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Philosophy of Accelerationism: A New Way of Comprehending the Present Social Reality (in Nick Land's Context)

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Abstract. Modern types of social reality require updated ways of comprehending them. The research is devoted to a new analytical form of understanding modernity that has recently emerged — accelerationism, still rarely discussed in Russian philosophy. The representatives of accelerationism call for a radical and rapid acceleration of socio-economic and technological processes in capitalist societies. The article reflects some ideas of the *Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics* by Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, after which the accelerationist trend in philosophy and social sciences intensified and gained clear theoretical guidelines. The Manifesto's ideas about accelerating technological evolution as a means of resolving social conflicts, about unleashing all the latent forces of capitalist production to achieve a state of post-capitalism, denying a return to the Fordist type of production and calling for the restoration of the future as such, are highlighted. The *Manifesto* and the works of Nick Land, the founder and the most prominent representative of accelerationism, present the position of creating a new program and the very style of thinking with regard to changing the capitalist system along the vector of acceleration. The article pays attention to the interpretation of Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's concept of "deterritorialization" in Land's works. It emphasizes the focus of accelerationism on the future as a kind of realization of the paradoxical thesis of "looking back from the future." The content of Land's accelerationist theory shows the fundamental concepts of K-space (cyberspace), K-war (cyberwar), time and reality, technocratic future of society as Techno-Capital Singularity, expansion of capital as opposed to its reterritorialization. The meaning of Land's idea of an acceleration of capitalism and the transition to a more progressive future through the collapse of outmoded structures and phenomena of the existing system of capitalism and its technological basis is deduced.

Keywords: philosophy of accelerationism, technology, capital, acceleration, deterritorialization, Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics, Nick Land, Backward from the Future, Prometheus in Politics

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Introduction

The philosophy of accelerationism emerges at the beginning of the 21st century as a new form of theoretical reflection on modern societies, which follow the path of capitalist reproduction based on technological progress. However, according to the adherents of this emerging trend, there is currently a slowdown and a kind of "going round in a circle" of capital, technology and media, which is also supported by non-progressive political thinking on the part of both the right and the left. It is therefore necessary to switch to a new, accelerationist model of thought and political action, which will, in turn, cause a rapid acceleration of the system of capitalism and eliminate all contradictions and constraints within it.

The Austrian-German philosopher and political scientist Armen Avanessian, exploring accelerationism, emphasizes its essential characteristics as follows: "Any accelerationist thought is based on the assessment that contradictions (of capitalism) must be countered by their own aggravation: on the one hand, a cynical trust in *politique du pire*, and on the other hand, an idealistic hope that the intensification of capitalism's crisis phenomena in contemporary neoliberalism — on the model of double negation — could lead to the removal of its internal contradictions and even to its explosion" [1. P. 3]. In this context, accelerationism is a movement towards the future and even comprehension of the future as already arrived. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the objective processes of modernity on the basis of the state of the future, *as if looking back*. History and the future in the accelerated transformations of capital, media, and computer technologies, the transition of capital from being fixed in a certain territory to its deterministic distribution — these are the fundamental features of society's new reflection.

The founder of accelerationism in this respect was Nick Land, who more than a decade ago prepared a conceptual report on the adoption of an accelerated vector of development for the future. Atemporality, the future as reality in the accelerationalist philosophy outgrows postmodernist presentism with its close attention to the present and only a focus on the future In Nick Land's accelerationism, time and reality are intertwined to the point of inseparability,

which allows him (and his followers) to consider the future as the present, as that real which transcends time and becomes the most important object for a new, atemporal form of analysis. Land argues: "The tendency of transcendental philosophy is to increasingly identify the Real and Time. The Real and the Temporal are so strongly intertwined with one another that it is impossible to imagine Time as a 'place' in which the Real would be situated... To think that it is situated in Time is to fail in the transcendental formulation of the question itself" [2. P. 34].

Nick Land, English philosopher and writer, the father of Accelerationism, taught continental philosophy at The University of Warwick from 1987 until his retirement in 1998. At Warwick, Nick Land and Sadie Plante co-founded the interdisciplinary Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU). Philosophers Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman described it as a "diverse group of thinkers who experimented in conceptual production by welding together a wide variety of sources: futurism, technoscience, philosophy, mysticism, numerology, complexity theory, and science fiction, among others" [3. P. 6].

Nick Land sought to go beyond philosophy, crossing it with other disciplines, from nanotechnology to the occult, from mathematical computing to anthropology. Land credits Deleuze's and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* with recasting the problem of the theory of experience as a problem concerning the caging of desire. The latter reads as a synonym for the impersonal, synthetic intelligence ("animality", "cunning") that Land seeks to distinguish from the will of "knowledge" to order, resolve, and correlate-in-advance. Therefore, Land's philosophy is not impersonal, has a distinctly anthropological meaning and is not distanced from sociality in its discourse on timelessness and acceleration.

Nick Land's ideas are considered in this article in the context of his original authorial specificity.

Accelerationism as a Trend in Contemporary Philosophy: Promethean Politics and Post-Capitalism

Textually and substantively, the author's understanding of accelerationism is vividly expressed in Nick Land's essay *Meltdown*. Here is a short excerpt from his work: "The story goes like this: Earth is captured by a technocapital singularity as renaissance rationalitization and oceanic navigation lock into commoditization take-off. Logistically accelerating techno-economic interactivity crumbles social order in auto-sophisticating machine runaway. As markets learn to manufacture intelligence, politics modernizes, upgrades paranoia, and tries to get a grip" [4. P. 441].

The very term accelerationism was originally introduced as a neologism by Professor of Critical Theory at University of Chichester Benjamin Noys in his 2010 book *The Persistence of the Negative* [14] to describe the theoretical trajectory of some poststructuralists who adopted unorthodox Marxist and counter-Marxist overviews of capital in the 1970s, such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. Noys noted: "They are an exotic variant of *la politique du pire*: if capitalism generates its own forces of dissolution

then the necessity is to radicalize capitalism itself: the worse the better. We can call this tendency accelerationism" [5. P. 5].

Aside those mentioned by Noys, representatives of the emerging accelerationist trend in contemporary philosophy include such thinkers as Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams (authors of the *Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*), Franco "Bifo" Berardi, Matteo Pasquinelli, Patricia MacCormack, and others. A descriptive feature of the studies of accelerationist philosophers is their focus on analyzing the current economic and technological state of societies with a capitalist mode of production (they use Marxist terms, as accelerationists reason categorically in the spirit of neo-Marxism) and promoting the idea of the need to rapidly develop capital and digital technology in a very short time.

In general, accelerationalists argue that technology, especially computer technology and capitalism, in particular, its most aggressive, global variety, must be greatly accelerated and intensified, either because it is the best way forward for humanity or because there is no alternative. Followers of this trend in philosophy advocate automation, but necessarily tied to the human factor. In the spirit of postmodernism (only with a call for a more accelerated implementation of its principles) they put forward ideas of a further fusion of the digital and the human. But they also stress that people must stop deluding themselves that economic and technological progress can be controlled.

In accelerationist philosophy, one can often find theorizing about deregulation of business and radical reduction of government. The occasional social and political upheavals in capitalist societies, which are valuable in their own right as self-sufficient social phenomena, can play a positive role in this. In many respects, accelerationists are guided by the fundamental category of *deterritorialization* of G. Deleuze and F. Guattari. For the representatives of French poststructuralism, the process of determinism meant the intensification and deepening of political and social forces, making possible rapid and effective changes in the state of the economy. Accelerationalists, grasping this poststructuralist concept, call for its deepening and use to counter the so-called reterritorializing movements that inhibit the dynamics of modern society.

Accelerationism represented by Alberto Toscano linked its social and political philosophy to the mythological image of Prometheus [7], guiding the progress of history and setting the high transcendent goal of reaching a completely new phase of capitalism. And all means are good in this dynamic: from creating a new epistemology of acceleration to breaking down old and obsolete structures and constantly supporting the growing movement of capital. In this context, A. Avanessian notes: "...Promethean" accelerationism... relies not on reflection but on recursion. Whereas reflection is based on defining boundaries which make visible a given whole, recursion always involves breaking boundaries, accessing objects of knowledge or interfering into the internal dynamics of processes in order to produce a new whole... the Promethean task of recursive goal setting... can only be achieved through changing the dynamics of political movement, through acceleration... Progress, whether technological, social or political, can only be thought through acceleration" [8. P. 84].

The Promethean policy of aiming for a new kind of economy — post-capitalism — through the creation of a progressive form of neoliberalism, a rapid renewal of the left and the construction of a future (or rather, even the r*ebirth of a future* as if paralyzed by the inefficient "regressive stage" of the present) was also picked up in the famous *Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics* by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, originally published on the Internet in 2013. "We declare that only a Promethean politics of maximal mastery over society and its environment is capable of either dealing with global problems or achieving victory over capital" [6]. Calling Marx and Land "the paradigmatic accelerationist thinkers," the *Manifesto* authors ambiguously connect the ideals of accelerationism with capitalism and call not to abandon its gains but to accelerate them "beyond the constraints the capitalist value form" [6]. Therefore, the historically created model of neoliberalism should not be destroyed, but it is also impossible to allow the return of Fordism as a factory system of labor organization. Fordism, for the politicians of accelerationism, is a bearer of many negative factors, from the system of colonies to racism and domestic violence. Fordism should be abandoned, dialectically retaining all the best achievements, and we should see in the Fordist infrastructure a capitalist "springboard to launch towards post-capitalism" [6].

Using and subordinating technoscience, accelerating technological and technopolitical processes to make the right social decisions, one can arrive at social and technological solutions. And this, according to Srnicek and Williams, leads to overcoming social conflicts and even to winning them [6]. Manifesto lacks clear definition of post-capitalism, yet the authors clearly link this new round of its development with the absence of social conflicts, the removal of restrictions and injustices of historical capitalism, the latter's containment of progress and technological development. It seems that, for accelerationalists, post-capitalism is an escape from the limitations of the existing way of life and the very way of thinking about existing reality. Accelerationists set truly global goals: "Accelerationism is the basic belief that these capacities can and should be let loose by moving beyond the limitations imposed by capitalist society. […] After all, it is only a post-capitalist society, made possible by an accelerationist politics, which will ever be capable of delivering on the promissory note of the mid-Twentieth Century's space programmes, to shift beyond a world of minimal technical upgrades towards all-encompassing change" [6].

In the accelerationalists' justification of the movement toward an infinite and atemporal future, we may trace the emergence of a new metaphysical doctrine, paradigmatic in meaning, but somewhat utopian in its possibility of realization. The aspiration to achieve a post-capitalist period of development (the *Techno-Capital Singularity*, according to Land) through the acceleration of established structures and technological forces within capitalism itself is a project that requires a combination of new kinds of knowledge, political discourses, economic doctrines, support for the non-stop movement of production and cybernetic systems, reconciliation of left and right forces in the struggle to achieve a new future, etc., etc. This vision of building a techno-social future has provoked a heated debate in the social sciences, a debate that is still going on in Western European philosophy.

We deem the philosophy of accelerationism to be of an extreme interest as it paves the way to comprehend the current state of many societies facing unprecedented challenges. By fusing in their thinking technology, economics, sociology, futurology, linguistics, and even science fiction, accelerationists create somewhat confusing, a bit demanding but useful and witty discourse. Yet, frankly, accelerationism still has to find some common theoretical grounds to use for the future developments and reflection. The greatest contribution to the given discourse on the need to accelerate society on the basis of capitalist production and reproduction was made by Nick Land.

Nick Land and the Founding of the Philosophy of Accelerationism

Nick Land, in his 2017 essay *A Quick-and-Dirty Introduction to Accelerationism* [9], listed a number of philosophers who express accelerationist views. Among them he named G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, on whose basic concepts he builds his understanding of the philosophy of acceleration and deepening of the system of capitalism for the dynamic social transformations of modern societies. Nick Land believes that Deleuze and Guattari sometimes use Nietzsche's foundations and apply them as fundamental principles of their work. For instance, Friedrich Nietzsche argued in *The Will to Power* that "The homogenizing of European man is the great process that cannot be obstructed: one should even hasten it" [10. P. 478].

Drawing on this Nietzschean understanding of progress, Deleuze and Guattari argued in their classical 1972 *Anti-Oedipus* for an unprecedented "revolutionary way" to further perpetuate the tendencies of capitalism, which would later become the central idea of accelerationism [11]. Thus, according to N. Land, Deleuze and Guattari are the forerunners of the accelerationist politics and philosophy. Land also refers to Karl Marx, who in his 1848 *On the Question of Free Trade* [12] also anticipated accelerationist principles a century before Deleuze and Guattari, describing free trade as socially destructive and inciting class conflict, and then actually arguing and showing its principles in his theory.

In general, Nick Land in his work gravitates toward the thoughts of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and prefers their philosophical style of the so-called schizoanalysis. Following the French authors, he likes to analyze the world as if from outside, from "non-human" points of view, perceiving it as animals, robots, computers, other technologies created by people, as Earth or the Universe might think of the world. Nick Land likes capitalism and the technological revolution as such, as phenomena that can and should be developed as quickly as possible, not even always considering their concrete benefits, but moving toward a goal more global and expansive.

In developing the ideas of accelerationism, Land justifies the core concept as follows: *acceleration* is the "natural-historical reality" of capitalization, that is, a specific period of capital accumulation, bringing together "savings accumulation" and "technicity." Consequently, as basic co-components of capital, technology and economics have only a limited, formal distinctiveness under historical conditions

of ignited capital escalation. The indissolubly twin-dynamic is techonomic (cross-excited commercial industrialism). Acceleration is techonomic time [13. P. 22]. Time itself, the forms of "techonomic processes" dictate the need for accelerated progress towards "Terrestrial Capitalism (or Techonomic Singularity)" [13. P. 29], a new anthropological future existing also in Reality (but without time), which enables us to comprehend it theoretically and even to look into our present from within it (i.e., from future). Will our present like our future? Land's answer can only be found in context, yet the Techonomic Singularity, as a human future, is created, in his view, epistemologically, as a complex spiral of cognition and this task belongs immanently to accelerationism. "Accelerationism exists only because this task has been automatically allotted to it. Fate has a name (but no face)" [13. P. 29].

Nick Land inevitably arrives at the fundamental accelerationist notion of deterritorialization, deriving it essentially from postmodernism's postulates of the deterritorialization of space and the atemporality of culture (found in virtually all French postmodernists, not just in Deleuze and Guattari). In Land's understanding, determinism characterizes the current state of capital and finance associated with the political maintenance of the existing system. By keeping the system in a certain state, deterritorialization expresses its main feature — it can effectively exist in a given state anywhere on the globe without exceeding its limits (or "drifting" in a given political direction), if accelerating solutions correlate with the contemporary requirements of capitalist society's development. Land writes in this context: "So instead, events increasingly just happen. They seem ever more out of control, even to a traumatic extent. Because the basic phenomenon appears to be a brake failure, accelerationism is picked up again. Accelerationism links the implosion of decision-space to the explosion of the world — that is, to modernity. […] For accelerationism the crucial lesson was this: A negative feedback circuit — such as a steam-engine 'governor' or a thermostat — functions to keep some state of a system in the same place" [9].

Speaking extensively about cyberspace and cyborg culture, accelerationists justify the idea that technology is not neutral. It's a mere *tool*, but even tools have desires and tendencies, controlling the very users who controls the tools. This is an ancient idea, going way back to Socrates's criticism of writing as affecting the memories of its users. Kevin Kelly is an influential modern-day writer and editor, who wrote a book *What Technology Wants* [14], and his idea is that the technologies are very much not neutral, and can even be thought of as something alive, with its own goals. The future of earth is very much determined by how this specific ecosystem of technologies evolves.

Kevin Kelly treats technology as a living organism. He justifies how material artifacts formerly created by human beings drive society to create more and more technological innovations, thereby influencing human beings. The cars are mechanical horses that want you to build more roads so that they can go to more places. In order to encourage you to make more roads, it allows you to sit in them and take you everywhere. That's how in just 100 years, there are suddenly these thin, gray, flat concrete things called *roads* everywhere on earth. The Internet wants

to expand, enticing you to join by providing so much stuff there. Junk food wants to be eaten, and diet books want you to get fat [14].

Nick Land takes this to an extreme. It means something like this: our world, with its cars, finances, AI, and other industrial technologies, has a clear goal of its own: a future dominated by upgraded versions of these technologies, with humans becoming extinct or irrelevant. An inevitable AI apocalypse. It's called an invasion from the future, because this inhuman future is not yet here, but we already feel like we are being pulled towards it, as if someone has sent agents back in time to ensure humans do not mess up this plan. Perhaps this is the *view back from the future*, a principle to which the accelerationist intensions gravitate. From this position, they have the task of theorizing the present in relation to the futuristic phenomenon of the expected and foreseeable future.

This is where philosophy fuses with science fiction even to a greater extent. Land speaks of *K-space* (cyberspace subtracted from its inhibitive tendencies due to the rapid development of capital and technology) stemming from where the obscure communications of artists merge with the productions of capitalism, a space that melds gleaming abstraction to eldritch portent. Land's writing sought out and tapped into modes of then-contemporary cultural production that provide explosive condensates of this fusion of commodification and aesthetic engineering. In fact, even the *future* described by accelerationalists becomes a commodity and is immanently woven into the deterritorialized and commodified space of society, which has yet to be replaced by the present. Further on, Land introduces the concept of *K-War* (cyberwar), meaning the struggle for the acceleration of the existing system up to the collapse of its obsolete mechanisms and the victory of a new advanced capitalist society. Time and reality do not correlate here — the movement occurs to the intended goal and is completely atemporal and deterministic.

The insurrectionary basis of revolution now lies at the virtual terminus of capital — the future as transcendental unconscious, its "return" inhibited by the repressed circuits of temporality. "If, as Gibson has famously insisted, 'The future is already here — it's just not very evenly distributed,' then the revolutionary task is now to assemble it, …unpack[ing] the neurotic refusal mechanisms that separate capital from its own madness" [4. P. 36] and accelerating its collapse into the future.

Conclusion

Land's accelerationism, through the collapse of the present state of capital and technology, thus describes a movement toward a more advanced future (an unprecedented Techno-Capital Singularity) that he herself believes in and outlines with new thought forms, as if looking from the future into our present. The ideas of Land and his followers may seem contradictory or overly optimistic, but they certainly contain the intention of creating a new analytical paradigm for making sense of the time and society in which we live, and of the society to which we may arrive. The Promethean discourse in philosophy and society, set forth by the accelerationalists, seems very relevant and requires a multifaceted theoretical reflection.

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Философия акселерационизма: новый путь осмысления современной социальной реальности (в контексте идей Ника Ланда)

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Аннотация. Современные типы социальной реальности, охваченные медиатизацией, виртуализацией и технологическими процессами, требуют сегодня обновленных путей их постижения. Данное исследование посвящено возникшей в последнее время новой аналитической форме осмысления современности — акселерационизму, который

пока достаточно редко обсуждается в российской философии. Представители акселерационизма призывают к радикальному и быстрому ускорению социально-экономических и технологических процессов капиталистических обществ. Беря за основу исторически сложившиеся характеристики капитализма, последователи этого теоретического движения нацеливают на перенаправление их функционирования на столь стремительное развитие, при котором все деструктивные элементы существующей капиталистической системы просто не выдержат и отпадут в силу их неустойчивости и неэффективности. В статье отражены некоторые идеи «Манифеста акселерационистской политики» А. Уильямса и Н. Срничка, после которого усилилась и приобрела отчетливые теоретические ориентиры акселерационистская тенденция в философии и социальных науках. Освещаются идеи «Манифеста» об ускорении технологической эволюции как средстве разрешения социальных конфликтов, о высвобождении всех латентных сил капиталистического производства для достижения состояния посткапитализма, поддержки нового типа неолиберализма и глобальной «гегемонии левых», отрицания возврата к фордистскому типу производства и призыва восстановить будущее как таковое, возможности которого уже утрачены провалом неолиберальных проектов и «параличом» левых сил. Таким образом в «Манифесте» и работах самого яркого представителя и основателя акселерационизма Ника Ланда представлена позиция создания совершенно новой программы и самого стиля мышления в отношении изменения современной капиталистической системы по вектору акселерации (ускорения). Особое внимание уделяется восприятию и интерпретации концепта «детерриториализация» Ж. Делеза и Ф. Гваттари в творчестве Н. Ланда. Подчеркивается нацеленность акселерационизма на будущее, как своего рода реализацию парадоксального тезиса «взгляда назад из будущего». В содержании акселерационистской теории Н. Ланда показаны фундаментальные понятия K-space (киберпространство), K-war (кибервойна), время и реальность, технократическое будущее социума как Техномическая Сингулярность, расширение капитала в противоположность его ретерриториализации. Выводится смысл идеи Ланда об ускоренном «разгоне» капитализма и переходе к более прогрессивному будущему через крах отживших структур и явлений существующей системы капитализма и его технологического базиса.

Ключевые слова: философия акселерационизма, технологии, капитал, ускорение, детерриториализация, Манифест акселерационистской политики, Ник Ланд, принцип *назад из будущего*, образ Прометея в политике

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