Srnicek (2014, p. 361) insist, “we can determine probabilistically likely ranges of outcomes.” Cognisant of the contingencies involved in any form of political action, prometheanism combines rationality with speculative artistry in order to instigate social and political transformation. Prometheanism is both an attempt to move beyond enlightenment ideals of total mastery *as well as* post-modern contempt for all forms of authority. Instead of naively assuming complete control over political outcomes, or conversely decrying all forms of mastery as “proto-fascistic,” prometheanism aims to couple complex systems analysis with improvisatory practices in order to work out the “best means to act in a complex world” (Williams and Srnicek, 2014, p. 361).

Ray Brassier (2014, p. 470) defines prometheanism as “simply the claim that there is no reason to assume a predetermined limit to what we can achieve or to the ways in which we can transform ourselves and our world.” In advocating for a re-examination of Enlightenment prometheanism, Brassier attempts to counteract the post-metaphysical “fideism” that has pervaded continental philosophy since Martin Heidegger⁴. According to continental fideism, the idea of *remaking* the world, and *remaking* ourselves, “is routinely denounced as a dangerous totalitarian fantasy” (Brassier, 2014, p. 469). This is because there is a presumed to be a “fragile equilibrium” between what is *given* to human beings and what is *made* by them

⁴ For a similar, and equally compelling critique of this tendency in Continental Philosophy (since Martin Heidegger), see Meillasoux, Q. (2009). *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. (R. Brassier, Trans.). London: Continuum, specifically the second chapter entitled “Metaphysics, Fideism, Speculation.”

(Brassier, 2014, p. 474). According to Brassier, this concept of “equilibrium” has its origins in the Kantian notion of finitude, which Heidegger ontologises. According to this notion, since human beings are the source and the condition for transcendence, we inevitably transcend every objective determination of ourselves. To understand ourselves like we understand other objects, “would require objectivating the condition of objectivation, which would be, as Arendt says, like trying to jump over our own shadow” (Brassier, 2014, 476). From this perspective, philosophers “who have claimed that human beings can radically re-engineer themselves can be denounced as metaphysicians reifying the transcendence of existence” (Brassier 2014, p. 476).

However, as Brassier points out, continental fideism leads to a political impasse. In claiming that all objectivation is savagery, and all “progress” inherently violent, fideism renders all savageries equivalent, making it impossible to discriminate between them. By contrast, “prometheanism denies the ontologisation of finitude” (Brassier, 2014, p. 478). That is, prometheanism destroys “the equilibrium between the made and the given—between what human beings generate through their own resources...and the way the world is” (Brassier, 2014, p. 478). Whilst Brassier (2014, p. 486) acknowledges that savagery is indeed recapitulated in objectivation, prometheanism maintains that “some savageries are better than others, and that it is not only possible but necessary to discriminate between modes of instrumentalisation and insist that some are preferable to others.” Rather than attempting to preserve what Brassier (2014, p. 486) terms “the theological equilibrium between the made and the given,” prometheanism is about reshaping the social and technological mechanisms that shape us—*it is about making (and remaking) the given*. From the point of view of prometheanism, rationality “is not a supernatural faculty”—an assumption that Heidegger and others rightly criticised—rather, rationality “is simply a rule-governed activity...the faculty of generating and being bound by rules” (Brassier, 2014, p. 485). Such rules are historically mutable insofar as “the ways in which we understand the world, and the ways in which we change the world on the basis of our understanding, are perpetually being redetermined” (Brassier, 2014, p. 486).

By recognising their “essential” illegitimacy, their artificial “nature,” cyborgs and accelerationists free themselves from ideological fideism. Mutational politics is about disrupting the present rather than preserving the future. This disruption is motivated by the fact that nothing is predetermined. There is no divine equilibrium governing technosocial development. All that endures is artificial and ever-changing. Unlike traditional emancipatory discourses—which bemoan the increasing colonisation or perversion of “human nature”—prometheanism is a permanent process of innovation and improvisation based on the knowledge “that science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction, as well as a matrix of complex dominations” (Haraway, 1991, p. 181). Irreverent towards revolutionary discourses that presume innocence in the face of capitalist technological abstraction—prometheanism assumes “responsibility for the social relations of science and technology” (Haraway, 1991, p. 181). Prometheanism is about participating in the construction and deconstruction of boundaries and relations “without having to refer to a divine blueprint” (Brassier, 2014, p. 485). It is about shaping the things that shape us, despite the fact that the outcomes of our actions can never be pre-established.

Patricia Reed (2014) develops a detailed topography of accelerationist praxis. Dissatisfied with the ambiguous injunction to “accelerate,” which serves merely to popularise and polemicise the movement, Reed deploys seven alternative, and more modest, prescriptions which better characterise what accelerationism stands for. According to Reed, “accelerate” has become a buzz-word that serves to obfuscate the actual content of the texts and ideas associated with the movement. As a result, reactions to the manifesto have been hasty, plentiful, and largely superficial. Commentaries either “blindly champion #Accelerate (often by no other means than repetition of the tag), or condemn it as a ‘neo-futurist fascist travesty’” (Reed, 2014, p. 523). Reed sets out to rearticulate and respond to the ill-named “accelerate” movement with a series of seven prescriptions: reorientate, eccentricate, speculate, fictionalise, geometricise, commonise, abstractify.

Reorientation, she writes “is about directing existing energies in (as yet) inexistent directions” (Reed, 2014, p. 524). To *reorientate* is to anticipate “what could be” or “what ought to be” in order to reflexively restructure “what is.” *Eccentrication* refers to the creation “out-of-centre attractors,” that disrupt the centrifugal energies of normative processes (Reed, 2014, pp. 525-6). Eccentrication is designed to

demonstrate the contingency or mutability of particular trajectories and “magnetise” other points of orientation. To *speculate* “is to articulate and enable the contingencies of the given” to manifest themselves. Speculation consists in the sacrificing of a determinate political project or ideology, in favour of “an experimental responsiveness to epistemic, ontological and systematic variation” (Reed, 2014, pp. 527-8). To *fictionalise* is to break out of the “diagnostic register” of the Left and “acknowledge the power of belief that is necessary for the construction of speculative futures” (Reed, 2014, p. 528). To *geometricise* is to “engineer openings” in human perception. That is, to think outside anthropocentric spatio-temporal registers—even if we cannot completely overcome our phenomenological constraints. To *commonise* is to avoid totalising commandments and universalist claims. It is to create a commons, “a generic thought of value creation that formally morphs under localised, material modes of practice” (Reed, 2014, p. 534)⁵. And finally, to *abstractify* is to separate *what is* from *what could be*. It is to deny that abstraction is an inherently malevolent force—acknowledging it as a necessary part of forging new collectives and accommodating new ontologies “beyond the immediately perceptible” world-as-is (Reed, 2014, p. 535).

Reed’s (2014, p. 524) seven prescriptions not only provide us with a detailed topography of accelerationist praxis, they effectively “de/restructure the existent” through naming. Whilst the seven prescriptions pertain to an incredibly extensive range of philosophical and political questions, what they have in common is their mutational structure. In other words, each prescription—reorientate, eccentricate, speculate, fictionalise, geometricise, commonise, abstractify—designates a different mutational process, that transgresses traditional philosophical distinctions: human/nonhuman, material/ideal, real/virtual, natural/artificial. These processes attest to a greater mutational ontology wherein transcendental conditions and material entities are never permanent, fixed, or given, but always mutually transformative. Mutate-ability signifies something fundamentally different from the all-encompassing transcendental immutability of Being. Whilst the latter designates a divine equilibrium between the made and the given that must be “preserved,” the former refers to the perpetual plasticity and transmutability of both immanence and transcendence.

Hyperstition

“Hyperstition” was first coined by the renegade academics of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU)⁶. It combines the prefix “hype” with the word “superstition” in order to account for how fictional entities or “ideas” make themselves real by causally bringing about their own reality. “Hyperstition aims to flatten the transcendence of superstition,” emphasising the immanent effects wrought by fictions upon the world—for instance, the capacity for “hype” to shape and manoeuvre the market (Greenspan, 2004). Importantly, whilst superstition operates through diffusing belief, hyperstition functions by mobilising a positive un-belief, designed to de-programme ideology and potentiate mutations. According to the CCRU (2004, p. 276), fictions are not “transcendental screens” removed from the world; rather, they are sorcerous interventions, “active agents of transformation.”

Sadie Plant (1997) describes how the mathematical theorisation of the Difference/Analytic Engine actualised the future of digital technologies. Ada Lovelace’s nineteenth-century invention was destined to remain one of “pen, ink, and paper.” However, as Plant points out, its collateral effects upon the present were immeasurable. “While they may have left few trails of the kind which can easily be followed and packaged into neat and linear historical accounts, Ada and her software did not evaporate. The programs began to run as soon as she assembled them” (Plant, 1997, p. 21). In other words, whilst nineteenth century engineering lacked the technical capacity to “run” Ada’s software, her mathematical formulae were *already running*—inducing their own subsequent actualisation. For instance, Ada’s (and her collaborator

⁵ Importantly, this is something which Reed is not sure Accelerationism itself achieves, given its almost entirely “white-Euro-male-origins” (2014, p. 533).

⁶ These days the CCRU consists largely of a maze of dead hyperlinks. However, fragments of their writings continue to be exhumed from the internet. See Nick Land’s *Circuitries*; Sadie Plant and Nick Land’s *Cyberpositive*; the CCRU’s *Cybernetic Culture and Swarmachines*—all published in Avanesian, A. & Mackay, R. (Ed.s). (2014). *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic. See also Land, N. (2011). *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*. (R. Mackay and R. Brassier, Ed.s). Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic.

Charles Babbage's) ideas contributed to the standardisation of mechanised lathes leading to crucial advancements in engineering and scientific experimentation that would later influence computing itself. As Plant (1997, p. 22) maintains, "The Engine was assembling the processes and components from which it would eventually be built."

Plant's account of the conducive consequences of the Analytic Engine effectively demonstrates how hyperstition functions—how seemingly un-actualisable ideas bring about the conditions necessary for their own actualisation. According to the hyperstitional model of the universe, theories are neither ambivalent abstractions, nor mere adjuncts to *action*—they are themselves actors, *insurgent agents of actualisation*. For the CCRU (2004, p. 276), that "reality is composed of fictions" is not an epistemological stopgap. It is an affirmation of "the magical powers of incantation and manifestation," an argument for "the efficacy of the virtual." Rather than remaining isolated within the realm of the perceptual, "contained by a metaphysical frame," theories and fictions are imbued with causal efficacy—they populate the world, transforming its material constitution (CCRU, 2004, p. 277).

Employed in different ways by both Haraway and Williams and Srnicek, hyperstition couples analyses with artificial agencies, cultivating positive systems of unbelief conducive to political, scientific, and technological transformation. Whilst accelerationism—with its push to free the latent potentialities of technological acceleration—presupposes hyperstition⁷, Haraway's cyborg ontology is both an explicit theorisation and a self-conscious performance of it. In the opening to her manifesto, Haraway proclaims that the cyborg is, "a creature of social reality and a creature of fiction" (1991, p. 149). For her, social relations and lived experiences are "crucial" political constructions. They are artificial realities, hybrids of fact and fiction that intervene in the world, bringing about new incarnations. According to the manifesto,

Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion. (Haraway, 1991, p. 149)

Cyborg mythology is both an interpretive fiction and an interventionist tool. It is an attempt to alter reality by problematising it—a process that takes the imaginary beyond the bounds of transcendental apperception and into the material world. "The cyborg," Haraway (1991, p. 150) writes, "is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation." Fact and fiction, reality and mythology, mutually constitute one another. Together, science fiction and social reality make up the conditions for the emergence of new possibilities.

Mythos is neither the representation nor the misrepresentation of "reality" for Haraway. Strictly speaking, mythos *is* reality in that the two things cannot be separated out from one another. But this does not make them the same thing. In contrast to Guy Debord's "spectacle" or Jean Baudrillard's "simulacrum," Haraway does not interpret the dissolution of the boundary between reality and fiction to be one of incorporation or subsumption. Whilst many Marxisms refer to the capitalist "colonisation" of the real—a process that must be reversed by appealing to an authentic or non-fictional "outside"—Haraway insists that any formulation of "the real" is always already mythology—something that feminists are perhaps more attuned to. The idea that "the real" is always already mythology is very different from the idea that that reality has become incorporated into or colonised by mythology. Whilst the latter threatens us with subsumption and determinism, the former posits a dynamic interplay where reality and mythology mutually transform and reinforce one another—making possible new couplings, mutations, and the emergence of new entities.

Feminism has always been speculative: *it has to be*. In order to avoid reifying oppressive dualisms, feminists are forced to disrupt the present—to construct futures without reference to patriarchal pasts (or

⁷ The Publication of *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* is a self-professed instance of "hyperstition." In the introduction to the reader (p. 8), Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian describe the book as an attempt "to participate in the writing of a philosophical counterhistory, the construction of a genealogy of accelerationism...at the same time producing accelerationism 'itself' as a fictional or hyperstitional anticipation of intelligence to come."

presents). Haraway calls the hyperstitional practices of feminist authors, “cyborg writing.” Examples of cyborg writing include the biomythography of women of colour and [the] monstrous imaginaries of feminist science fiction writers—which disrupt oppressive patterns of recognition and allow new non-essentialist identities to emerge⁸. Cyborg writing, Haraway (1991, pp. 175-177) maintains, is neither phallic nor innocent, it refuses to be reduced to dialectics. Instead, cyborg writing seeks to displace the “hierarchical dualisms of naturalised identities” that continue to oppress women, people of colour, first nations peoples, nature, workers, and animals. The reification of innocence, of originary wholeness, or oneness with nature are nothing but ideological resources for masculine autonomy—which takes respite in the wholesome bosom of the Other (Haraway, 1991, p. 177). Cyborg writing is about polluting “nature.” It is about breaking down clean distinctions between organism and machine, human and animal, civilised and primitive, whole and part, man and woman. Cyborg writing is about recognising “oneself as fully implicated in the world,” and as such freeing oneself “of the need to root politics in identification, vanguard parties, purity, and mothering” (Haraway, 1991, p. 176). A promethean praxis, rather than an ideological appeal, cyborg writing is about seizing the tools to mark the world that marks us (Haraway, 1991, p. 175). It is about rewriting bodies and social realities. Haraway’s cyborg writing is an insurgent political practice—a mixture of analysis and speculative artistry based on the knowledge that the actual and the virtual are always co-extensive. Thinking of the universe in these terms allows us to step outside of the antagonistic dualisms of dialectical politics and engage in imaginative reconstructions of the world—reconstructions which are always also reconfigurations.

Oppositional Consciousness

One of the most (if not the most) ubiquitous critique of accelerationism is that it reaffirms “grand narrative” politics. According to Suhail Malik and Armen Avanesian,

Cultural leftism's embrace in the 1990s of post-modernism, identity politics, and the turn to ethics (via the human rights settlements) as the primary organising determinants of a social justice agenda that militated against standardisation not only ruled out any appeal to the 'grand narratives' of modernity as the basis for leftism but, more actively, sought to delegitimise any such universalising criteria. (Malik & Avanesian, 2016, pp. 5-6).

Importantly, post-structuralism sought to combat oppression and political marginalisation by promoting the irreducible nature of different identities, discourses, and experiences. Tied to this acknowledgment of subjective irreducibility was an accompanying acknowledgment of the “singular, irreproducible, and even untransmittable” nature of particular political claims and social demands (Malik and Avanesian, 2016, p. 6). Through engaging in various practices of social, historical, and cultural deconstruction, post-structuralists sought to relativise, and thereby destabilise, the universal and objective status of particular discourses—e.g. scientific “truth” and instrumental reason. However, as Malik and Avanesian (2016, p. 6) point out, post-structuralism’s wholesale divestment from universal theorising “has resulted in social, cultural, and political assertions being formulated primarily in terms of subjectively-organised claims that caution against extending beyond themselves for fear of imposing a microimperialism.”

Accelerationism's perceived effacement of subjectivity, locality, and lived experience—in favour of abstract globalism—troubles feminists and postcolonial theorists in particular. It is doubtful to many critics whether Enlightenment values (truth, justice, rationality, self-mastery etc.) are extricable from the oppressions inherent in the original Enlightenment project (colonialism, patriarchy, slavery etc.) As such, many critics regard accelerationism's reaffirmation of rationality, universality and instrumentality to be reaffirming oppression—*cue accusations of imperialism, chauvinism, and proto-fascism*. However, such arguments—apart from overlooking accelerationism's *critical* engagement with the Enlightenment, embodied in their argument for historically mutable normative political schemas, rather than immutable

⁸ Haraway cites Joanna Russ, Samuel R. Delaney, John Varley, James Tiptree, Jr, Octavia Butler, Monique Wittig, Vonda McIntyre, Mary Douglas, Luce Irigaray, Susan Griffin, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Cherríe Moraga as examples of cyborg writers.

metaphysical grounds or categories—often rely upon reviving essentialisms: universality is *essentially* absolutist, mastery is *necessarily* fascistic, rationality is *inherently* patriarchal, etc. Rather than entering into what has become a stifling political debate, I would like to propose Haraway's cyborg ontology as a model for political universality that not only avoids reaffirming oppressions, but also acts as a safeguard against them. This model, I will argue, is at once appropriate to accelerationism and useful for addressing its major criticisms in a productive way.

Unlike many of her post-structuralist counterparts, Haraway affirms essential artificiality. Whilst most established Leftisms interpret this artificiality as “the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet,” Haraway (1991, p. 154) sees it as the potential for new forms of political coalition based upon affinity. US Left movements and US feminism, she writes, have responded to the “painful fragmentation” of successive identity crises “by endless splitting and searches for a new essential unity. But there has also been a growing recognition of another response through coalition—affinity, not identity” (Haraway, 1991, p. 155). In order to explore the possibilities of political affinity, Haraway (1991, p. 155) examines the formation and history of the “women of colour” movement in America, arguing that the galvanisation of the women of colour movement can be thought of in terms of what Chela Sandoval coined “oppositional consciousness.” Oppositional consciousness is, broadly speaking, “the conscious appropriation of negation” (Haraway, 1991, p. 156). For women of colour, oppositional consciousness is the conscious appropriation of a *double negation*. Whilst, like others, they find themselves negated by white patriarchal colonial capitalism, unlike many others, women of colour *also* find themselves negated by privileged categories of the oppressed (“women” and “blacks”). “Woman of colour” thereby constitutes a political “identity” for those “refused stable membership in the social categories of race, sex, or class” (Haraway, 1991, p. 155). Importantly, whilst oppositional consciousness arose out of *necessity* for non-white, third-world feminists, Haraway's (white, first-world) redeployment of it—in terms of the cyborg—transforms oppositional consciousness into a universalist *strategy*. According to Haraway, “woman of colour” is a political identity constructed out of non-identities. As a result, it provides us with a model of political identity that avoids reifying oppressive essentialisms. Like the woman of colour, Haraway (1991, p. 155) maintains, the cyborg has no natural origin or essence—she is artificial. An illegitimate bundle of negations, she can appeal to nothing but her “otherness, difference, and specificity.”

According to Haraway, a cyborg kinship based upon oppositional consciousness would not rely upon “the logic of appropriation, incorporation, and taxonomic identification” (1991, p. 157) implicit in traditional revolutionary discourses. Such kinship forecloses the possibility for relations of domination (e.g. patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism) to be justified *or* challenged by way of appeals to totalising universalities or essentialisms. What distinguishes both cyborgs and women of colour from the traditional revolutionary “subject” is an appreciation for their essential artificiality. “With the hard won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in ‘essential’ unity” (Haraway, 1991, p. 155). Cyborgs regard themselves as neither innocent, nor revolutionary—they are painfully aware of their status as “the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism.” (Haraway, 1991, p. 151). However, as Haraway (1991, p. 151) insists, “illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins.” Through dispensing with myths of original unity, cyborgs gain the capacity “to build an effective unity that does not replicate the imperialising, totalising revolutionary subjects of previous Marxisms and feminisms” (Haraway, 1991, p. 156). Instead of appealing to a naturalised identity, the figure of the cyborg engages in resistance through ongoing and ever-changing practices of artificial recoupling and mutation.

In constructing a universal political identity out of oppositional consciousness, Haraway provides a model for accelerationist subjectivity which not only avoids, but actively forecloses, imperialising oppression. Oppositional consciousness facilitates the formation of collective political affinities based on partial identities and shared struggles. Rather than appealing to metaphysical principles, or unifying essentialisms, Haraway seeks to create new futures by way of illegitimate couplings and potent fusions. Feminists—especially women of colour, as well as queer and trans* subjects—have long relied upon the production of artificial identities for survival. These acts of “personal and political pollution” are not symptomatic of atomised individualism, or a blind faith in technological development. Rather, they are concerted attempts to move beyond totalising essentialisms and open up new possibilities for politics.

Williams and Srnicek (2014, p. 360) insist that the Left must “move beyond the notion that an organically generated global proletariat already exists [and] instead...knit together a disparate array of partial proletarian identities, often embodied in post-Fordist forms of precarious labour.” Whilst Williams and Srnicek fail to develop a theory of the accelerationist subject, Haraway's cyborg—with its commitment to political coalition and collective self-mastery—represents an appropriate candidate. Furthermore, the figure of the cyborg (with its origins in the woman of colour movement) might encourage further engagement with questions concerning colonialism, race, sex, and gender and their relationship to global or universal anti-capitalist agendas—something decidedly lacking in the accelerationist manifesto. The use of the cyborg as a potential model for accelerationist subjectivity represents one of the many ways in which accelerationist politics could benefit from further engagement with the history of technofeminist thought—a history to which it, arguably, owes much of its existence.

Conclusion

Accelerationists tend to oscillate between championing Marxian orthodoxies, advocating planetary techno-transcendence, and invoking enlightenment rationalism. As Patricia Reed's article demonstrates, it is difficult to determine exactly what accelerationism stands for. The construction of a genealogy or an ontology appropriate to the movement seems eminently problematic. As Mackay and Avanesian (2014, p. 7) observe, the history of accelerationism consists almost completely of “isolated eruptions which each time sink without trace under a sea of unanimous censure and/or dismissive scorn.” Despite this, reconstructing accelerationism's genealogies is an effective way of exploring and assessing its possibilities—both as a philosophical configuration and a political proposition (Mackay and Avanesian, 2014, p. 7). The aim of this article is to contribute to the efforts of other feminist theorists currently working to re-contextualise accelerationism within the history of technofeminist thought. Accelerationism's current lack of association with technofeminist philosophers such as Haraway is to the detriment of both accelerationism and contemporary feminism. This is something that the editors of *Dea ex Machina* and the authors of the “Xenofeminist Manifesto” are attempting to combat. Whilst many have acknowledged accelerationism's potential usefulness for contemporary gender politics, we are yet to adequately acknowledge gender politics' usefulness for accelerationism. By showing how accelerationism might benefit from further engagement with Haraway's ideas, I have attempted to reorientate debates surrounding accelerationism—away from antagonistic impasses and towards constructive collaborations, artificial couplings, and potent fusions.

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