Speed Freaks: Acceleration & Accelerationism from the Mid-century to Now

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham
for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Submitted: November 18th 2023

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Abstract

Throughout this thesis I examine accelerationism in select works from the mid-century through to the contemporary moment. I characterise accelerationism as a litany of affirmative responses to experiences of "acceleration", the idea that forms of technological and social change, as well as the pace of life, are increasing. Contemporary studies of acceleration tend to focus on its negative aspects by expressing critical concern for its deleterious consequences on individuals and institutions. Accelerationists take a different view. Existing on the inverse, mirror-side, of ambivalence, accelerationists either accept or embrace the consequences of acceleration. In doing so, they perform a political gesture, one which both observes and hopes to overcome a stasis that they associate with a given political status quo.

As political gestures go, it is my view that accelerationism is an uneasy one. The idea is obtuse, often favouring complicity with the harms of frenetic change over other forms of political resistance. This often makes the perspectives of its adherents questionable and, at times, even outright reactionary. Yet, accelerationism is a position that has persisted and that continues to manifest alongside acceleration at varying levels of intensity. It is my contention in this thesis that it was palpable in the works of advocates for mass and consumer culture in the fifties, in visual arts that championed change in the sixties, and in the digital "revolutionaries" of the nineties. It also remains detectable today in proponents of spaceflight and automation. This continued insistence of accelerationism throughout the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first make probing it a necessity. Working at the intersection between art and literature, throughout this thesis I analyse examples of accelerationist responses to experiences of acceleration in order to both clarify what accelerationism is, and critique it. In doing so, I produce the first sustained study that analyses and synthesizes the accelerationist currents of the Independent Group, Eduardo Paolozzi, and J.G. Ballard, while furthering studies of contemporary accelerationism and the outputs of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit. This research will be of interest to audiences hoping to gain greater insight into the conflicted political terrain that is accelerationism, and for those more generally interested in cultural responses to acceleration.

Wordcount: 78,969

Acknowledgements

Many individuals and organisations have supported the production of this thesis. First, I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership for funding this research. I am also appreciative to the large number of archivists that granted me access to primary material, including at the Scottish National Galleries, the Tate, the V&A, the Arts Council Collection, Whitechapel Gallery, and the British Library. I'd also like to acknowledge the many anonymous archives and the archivists that occupy the gaps between these institutions—your work has been equally impactful on this study.

I'd like to extend my thanks to my supervisory team: Dr Dorothy Butchard for her extensive input and mentoring, and for dedicating her time as lead supervisor on this project; Dr Rex Ferguson and Dr Richard Hornsey for their advice and feedback on several chapters as secondary supervisors; and Professor Andrzej Gąsiorek for his comments on an early draft of the J.G. Ballard chapter.

Beyond my supervisory team, I'd like to thank: Dr Toria Johnson for her assistance as a personal mentor; Rachel Soron for her extensive administrative support; Dr Christopher Haworth for our conversations about the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, and for inviting me to participate in 'Between Sound and Concept: Listening with the CCRU' in 2021; Jenny Lance and Liv Laumenech for our discussions about Paolozzi and for supporting access to resources at the Universities of Birmingham and Edinburgh; Huw Moseley at Redditch Borough Council and Philip Roberts at Arts in Redditch for supporting a research-led placement on a sorely overlooked Paolozzi work; Josie Lilley-Byrne, Arzu Bali, and Ben Horn for co-facilitating the Contemporary Theoretical Network (Ctrl Network) seminar sessions, and for our many insightful discussions about theory; Matt Colquhoun and the numerous attendees of the Ctrl Network for their contributions; Dr Rachel Stratton for providing access to her PhD thesis; Reza Massin for the education in breakbeat hardcore; Ellen Addis for proofing a draft of the first chapter; and Urbanomic Ltd for publishing works that spurred this thesis.

My final thanks go out to the numerous friends I have made and that have supported this journey, my family, and to my partner, Leonie, for her enduring support and encouragement.

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Following the conservative bent of Comte, social thought continues to seek some return to earlier cohesive forms and simplicities. Modern man may find solace only through allegiance to the larger solidarities; the way toward individual security and collective normalcy, the restoration of norms, binding customs, and social health lies with emphasis on the group, with conformity. […] This emphasis has remained with us up to the present. The social institutions and directions that have been accorded prior academic interest and official support have been those identified with stability and integration rather than those associated with change and creative innovation.

John McHale, *The Future of the Future* (1969)[1]

The celebrants of capitalism tell us surprisingly little of its infinite horizons, its revolutionary energy and audacity, its dynamic creativity, its adventurousness and romance, its capacity to make men not merely more comfortable but more alive. The bourgeoisie and its ideologists have never been known for their humility or modesty, yet they seem strangely determined to hide much of their light under a bushel. The reason […] is that there is a dark side to this light that they cannot blot out. […] The pathos of all bourgeois monuments is that their material strength and solidity actually count for nothing and carry no weight at all, that they are blown away like frail reeds by the very forces of capitalist development that they celebrate.

Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (1982)[2]

Machinic revolution must […] go in the opposite direction to socialistic regulation; pressing toward ever more uninhibited marketization of the processes that are tearing down the social field, "still further" with "the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization" and "one can never go far enough in the direction of deterritorialization: you haven't seen anything yet".

Nick Land, 'Machinic Desire' (1993)[3]

We need to revive the argument that was traditionally made for post-capitalism: not only is capitalism an unjust and perverted system, but it is also a system that holds back progress. Our technological development is being suppressed by capitalism, as much as it has been unleashed. Accelerationism is the basic belief that these capacities can and should be let loose by moving beyond limitations imposed by capitalist society.

Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, '#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics' (2013)[4]

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[1] John McHale, *The Future of the Future* (New York: George Brazilier, 1969), p. 36.

[2] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London ; New York: Penguin, 1988), pp. 98-99.

[3] Nick Land, 'Machinic Desire', in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, ed. by Ray Brassier and Robin Mackay, 2nd ed (Falmouth : New York, NY: Urbanomic ; Sequence Press, 2012), pp. 319–44, pp. 340-41, quoting from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans by. R. Hurley, M. Seem, H.R. Lane (London: Athlone, 1983), pp. 239, 321.

[4] Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, '#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 347–62, p. 361.

Introduction

Too far-out? Accelerationism and Overcoming Stasis

> "Accelerationism is so far out now that it'll never make it back in during my lifetime. Pity, too. I'd like to lift sail again, head off toward another horizon. Or lift ship..." – Roger Zelazny, *Lord of Light* (1967)[1]

Any historiography of accelerationism is complex. The earliest use of the word in print is in Roger Zelazny's science fiction novel *Lord of Light* (1967). However, its more widely accepted usage today ultimately stems from Benjamin Noys and his 2010 work *The Persistence of the Negative*. In Zelazny's novel, accelerationism describes a radical political advocacy for a democratisation of technological progress. This is a position held by the novel's protagonist, Mahasamatman or Sam, who is opposed to a hyper-technologically advanced pantheon of godlike humans that suppress technological development in a bid to maintain colonial dominion over a planet's population. In contrast, Noys first describes accelerationism as an 'exotic variant of *la politique du pire*' he attributes to the post-'68 French philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jean François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard, whereby, 'if capitalism generates its own forces of dissolution, then the necessity is to radicalise capitalism itself: the worse the better.'[2] The gulf between this definition and the one in *Lord of Light* is self-evidently vast, with Zelazny's vision of a progressive politics of technological and social emancipation replaced in Noys's definition by a politics advocating for self-induced capitalist crisis.

Noys has claimed that he was unaware of Zelazny's term when he first defined accelerationism, although he had at one point read the novel.[3] To many, this would make the need for any comparison between Noys's work and Zelazny's seem unnecessary. Surely, the much more academically rigorous theoretical definition has precedent over musings found in a novel that, thematically speaking, is very much of its time?[4] The problem with such a perspective is that, in my view, it assigns far too much priority to the theory and risks giving Noys the final statement on something that exceeds a singular definition. This is an issue heightened by other competing

[1] Roger Zelazny, *Lord of Light*, SF Masterworks (London: Gollancz, 2010), p. 54.
[2] Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/persistence-of-the-negative/B47CB829AC35E8AD5EE81A0FD3AA85CE> [accessed 31 January 2022], p. 4.
[3] Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism & Capitalism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), p. xi.
[4] The orientalist Indian flavour of Zelazny's novel—Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922) meets space opera—clearly deriving from a '60s context of Western Indomania.

definitions that have since come to contest Noys's, like Nick Srnicek's and Alex Williams's in their '#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics' (2013). In this manifesto, they present a definition that has more in common with Zelazny's and less with Noys's. The authors advocate 'to accelerate the process of technological evolution' which they otherwise see as enslaved to 'capitalist objectives' interested in producing only '[r]elentless iterations of the same basic product [to] sustain marginal consumer demand at the expense of human acceleration.'[5] Like Sam in *Lord of Light*, both Srnicek and Williams characterise accelerationism as an opposition to a stasis imposed by an oppressive power, encapsulated in their observation of a 'paralysis of the future imaginary'.[6] They also advocate in favour of a form of acceleration (technological) to help overcome this stasis.[7] Overall, their approach gives political credence the fictional definition offered by Zelazny in his novel, while refuting the more negative connotations of Noys's definition implied by the phrase 'the worse the better'.

My research for this thesis has led me to understand accelerationism as a term that describes a wide variety of transhistorical perspectives that affirm experiences of acceleration, usually with the intended purpose of overcoming or drawing attention to a static political, social, and/or cultural status quo—much like Srnicek and Williams, or Zelazny above. I understand acceleration experiences as perceptions of an increasing rate of change within modern societies, which although abstract and difficult to quantify, have been consistently observed or commented upon throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, particularly in European and North American contexts.[8]

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[5] Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, '#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 347–62, p. 355.

[6] Ibid., p. 349.

[7] I parenthesise technological here to highlight that it is but one form of acceleration. Throughout this thesis, I follow the social theorist Hartmut Rosa in identifying acceleration as always having been 'heterogenous' and therefore 'difficult to bring together under a single concept'. In his work Rosa identifies three distinct, but interrelated forms of acceleration: 1) technical/technological acceleration, 2) the acceleration of social change, and 3) an acceleration of the pace of life. This constitutes his definition of social acceleration. I choose to broadly follow Rosa's definition because it does not reduce acceleration to a simple consequence of technological development. See: Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, New Directions for Critical Theory, Paperback ed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 63.

[8] Responses to acceleration in literature are far too vast to list extensively; however, a good point of introduction to the topic is Hartmut Rosa's and William E. Scheuerman's *High-Speed Society* (2009), which includes a wide array of sociological responses to acceleration interspersed with examples of more general writing on the topic. Other classic examples of works that identify and explore the effects of acceleration that I also refer to throughout this thesis are Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (1970), Paul Virilio's *Speed and Politics* (1977) and *The Great Accelerator* (2012), Marshall Berman's *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), and Rosa's *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (2013), alongside the definitions provided by Reinhart Koselleck in 'The Eighteenth Century as the Beginning of Modernity', mentioned in Chapter One.

Accelerationist responses to such experiences of acceleration are the principal subject of analysis in the texts and works covered throughout this thesis. As I will go on to demonstrate, accelerationists affirm acceleration in numerous ways, with responses varying across an array of historical contexts, while also consisting of vastly different levels of intensity, ranging from ambivalence—a conflicted response that still ultimately accepts acceleration as a facet of modern life—to outright advocacy. My key point of argument throughout this thesis is that, contra claims that accelerationism may be simply nihilistic, and regardless of the vigour with which acceleration is affirmed, accelerationism frequently serves some kind of political end. However, as I will also demonstrate, this does not mark accelerationism as something simply subversive. Instead, to retain something of Noys's more critical definition, accelerationism also always has an uneasy status, often risking acquiescence with changes already underway, changes that may already be facilitated by the political conditions rallied against.[9]

Critical studies of experiences of acceleration have, up until now, tended to focus on negative responses. Two examples of this response include Hartmut Rosa's landmark work *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (2013) and Paul Virilio's essays collected in *The Great Accelerator* (2012). In these works, both writers are concerned with the pathologies produced by acceleration, such as depression and burnout, arguing that these have become increasingly pronounced in the contemporary moment. They suggest that the proliferation of such pathologies is one of the reasons why acceleration must be apprehended critically, with its continuation posing significant risks to human health, wellbeing, and the possibility of living a good life. Acknowledgement of the extractive logics and racialised labour that has historically underpinned acceleration can also be used to augment these criticisms, raising significant questions about the human costs of acceleration as it has been pursued in modern societies. While certainly justifiable grounds for critical intervention on acceleration, such views are complicated by the fact that, as Rosa has it, acceleration has also been 'experienced as ambivalent from the very beginning', and that '[a]mbivalent evaluations […] show up over and over again in cultural conflicts'.[10] These ambivalent responses to acceleration produce a problem not accounted for by straightforwardly negative criticisms: that acceleration might also be accepted, or even desired, despite its negative consequences. In this thesis, I turn to accelerationism to ultimately ask what might be made of responses to acceleration that aren't straightforwardly negative, with the hope of uncovering and

[9] Here I follow Robin Mackay's and Armen Avanessian's assertion in *#Accelerate: the Accelerationist Reader* that accelerationism has an inherently 'uneasy status' that frequently vacillates between 'subversion and acquiescence'. See: Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, 'Introduction', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 1–46, p. 4.
[10] Rosa, pp. 36, 40.

critically exploring the motivations of such perspectives. In this vein, I aver accelerationism's usefulness as a critical framework. I do this by framing it as unique, and often overlooked, response to experiences of acceleration while arguing that it is applicable to a variety of cultural outputs and contexts, some of which have never previously been associated with the term.

My investigation of accelerationism across this thesis consists of five parts. In each, I identify five separate affirmations of acceleration of differing intensity from the mid-century to the contemporary moment. My framework here follows the two most complete genealogical works on accelerationism so far: Noys's *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism & Capitalism* (2013), and Robin Mackay's and Armen Avanessian's *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*. Like myself, both of these works identify accelerationism as an expression that periodically waxes and wanes in significance.[11] However, the information about the origins and meanings of the term is patchy, and the textual and contextual examples they associate it with limited. To address this, I make a greater effort to delve into the origins of the term, while extrapolating it out to provide further examples. In Chapter One, I explore contemporary forms of accelerationism tied to the term's inception by Noys as a means for unpacking much of its theoretical baggage. Thereafter, I begin to attribute the idea to the outputs of groups and individuals that precede more contemporary understandings of its definition, and who have never been previously associated with the term. For instance, in Chapter Two I reflect on the Independent Group (IG or Group) a loose collection of artists, architects, and writers who were based out of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) between 1952-55, and some of whom were involved in the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition (1956).[12] Chapter Three, sees me look to Eduardo Paolozzi as an artist whose sixties works respond to changes in how speed was coming to be characterised in the period. In Chapter Four, I turn to J.G. Ballard, a writer whose ideas have, in recent years, been associated with accelerationism, and whose works, like *Crash* (1973) and 'Memories of the Space Age' (1982), identify and challenge a pervasive sense of stasis resulting from accelerated

[11] A particularly evocative reference to the periodic shifts in the applicability of accelerationist responses to acceleration is made by Mackay and Avanessian in their introduction to *The Reader*. They explain that as much as the collection chronicles accelerationism, they are also 'simultaneously reclaiming it as an untimely provocation, an irritant that returns implacably from the future to bedevil the official sanctioned discourse of institutional politics and political theory.' See: Mackay and Avanessian, p. 8.

[12] The Independent Group were a collective of artists, designers, critics, and architects largely constellated around two lecture series, the first from September 1952-June 1953, and the second in 1955. As I explain in chapter two, the Group was likely more porous and less cohesive than it has often been presented in historical accounts, however it is usually seen as being made up of the following core members: Richard and Terry Hamilton, William Turnbull, Magda and Frank Cordell, John McHale, Alison and Peter Smithson, Reyner and Mary Banham, Eduardo and Freda Paolozzi, Colin St John Wilson, and Toni del Renzio. The Group was so called 'Independent' because of its relationship to the Institute of Contemporary Arts, representing an off-shooting younger faction that were opposed to the Institute's older guard.

technological development. Finally, in Chapter Five, I analyse nineties outputs by Nick Land and the Cybernetic Cultures Research Unit (CCRU or Unit)—a loose collection of theorists initially based out of the University of Warwick whose earliest works responded to the digital boom and cyberculture nascent during the period, a facet that sees them labelled as forerunners to accelerationism by Mackay and Avanessian, and Noys.

My methodological approach to each of the groups and individuals varies to approximate the encompassing nature of experiences of acceleration. However, in each case it involves exploring their cultural contexts, a closer reading of select works, and critical interpretations of their ideas, all to try and grasp at their respective interests in acceleration, and to determine the political, cultural, and social stakes of this interest. Over the course of doing this, I produce the first sustained study to analyse and synthesize the accelerationist currents of the Independent Group, Eduardo Paolozzi, and J.G. Ballard, while connecting them to the outputs of the CCRU, and more contemporary works and debates that respond to acceleration and accelerationism.

One of the key ways that I demonstrate accelerationism's conceptual usefulness across the chapters of this thesis, is by highlighting responses to acceleration that remain ambivalent to it, or that advocate for it, despite an awareness of its potentially destructive or harmful effects. This contrasts with work that reflects on the hegemonic qualities of acceleration in the present, such as Rosa's *Social Acceleration*. Throughout this work, Rosa isn't just attentive to the pathological effects of acceleration, and how they are reflected in experiences of acceleration. Instead, he also sees acceleration as a key, hegemonic, demand of modern existence. He identifies this quality as arising from what he believes to be its principal causes and forms of advancement in things like economic competition, functional differentiation, and in the desire to live a faster life. While the first two of these causes can be said to wholly relate to capitalist development, and are therefore relevant to accelerationist responses to capitalism, this third concern—the idea of living faster to satiate a desire to do more in less time—is not so easy to solely attribute to this cause. Instead, Rosa characterises the desire to live more quickly as being fundamentally connected to the pursuit of living a good life in the modern world, something not only rooted in economic pressures, nor necessarily strictly enforced by "totalitarian" powers, but instead more applicable to the eudaemonistic dimension of modern secularized existence, or the need to live a good life in lieu of theological conceptions of what this life might consist of. For my purposes, accelerationism is intriguing because of how it uncomfortably relates to this idea. This is because accelerationist responses to acceleration don't just connect it to eudaemonia; rather, they also frequently advocate for the harm and destruction

accelerated change brings to institutional and systematic frameworks and ideas. For Rosa, these are the wholly negative consequences of acceleration arguably responsible for exacerbating its pathological effects in the contemporary moment.[13] For accelerationists, these things often present opportunities for change. In other words, they are ways out of a static, contemporary moment. Accelerationism is, in this sense, not only affirmatory, but also arguably a negative form of political expression. This is because, even though accelerationists affirm acceleration, they often only do so to both highlight and exacerbate what they perceive to be structural imbalances in forms of power—something that I argue is particularly evident in the IG's and CCRU's outputs in Chapters Two and Five.

The tendency of accelerationists to affirm the destructive and harmful effects of acceleration has seen it frequently characterised as a completely 'nihilistic alignment […] with the excesses of capitalist culture'.[14] This is evident in Noys' definition of it as *la politique du pire* above, but also in Steven Shaviro's writing on accelerationist aesthetics, collected in *No Speed Limit* (2015). Shaviro, following Noys, identifies accelerationism with a kind of catharsis, one that is interested in '[i]ntensifying the horrors of contemporary capitalism' insofar as it offers 'a kind of satisfaction and relief, by telling us that we have finally hit bottom, finally realized the worst.'[15] Although such views on accelerationism have a certain traction—they are highly relevant to Nick Land's CCRU adjacent work I explore in Chapter Five—I am also keen to contest the status of accelerationism as a simply nihilistic exercise. My view here follows the protestations of Mark Fisher, who has articulated that seeing accelerationism as a nihilistic embrace of capitalism 'is question-begging in that it assumes what accelerationism rejects—the idea that everything produced "under" capitalism fully belongs to capitalism'.[16] For Fisher, accelerationism is actually foremost a response to a crisis of political imagination, one concerned with the foreclosure of future and alternative socio-cultural possibilities by a stifling sense of what is considered politically realistic in the present. He implies such in the article, 'Popular Culture's Interrupted Accelerationist Dreams' (2013) where he refers to

[13] The damage acceleration does to institutions serves as a ground for its criticism by Rosa throughout *Social Acceleration*, with him noting that 'the pressure to accelerate continually produces new time practices and institutions that can further heighten the acceleration dynamic for a while before they themselves run up against their speed limits, i.e., become hindrances to acceleration, and are therefore "overcome" in the end by the forces of acceleration that they themselves unleashed.' See: Rosa, p. 170.
[14] Mackay and Avanessian, p. 4.
[15] Steven Shaviro, *No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism*, Forerunners (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 2015), p. 35.
[16] Mark Fisher, '"A Social and Psychic Revolution of Almost Inconceivable Magnitude": Popular Culture's Interrupted Accelerationist Dreams', *e-Flux*, 46, 2013 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/46/60084/a-social-and-psychic-revolution-of-almost-inconceivable-magnitude-popular-culture-s-interrupted-accelerationist-dreams/> [accessed 15 January 2021].

accelerationism as an 'attempt to converge with, intensify, and politicize the most challenging and exploratory dimensions of popular culture.'[17] In this vein, accelerationism chimes with, and attempts to resolve, a problem that is also commonly attributed to Fisher's work *Capitalist Realism* (2009): that 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism'.[18] This is because accelerationism is as much an attempt to overcome an inability to imagine more than what is already conceivable within capitalism, as it is an affirmation of the destructive capacity of capitalism's accelerative effects.

Although resolving a crisis of imagination is a significant part of accelerationism, it's highly questionable whether accelerationists ever actually succeed in doing this. In *Malign Velocities* (2013), Noys argues that even with an emphasis on newfound imaginative possibilities, accelerationism frequently 'gives over to capital a monopoly on our imagination of the future as a continuing intensification of accumulation and reinforcement of the capitalist continuum'.[19] This is because in their attempts to conceive new imaginative possibilities, accelerationists often elide the significance of forms of political struggle and resistance for effecting forms of radical institutional and structural change in the first place. Moreover, the accelerationist insistence on acceleration often sees them acquiesce with political and cultural imperatives already reshaping the bounds of this imagination, imperatives that do not, in and of themselves, challenge oppressive political powers and structures. This dual nature of accelerationism, its 'uneasy status' between 'subversion and acquiescence', is evident in the uptick of debates about the efficacy of accelerationism in political and cultural theory, and thereafter its continued application as a term in a variety of literatures today.[20] It's also a problem common to each of the texts and works that I examine across this thesis.

Accelerationism in Literature and Culture

A wide-ranging interest in accelerationism is evident in the multitude of existing secondary literatures that either discuss or criticise the topic. This includes criticisms of accelerationism in Fred Turner's 'On Accelerationism' (2016), Andrew Culp's *Dark Deleuze* (2016), James Bridle's *New Dark Age* (2018), Rosi Braidotti's *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019), and *The Dignity of Labour* (2021) by Labour Party MP Jon Cruddas. Alongside these criticisms, accelerationism, or ideas associated with it, have also seen some level of continued theoretical interest; although, it is usually employed by

[17] Ibid.
[18] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), p. 2.
[19] Noys, *Malign Velocities*, p. 62.
[20] Mackay and Avanessian, p. 4.

figures with the proviso that they are distancing themselves from the term. Examples of this range from: 1) philosophy, as in the *Alien Vectors* special issue *Angelaki* (2019), 2) aesthetic theory and criticism, as in Julian Jason Haladyn's *Duchamp, Aesthetics and Capitalism* (2019), and 3) more overtly political forms of theory, such as 'Blaccelerationism' which was first formulated by Aria Dean (2017), Xenofeminism which is most clearly outlined by Helen Hester (2018), and Fully Automated Luxury Communism, a post-capitalism whose lead proponent is Aaron Bastani (2019).[21]

Many of the above criticisms of accelerationism have tended to cluster around several key concerns. One of the key ones is a perception of it as a utopian tendency, one that abstracts considerations of class and labour struggle often more typical to Marxism. These kinds of criticisms are evident in the likes of Cruddas's, Culp's, and Turner's works, which position (left-oriented) accelerationisms as kinds of technocratic leftism concerned with the social distribution of wealth through a mastery of technology, each suggesting that it ignores issues of labour exploitation, dignity, and practices of resistance. These criticisms are often further complemented with the view that accelerationism has been a largely Anglophone phenomenon that has not been encompassing of politically marginalized voices and perspectives, particularly issues pertaining to racial, gender, and sexual difference, all of which raise significant questions about whose political interest's accelerationism serves. Where this gap has been observed, it has been attempted to be addressed by political perspectives that have either added new distinct forms of accelerationism—such as gender-accelerationism—or that draw on accelerationist concepts while having distanced themselves from accelerationism, such as Xenofeminism and Blaccelerationism.[22]

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[21] See: Dean's 'Notes on Blacceleration', Hester's *Xenofeminism*, and Bastani's *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*. Bastani is referred to as an accelerationist by Beckett in a *Guardian* review of his book, see: Andy Beckett, 'Fully Automated Luxury Communism by Aaron Bastani – a Manifesto for the Future', *The Guardian*, 2019 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/may/29/fully-automated-luxury-communism-aaron-bastani-review> [accessed 10 December 2020]. More broadly, contemporary post-capitalism also has a history of being related to debates around accelerationism, with the interlinking nature of the two ideas being implicit in Mark Fisher's brief article 'Post-Capitalist Desire' (2012), and thereafter made explicit in *Postcapitalist Desire: the Final Lectures* (2020). Post-capitalism refers to a hypothetical state whereby it is no longer appropriate to define world economic systems as capitalist, and its origin is largely correlated to the rise of the information economy in the 1990s. For an overview of the history of post-capitalism, I recommend Paul Mason's *Postcapitalism: A Guide to our Future* (2015), which explores its background as a concept first used by Peter Drucker and its links to Kevin Kelly's *New Rules for the New Economy* (1998). Nick Srnicek's and Alex Williams's *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (2015) offers a clear overview of contemporary left post-capitalist political demands, while also serving as a further example of the connection between accelerationism and post-capitalism, given that it follows their publication of the '#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics' (2013). Jon Cruddas also identifies accelerationism with post-capitalism in *The Dignity of Labour*; although he places greater emphasis on the latter term. Finally, Fred Turner also criticises left post-capitalism and accelerationism in 'On Accelerationism'.

[22] The distancing of Xenofeminism and Blaccelerationism from accelerationism is evident in remarks made by Helen Hester and Aria Dean about the respective political projects. Hester explains that Xenofeminism is 'a

Complementing these criticisms, a concerted shift away from the term accelerationism is also evident in the left-political circles in which it was originally adopted. Such is characterised by Nick Srnicek's 2018 claim that 'the term 'accelerationism' has become useless; liable to mean anything to anyone.'[23] Significantly, Srnicek's view responds to two things: 1) a proliferation of diverging political types of accelerationism, and 2) its subsequent appropriation by the right and far-right.[24] The first of these is best explained through reference to left-accelerationism (l/acc) and right-accelerationism (r/acc), which represent two binary political camps of accelerationism that were first concretely identified by Simon O'Sullivan in 'The Missing Subject of Accelerationism' (2014), his response to *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*.[25] This, Srnicek argues, is a problem for political accelerationisms, as a left/right binary 'presupposes some common basis between the two', this common basis being the thing responsible for its unpalatability for the left.[26]

Exacerbating this problem, popular media interpretations of accelerationism have largely picked up this idea of a 'common basis' to all accelerationist writing. A great example of this is Andy Beckett's *Guardian* "long read" article on the topic (2017), which characterised accelerationism as the idea 'that technology, particularly computer technology, and capitalism, particularly the most aggressive, global variety, should be massively sped up and intensified – either because it is the best

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labour of bricolage, synthesizing cyberfeminism, posthumanism, accelerationism, neorationalism, materialist feminism, and so on, in an attempt to forge a project suited to contemporary political conditions', which suggests Xenofeminism is not wholly reducible to accelerationism. Aria Dean is more emphatic in declaring that Blaccelerationism 'is not a black accelerationism […] nor is it an accelerationist theory of blackness.' Instead, it is a 'binding of blackness and accelerationism to one another', highlighting that accelerationism already operates in a territory of blackness, and 'that blackness is always already accelerationist.' In this sense, it's a totally new approach to accelerationism, and a challenge how it was originally conceived. See: Helen, *Xenofeminism*, Theory Redux (Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018), p. 1. Aria Dean, 'Notes on Blaccelerationism', *e-flux*, December 2017 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/87/169402/notes-on-blaccelerationism/> [accessed 16 May 2023].

[23] Artem Gureev, Beyond Endless Winter: An Interview with Nick Srnicek, 2018 <https://tripleampersand.org/beyond-endless-winter-interview-nick-srnicek/> [accessed 17 July 2023].

[24] Since submitting this thesis in November 2023, this right-wing appropriation has become more clearly delineated in the pro-neoliberal stance of effective-accelerationism.

[25] The earliest identification these ideologically specific types of accelerationism, by my reckoning, was by Simon O'Sullivan in 'The Missing Subject of Accelerationism' (2014). The broad difference between the two can be explained as follows: left-accelerationists oppose capitalism on the grounds that it is a source of inertia in the present, while their right-accelerationist counterparts typically argue that capitalism is being held back by processes of democratisation. A third, non-binary position also exists, called unconditional accelerationism. At the most basic level, this viewpoint believes accelerationism cannot be politically purified. In my view the clearest definitions of all of these divergent forms of accelerationism is provided by Matt Colquhoun in their 'A U/Acc Primer' (2019). See: Matt Colquhoun, 'A U/Acc Primer', *Xenogothic*, 2019 <https://xenogothic.com/2019/03/04/a-u-acc-primer/> [accessed 15 October 2023].

[26] Gureev.

way forward for humanity, or because there is no alternative'.[27] Although Beckett identifies diverging ends to accelerationism, he views these ends as sharing means that resonate with the 'common basis' thereafter mentioned by Srnicek.

Beyond identifying this point of similarity between left- and right-accelerationisms, Beckett's article was also timely thanks to his identification that 'accelerationist ideas [were] "resonating" and being "circulated" everywhere from pro-technology parts of the British left to wealthy libertarian and far-right circles in America.'[28] This view pre-empted a more recent tendency of fascist, Neo-Nazi, and white supremacist extremist groups appropriating the term accelerationism to self-describe their political desire to instigate race-wars for the purposes of producing civilizational collapse.[29] This abominable "type" of accelerationism, although certainly in-keeping with Noys's definition of it as a form of *la politique du pire*, has little-to-no connection to the term as it was originally articulated by Noys or Williams and Srnicek the early 2010s. However, it is possible that this uptake and subsequent appropriation stemmed from Nick Land's popularity 'on alt-right blogs', as noted by Beckett, and his more contemporary shift to the far-right, as evidenced by his neoreactionary work *The Dark Enlightenment* (2012) and its proximity to individuals in this space.[30]

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[27] Andy Beckett, 'Accelerationism: How a Fringe Philosophy Predicted the Future We Live In', *The Guardian*, 2017 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/11/accelerationism-how-a-fringe-philosophy-predicted-the-future-we-live-in> [accessed 10 December 2020]. This description of accelerationism is closest to Nick Srnicek's and Alex Williams's position in the 'Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics', although it is not an entirely accurate reflection of their views in this work.

[28] Beckett. He attributes identification of this to Noys.

[29] This has since seen academic interest in the field of anti-terrorist studies by a small number of researchers associated with the Accelerationist Research Consortium. For press articles exploring this use of the term accelerationism, see: Jason Wilson, 'US Far Right Seeks Ways to Exploit Coronavirus and Cause Social Collapse', *The Guardian*, 2020 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/05/us-far-right-seeks-ways-to-exploit-coronavirus-and-cause-social-collapse> [accessed 10 December 2020]; Zack Beauchamp, 'The Extremist Philosophy That's More Violent than the Alt-Right and Growing in Popularity', *Vox*, 2019 <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/11/11/20882005/accelerationism-white-supremacy-christchurch> [accessed 10 December 2020]; Rob Waugh, 'What Is "Accelerationism", the Belief Followed by New Zealand Terror Attacker?', *Metro*, 2019 <https://metro.co.uk/2019/03/18/accelerationism-belief-followed-new-zealand-terror-attacker-8930673/> [accessed 11 December 2020]; 'White Supremacists Embrace "Accelerationism"', *Anti-Defamation League* <https://www.adl.org/blog/white-supremacists-embrace-accelerationism> [accessed 11 December 2020]; Cassie Miller, '"There Is No Political Solution": Accelerationism in the White Power Movement', *Southern Poverty Law Center* <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/06/23/there-no-political-solution-accelerationism-white-power-movement> [accessed 11 December 2020].

[30] Beckett, 'Accelerationism: How a Fringe Philosophy Predicted the Future We Live In'**.** For an in-depth overview of Land's far-right politics, see: Harrison Smith and Roger Burrows, 'Software, Sovereignty and the Post-Neoliberal Politics of Exit', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 38.6 (2021), 143–66 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276421999439>. Noys also reflects on the far-right appropriation of accelerationism in 'Burn Out: Reflection on Accelerationism' (2021), noting that it may also 'owe something to th[e] new enforced openness' of the internet itself, and the contextual shifting this causes. See: Benjamin Noys, 'Burn Out: Reflections on Accelerationism' <https://www.academia.edu/64818298/Burn_Out_Reflections_on_Accelerationism> [accessed 28 January

Across this thesis, I approach accelerationism with an awareness of these political contexts, while challenging the idea that they mar the usefulness of the term for describing a particular set of affirmative responses to experiences of acceleration. Part of my rationale for doing this stems from the fact that, even as these political applications have shifted, accelerationism has still seen newfound application in reference to cultural phenomena. For instance, in his introduction to the recently republished *Junglist* (2021), Sukhdev Sandhu refers to jungle as 'a music that was impossibly accelerationist'.[31] Likewise, in the documentary *Sensationalist: The Bad Girls and Boys of British Art* (2022)—about the Young British Artists—*Dazed* journalist Jefferson Hack refers to the nineties itself as a 'moment of accelerationism […] when things just really sped up.'[32] These specific connections to a period and its subculture are compelling because they are purely cultural definitions, disconnected from the more political contexts of the term used above. In this vein, they hint at the term's continued applicability, even if, as a political prospect, accelerationism is ineffective and open to appropriation.

However, with this in mind, I do not believe it is possible to abandon the political criticisms of accelerationism entirely. I think this much is evident in the continued popularity of Noys's definition. An example of this is observable in how the author Ted Chiang recently used the term in a *New Yorker* article, 'Will A.I. Become the New McKinsey?' (2023). In it, Chiang describes left-accelerationism as a position that 'says that it's futile to try to oppose or reform capitalism; instead, we have to exacerbate capitalism's worst tendencies until the entire system breaks down', an idea which he thereafter contests.[33] This continued application of accelerationism in reference to *la politique du pire* suggests its value for identifying this particular political tendency in the contemporary moment, even if definitions that relate accelerationism to such an exclusively nihilistic viewpoint are those that I hope to challenge in this thesis.

The continued value of accelerationism as a term is also evident within other academic works that employ it as part of an interpretative framework. For instance, there has been a clear development of works concerned with how accelerationism relates to forms of modernist aesthetics.

2023]. Other critical readings I recommend in relation to Land's contemporary politics are Elizabeth Sandifer's *Neoreaction: A Basilisk, Essays on or Around the Alt Right* (2017), Yuk Hui's 'On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries' (2017), and Hari Kunzru's novel *Red Pill* (2019), which I feel uses some of Land's ideas to inform the construction of the character Anton.

[31] Sukhdev Sandhu, 'Introduction: The Intense Now', in *Junglist* (London: Repeater Books, 2021), pp. 1–6, p. 2.

[32] *Sensationalists: The Bad Girls and Boys of British Art - Series 1: 3. Young British Artists*, 2022 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001d1nh/sensationalists-the-bad-girls-and-boys-of-british-art-series-1-3-young-british-artists> [accessed 16 November 2022].

[33] Ted Chiang, 'Will A.I. Become the New McKinsey?', *The New Yorker*, 4 May 2023 <https://www.newyorker.com/science/annals-of-artificial-intelligence/will-ai-become-the-new-mckinsey> [accessed 11 May 2023]. Chiang credits Slavoj Žižek for this definition of accelerationism.

Two examples of this are Julian Jason Haladyn's *Duchamp, Aesthetics, and Capitalism*, and Udith Dematagoda's essay ''Machinic Desire': Wyndham Lewis, Masculinity and the Sublime Horror of Technological War' (2020). Across these two works, accelerationism is presented as adhering to two very different aesthetic strategies. Haladyn equates it with Duchamp's readymade aesthetic practices, which he positively characterises as 'an act of accelerating art as a discourse, of pushing to the point of excess the philosophical precepts of modern aesthetics on which the notion of art in modernity is based'.[34] Dematagoda, by contrast, conceives of accelerationism as an aesthetic 'in equal parts fervent optimism and virulent nihilism' that make it equatable to the 'romantic sentimentalism' of 'bold fantasies of merging man with machine' expressed in the 'pyretic energy of Marinetti's baroque futuristic visions'.[35] Although both extremely different use cases referring to divergent movements in modernist art, accelerationism remains a central concept to these studies. On the one hand, it describes a novel practice intended as a clear affront to accepted institutional value, on the other, it disguises something more parochial, baroque, and even romantic. In both cases, these works demonstrate how, in their attempts to break with a static past, accelerationists frequently depend on older imaginaries that have also failed to do exactly that.

In case these examples lead to the false impression that scholarly interest in accelerationism can be reduced to the field of modernist studies, it's worth noting that it has also seen theoretical application in analyses of popular genre works in the late-20th century. An example of this is Hugh Charles O'Connell's writing about Marxism's relationship to cyberpunk fiction (2019). To O'Connell, part of the importance of accelerationism lies in its identification of capital's process of real subsumption, in which '"all relations of production and consumption, and all forms of life" not only those traditionally associated with labor are brought under the sway of capitalism.'[36] O'Connell identifies a complementary tendency between this quality of accelerationism and cyberpunk fiction, which, following the schema of Fredric Jameson, is a foremost example of science fiction's 'dramatiz[ation of the] incapacity to imagine the future', that is, an incapacity to imagine a future beyond capitalism.[37] For Marxist political perspectives on cyberpunk fiction, the association between accelerationism and the genre may just be another sign of its failings, insofar as O'Connell notes of

[34] Julian Jason Haladyn, *Duchamp, Aesthetics, and Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 2.
[35] Udith Dematagoda, '"Machinic Desire": Wyndham Lewis, Masculinity and the Sublime Horror of Technological War', *Modernist Cultures*, 15.4 (2020), 488–514 <https://doi.org/10.3366/mod.2020.0310>, p. 492.
[36] Hugh Charles O'Connell, 'Marxism', in *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, ed. by Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2020), pp. 282–90, p. 285, quoting Steven Shaviro, 'Symposium' *Science Fiction Studies*, 39.3 (2013), 374-84, p. 384.
[37] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), pp. 288-289.

the genre, 'any sense of transcending the system of late capitalism […] is always bound to a (re)affirmation of capitalist ideology, offering imaginary solutions that validate capitalism's own operative ideology'.[38] Undoubtedly, this is a quality of cyberpunk relevant to the inability of accelerationist's to offer alternatives to the forms of stasis they identify, however, O'Connell's identification of a correlation between accelerationism and cyberpunk is also compelling as a further instance in which the term is used to describe cultural outputs. In this sense, it indirectly resonates with Sandhu's and Hack's views, while suggesting that accelerationism might be something more encompassing than a strictly political definition implies.

O'Connell's association of accelerationism with cyberpunk, a genre of science fiction, is also persuasive for how it follows Steven Shaviro's identification of 'science fiction [a]s the accelerationist art par excellence'.[39] Alongside O'Connell's and Shaviro's remarks, the relationship between accelerationism and science fiction is also stressed in *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* through the inclusion of J.G. Ballard's essay 'Fictions of Every Kind' (1971). In this essay, Ballard proposes the importance of science fiction as an alternative to contemporary forms of social realism. This essay shares an affinity with O'Connell's characterisation of cyberpunk fiction as 'reveal[ing of] the dominant hallmarks of the late capitalist mode of production', insofar as Ballard argues that science fiction has the capacity to represent the present 'as perceived by the inhabitants of the consumer goods society.'[40] Moreover, a similar problem of imagination to the one O'Connell identifies in cyberpunk fiction is pre-empted in the work of J.G. Ballard, which, as Fredric Jameson has declared, 'testifies powerfully to the contradictions of a properly representational attempt to grasp the future directly.'[41] This point of connection between Ballard's work and cyberpunk is perhaps unsurprising given how influential his writings were on the genre. It's also a significant connection for readings of Ballard's accelerationism, revealing a midpoint between the modernist forms identified by Haladyn and Dematagoda, and the cyberpunk ones examined by O'Connell.

The inclusion of 'Fictions of Every Kind' in *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* certainly raises questions about the accelerationist credentials of Ballard's work. Intriguingly, it is also not the only place this link between Ballard and accelerationism has been made. Ballard is mined as a conceptual resource by both Ray Brassier and Iain Hamilton Grant in their respective chapters of the text, 'Prometheanism and its Critics' (2014) and 'LA 2019: Demopathy and Xenogenesis' (1996).

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[38] O'Connell, p., 384.
[39] Shaviro, p. 3.
[40] O'Connell, p. 285. ; J.G. Ballard, 'Fictions of Every Kind', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 235–40, p. 238.
[41] Jameson, p. 288.

Accelerationism has also been linked to Ballard's work by: John Russell in his article 'Abysmal Plan: Waiting Until We Die and Radically Accelerated Reptitionism', from the *e-flux* special issue *Accelerationist Aesthetics* (2013), Andrew Warstat in 'Speeding to the Doldrums' (2016), and Florian Cord in *J.G. Ballard's Politics* (2017). In fact, I would argue, that Ballard's writing finds itself more proximal to accelerationism than any other author of contemporary fiction.

This frequent connection of Ballard to accelerationism—made, implied, but then rarely explored or analysed—provided a conceptual starting point for this thesis. While researching accelerationism, I was particularly interested in how 'Fictions of Every Kind' came to be situated as an accelerationist work. This fascinated me because I felt Ballard's essay was in no clear way evocative of the 'horrors of contemporary capitalism', as Shaviro has it, lacking the extremity often afforded to accelerationism by many of its critics. Instead, the essay favours an ambivalent tone while exploring its central premise—that '[e]verything is becoming science fiction'—and it does this through reference to the otherwise benign and banal elements of everyday life: 'the gleam on refrigerator cabinets, the contours of a wife's or husband's thighs passing the newsreel images on a color TV set, the conjunction of musculature and chromium artifact within an automobile interior, the unique postures of passengers on an airport escalator'.[42] Far more stylized than horrific, Ballard argues that these abstracted associations owe to the imagery of 'Pop painters and sculptors' like 'Paolozzi, Hamilton, Warhol, Wesselmann, [and] Ruscha'.[43] By doing this, he draws an unexplored genealogical line between the Pop movement and accelerationism—stressing an aesthetic dimension to the term—while inadvertently anticipating Fisher's definition of accelerationism as 'an attempt to converge with, intensify, and politicize the most challenging and exploratory dimensions of popular culture' discussed above.[44]

This difference between Ballard's accelerationism and how critics like Shaviro, but also Noys and occasionally Mackay and Avanessian, have addressed the term compelled me to consider an accelerationist lineage differing from the more established genealogies. I do this by tracing the accelerationist preoccupation with the speed of technological and social change, evident in the likes of Ballard and the CCRU through earlier groups and individuals, like the Independent Group and Eduardo Paolozzi. My impetus for doing this stemmed from the references the author makes to

[42] Ballard, 'Fictions of Every Kind', pp. 237, 240.
[43] Ibid., p. 240.
[44] Fisher, 'Popular Culture's Interrupted Accelerationist Dreams'. Iain Hamilton Grant also draws a link between the CCRU's activities and the Pop movement by comparing their practices to Warhol's Factory in an interview about accelerationism with Andy Beckett, see: Beckett, 'Accelerationism: How a Fringe Philosophy Predicted the Future We Live In'.

Paolozzi throughout his essay, and how the artist's ideas were presented as a complement to the author's concerns, such as when he claims:

> [i]t is now some fifteen years since the sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi, a powerful and original writer in his own right, remarked that the science fiction magazines produced in the suburbs of Los Angeles contained far more imagination and meaning than anything he could find in the literary periodicals of the day. Subsequent events have proved Paolozzi's sharp judgement correct in every respect.[45]

Here, Ballard positions Paolozzi as pre-emptive of his interest in science fiction, and thus much of his argument throughout the 'Fictions of Every Kind' essay. In doing this, he suggests a link between his work and Paolozzi's that has been overlooked in accounts that associate the author with accelerationism. Ballard's attribution of his ideas to Paolozzi thereafter formed a guiding question that governed my choice of figures in this study: namely, what possible link, if any, might Paolozzi also be said to have with accelerationism, what influence did this have on Ballard, and where might this connection have originated?

Why the Independent Group, Ballard, Paolozzi, and the CCRU?

My use of accelerationism to connect the Independent Group, Paolozzi, Ballard, and the CCRU together is a unique contribution my thesis makes to studies of their works. Across the thesis, I draw this parallel in several different ways. After focusing on the historical antecedents of accelerationism in Chapter One, I develop a more concrete understanding of accelerationism as a political mode, that I thereafter apply to Chapters Two and Five. In Chapters Three and Four (but also to a lesser extent, Two and Five), I am more concerned with aesthetic/literary responses to technology and speed, concerns that I address as interpretations of experiences of acceleration, and thereafter link to accelerationism. In doing this, I apprehend accelerationism as both a politics, and as something that has been, and can be, represented aesthetically. Because of this, this research promises to be of interest to audiences hoping to gain greater insight into the conflicted political terrain that is accelerationism, and those that are looking to better understand the aesthetic responses to acceleration persistent across the outputs of the IG, Paolozzi, Ballard, and the CCRU.

Intriguingly, this thesis is not the first time all these figures have been related through the theme of acceleration. When I was exploring archival records of the 1998 exhibition *Speed: Visions of an Accelerated Age*, an exhibition that showcased responses to speed and acceleration across the

[45] Ballard, 'Fictions of Every Kind', p. 238.

20th century hosted at the Whitechapel Gallery, I came across an initial draft piece of documentation for a parallel speed education programme (0.1).[46] An initial list of names drawn up for this programme included, among others, Ballard, Paolozzi, and ex-IG member Richard Hamilton. Further to this, however, there were two more names: Sadie Plant and Kodwo Eshun. Plant and Eshun had a close connection to the CCRU in its early years, Plant as its founder, and Eshun as a close associate.[47] Therefore, at one moment in time, whether knowingly, or unknowingly, members of the Unit and Independent Group, as well as Ballard and Paolozzi, were all considered to have an overlapping mutual interest and intimate knowledge of frenetic speed and acceleration, supporting my logic of connecting these figures and the Group to the outputs of the CCRU. Re-invigorating this mutual interest in speed and experiences of acceleration through the interpretative framework of accelerationism, my thesis produces new insights that help explain points of overlap between the figures and groups.

The links between Ballard and Eduardo Paolozzi have been an area of long-standing interest in scholarship on both individuals. Artist and author were friends and collaborators in the late-sixties and early-seventies, and this is reflected in their outputs at this time. For instance: Ballard wrote the introduction to Paolozzi's lithograph and print series *General Dynamic F.U.N* (1965-70), parallels to Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* are drawn by Frank Whitford in the introduction to the artist's *BUNK* collages (1972), and Whitford also interviewed both men together for *Studio International* in 1971. Thereafter, Ballard also refers to his relationship with Paolozzi in his own work, writing about their friendship in his memoir *Miracles of Life* (2008), while his autofiction novel *Crash* contains a brief reference to their visit to the Imperial War Museum, which was filmed for part of an unreleased documentary (0.2).[48] The relatedness of the works of the two men has been explored at a cursory level by Andrzej Gąsiorek in *J.G. Ballard* (2005), and at slightly greater length by Jeanette Baxter in *J.G. Ballard's Surrealist Imagination: Spectacular Authorship* (2009). Further interest in their collaborations across both the *Ambit* and *New Worlds* periodicals is also evident in David Brittain's *The Jet Age Compendium* (2009), and *Eduardo Paolozzi at New Worlds* (2013), while Liz Stainforth has also related their connection to *Ambit* with the artistic outputs of Helen Chadwick (2011). What I

[46] Figure 0.1: 'Draft Speed Education Programme' from 'Speed: Visions of an Accelerated Age' curated by Jeremy Millar at the Whitechapel Gallery (1998), Whitechapel Gallery Archive, WAG/EXH/2/476/1.
[47] Both Ballard and Eshun would directly contribute to the final programme and exhibition. Eshun ran an educational workshop session, while Ballard wrote short commentaries on 20th century technologies of speed for the exhibition catalogue. Richard Hamilton's painting *Hommage à Chrysler Corp* (1957) was also on display in the gallery.
[48] Figure 0.2: 'Photograph of J.G. Ballard and Eduardo Paolozzi', black and white photograph (c. 1970), Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archive, GMA A40/10/17/3

consider to be the most complete study however, is Carol Huston's unpublished PhD Thesis 'Eduardo Paolozzi and J.G. Ballard: Representing New British Modernities, c. 1966-1980' (2013). In this thesis Huston considers their friendship through 'their mutual understanding of particular themes that were significant during the '"last gasp of modernism"', a view that has been influential on my understanding of how author and artist avoid neat periodization by problematizing narratives of postmodernism's clean break with modernism, while, in turn, raising questions about whether there might be a more suitable terminology for describing their mutual interests than either of these "isms" suggest, particularly when it comes to their shared fascinations with technological and social change.[49]

Early into my research, I discovered that Paolozzi's views on science fiction were also connected to, informed, and developed by, his involvement with the Independent Group in the 1950s. Ballard credits the Group as a major influence on his views in both his earlier autobiographical piece 'From Shanghai to Shepperton' (1984), and thereafter in his memoir *Miracles of Life*. In the former piece he notes that he 'felt their approach had a certain kinship with that of science fiction', and that the Independent Group exhibitions at *This is Tomorrow* made him think that '[s]cience fiction should be concerned with the here and now, not with the far future but with the present, not with alien planets but with what was going on in the world in the mid-50s.'[50] In *Miracles of Life* he's more emphatic, claiming that '*This is Tomorrow* convinced me that science fiction was far closer to reality than the conventional realist novel of the day'.[51] This latter point, an almost exact repetition of part of his argument in 'Fictions of Every Kind', persuaded me that, alongside Paolozzi, the Independent Group were also worth investigating in relation to accelerationism, both to explore the possible connections they have to the idea, and also to identify where their outputs might trouble it.

The links between the IG, Ballard, and Paolozzi have also been long-standing areas for academic research. The earliest piece on this connection was Eugenie Tsai's 'The Sci-Fi Connection:

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[49] Carol Huston, 'Eduardo Paolozzi and J.G. Ballard: Representing New British Modernities, c. 1966-1980' (unpublished PhD, University of Manchester, 2013), p. 11, quoting Michael Moorcock Interview with the author, 31 January 2010. Definitionally speaking, I understand modernism to be a term applied retroactively to a perceived upheaval in art and culture in the early 20th century (with precedents in the 19th) which sought to radicalise society in-line with the changes to lived experience that had taken place under modernity. Thereafter, I view postmodernism as a response and challenge to modernism that both follows and breaks with modernism. Like modernism, postmodernism is also a term applied retroactively, and can be considered a reflection of either late modernity, or postmodernity, with the former referring to a mutated continuation of modernity, and the latter as a break with the values and principles underpinning modernity (with the proviso that the extent of such a break is contested).

[50] J. G. Ballard, 'From Shanghai to Shepperton', in *J.G. Ballard*, ed. by V. Vale and Andrea Juno, RE/Search, no. 8/9 (San Francisco: Re/Search, 1984), pp. 112–24, p. 121.

[51] J. G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life*, Kindle Edition (London: Harper Collins, 2014), p. 186.

the IG, J.G. Ballard, and Robert Smithson' (1988), which outlined their interests in science fiction. Thereafter, Roger Luckhurst explored artist and group when analysing Ballard's work as 'avant-garde science fiction' in '*The Angle Between Two Walls': The Fiction of J.G. Ballard* (1997), while Baxter also investigated Ballard's links to Paolozzi and the IG as part of an argument that 'Ballard updates and modifies Surrealist art and politics in line with certain radical political avant-gardes of the 1950s and 1960s, namely Situationism and The Independent Group.'[52] More recently, the relation between the IG and Ballard has been explored by Mark Dorrian, who relates their work through ideas of 'outrageous stimulation'.[53] Dorrian explains that 'outrageous stimulation' is evident in the outputs of IG members, through how their work reflected 'a lapse' in architecture from 'style', understood as a historically grounded phenomenon, into 'styling', where the historical referent was completely lost.[54] Dorrian then connects this observation to Ballard's idea of the 'death of affect', which is the notion that affective overstimulation via the mass media was leading a loss of feeling—something that Ballard was notoriously ambivalent about.

While previous scholarship on Ballard, Paolozzi, and the IG has often emphasised their interests in science fiction and the artistic avant-garde, no material has yet examined their shared responses to experiences of acceleration. Moreover, the political implications of these responses has yet to be articulated. A core contribution of this thesis to academic understandings of author, artist, and IG is a sustained and detailed analysis that explores the complexities and challenges of their relationship acceleration, while synthesizing this response through accelerationism. By doing this, I build on existing scholarship that has previously identified each of their individual responses to accelerated change (be it technological, or social) while also articulating the political stakes of each of their engagements.

In the case of the Independent Group, for instance, I note in Chapter Two that their fascinations with science fiction have been frequently correlated to acceleration through an interest in forms of technological and social change in their respective moment. This much is made clear by Jacquelynn Baas in her introduction to *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (1990), in which she claims 'the ardor for experiencing and analyzing the effects of change,

[52] Roger Luckhurst, *'The Angle Between Two Walls': The Fiction of J.G. Ballard* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), pp. 76-77. ; Baxter. A further article that I do not mention here, but in which the connection to the IG is implicit, is Laura Colombino's 'Negotiations with the System: J.G. Ballard and Geoff Ryman writing London's Architecture' (2006). In this article, Colombino briefly explores the connection between Ballard's work and the *Archigram* architectural collective, who were heavily influenced by the IG and *This is Tomorrow*.
[53] See: Mark Dorrian, 'Banham Avec Ballard: On Style and Violence', *Cabinet*, 66, 2018 <https://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/66/dorrian.php> [accessed 19 June 2023].
[54] Ibid. Specifically, Dorrian is reading the IG through comments made by Nikolaus Pevsner in his talk 'The Return of Historicism' (1961).

was the unifying attribute of th[e] group'.[55] This thread carries through to other studies of the Group's outputs, with Anne Massey noting that '[t]he Independent Group argues that post-war British society was being radically restructured by new technology – particularly the mass media and mass production of consumer goods' in *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-59* (1995).[56] However, comparatively little has been made of the relation between the Group's response to acceleration and their provocative challenges of entrenched forms of cultural capital through American mass and popular culture, as noted by Dick Hebdige, among others. This is made all the more surprising by the fact that Independent Group members like John McHale and Magda Cordell later turned to futurology following the auspices of Richard Buckminster Fuller—famously a proponent of acceleration through what he termed 'ephemeralization' or doing more things with less.[57] Furthermore, the subsequent influence of McHale's work on the likes of Alvin Toffler, whose book *Future Shock* (1970) opens with the claim that '[t]he acceleration of change in our time is, itself, an elemental force', suggests the relevance of further analysis of the Group's interest in acceleration, to both better understand the political stakes and shortcomings of their arguments, and how they might constitute a form of accelerationism.[58]

Paolozzi's connection to acceleration also remains underexplored. As I explore in Chapter Three, barring a response to speed in Paolozzi's work being noted by Jon Wood in relation to transit in 'The Silver Sixties: Paolozzi's Sculpture Abroad' (2017)—'[h]is 1960s sculpture is a sculpture in transit: on the move and about the dynamics of moving'—there has been little further consideration over how things like speed and acceleration factor into his work.[59] This is despite the evident concern with speed in works like *Osaka Steel* (1969), and the Tottenham Court Road Mosaics (1986), and the connections drawn between Italian Futurism and the work produced early in his career by the likes of Stephen Mullin in *Granta* (1959), who noted that outputs at this time contained 'more than an echo […] of Marinetti's cry that 'the magnificence of the world has been enriched by a new beauty, the beauty of speed'.'[60] This lack of engagement has led to the political contours of Paolozzi's response

[55] Jacquelynn Baas, 'Introduction', in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 8–11, p. 8.
[56] Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-59* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 89.
[57] See: R. Buckminster Fuller, *Nine Chains to the Moon* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963).
[58] Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, Bantam Books (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), p. 2.
[59] Jon Wood, 'The Silver Sixties: Paolozzi's Sculpture Abroad', in *Eduardo Paolozzi*, ed. by Daniel Herrmann (London: Whitechapel gallery, 2017), pp. 150–61, p. 153.
[60] Stephen Mullin, 'Painting and Sculpture', *Granta*, 17 October 1959, 22–25, p. 22, quoting from Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'The Manifesto and Founding of Futurism'. The connection between the Tottenham Court Road Mosaics and speed is also noted by the London Regional Transport Department of Architecture and

to acceleration to be elided, despite, as I showcase in Chapter Three, the richness of allusions to speed and accelerated change in relation to both contexts of play and war.

Comparably, responses to speed and acceleration in Ballard's works have received much more scholarly scrutiny. For example, in Chapter Four, I highlight how Enda Duffy in *The Speed Handbook* (2009) has examined speed in Ballard's novel *Crash*. Arguing that sex in the novel acts as an 'allegory for […] speed', Duffy suggests that 'speed as pleasure must not try to break away from all that is valuable in the older forms of human satisfaction' lest it 'turn on us and kill us.'[61] Likewise, Florian Cord has produced a rich analysis of how *Crash* relates to Paul Virilio's concept of dromology, or the science of speed, in *J.G. Ballard's Politics* (2017) while also exploring how the author identifies and responds to stasis in later novels *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Super-Cannes* (2000). These clear engagements with the politics of speed and its stakes in Ballard's texts likely owe to how foundational the topic of acceleration was for the author, as was asserted by his part-collaborator at *Ambit*, Martin Bax, who noted that, '[t]he industrial revolution which *started* to change the way people behave, is now changing the way people behave at an *extraordinary pace*. […] Ballard is the chronicler […] of [… this] stage of the industrial revolution' (italics in source).[62] Throughout the fourth chapter of this thesis, I build on this pre-existing scholarship by evaluating Ballard's position as chronicler of acceleration as ultimately ambivalent. By doing this, I highlight accelerationist elements in Ballard's work that challenge the more distinctly humanist interpretations of the likes of Duffy, while accepting Cord's evaluation of Ballard's work as a 'clash of discourses' that 'ultimately defies any attempt to produce conclusive readings of it', a quality that allows it to be evocative of, even if non-reducible to, an accelerationist position.[63]

One major contribution my research makes to scholarship on the IG, Paolozzi, and Ballard, is a consideration of how their views and practices either inform or relate to an otherwise more marginal group in Chapter Five: the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit. Compared to author, artist, and Group, the CCRU have received much less in the way of scholarly attention, even though, much like the above figures their activities and outputs during the nineties have already had profound

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Design in their commissioning report. The Department explain that the works have a 'vigorous sense of movement', responding to passing trains, and 'the busy hubbub of Tottenham Court Road and its shops'. London Regional Transport Department of Architecture and Design, 'The Comissioning of Eduardo Paolozzi', in *Eduardo Paolozzi Underground*, ed. by Richard Cork (London: Royal Academy of Arts in association Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1986), pp. 25–26, p. 26.

[61] Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 261.

[62] V. Vale and Andrea Juno, 'Interview with Martin Bax', in *J.G. Ballard*, ed. by V. Vale and Andrea Juno, RE/Search, no. 8/9 (San Francisco: Re/Search, 1984), pp. 36–41, p. 36.

[63] Florian Cord, *J.G. Ballard's Politics: Late Capitalism, Power, and the Pataphysics of Resistance*, ANGLIA Book Series, volume 54 (Berlin ; Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), p. 13.

cultural impact. Where the CCRU are studied, they are usually connected to accelerationism directly, with this association largely acting as the source of continued interest in their works today. Examples of this include of the earliest republications of their works in *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, and the most in-depth critical analysis of the CCRU's outputs by Noys essay in *Malign Velocities*. Christopher Haworth has also produced further critical work that considers their broader cultural impact on internet meme culture, and the roots of their aesthetic outputs in 'in left-libertarian new musick and industrial culture fanzines' of the eighties.[64]

I add to these few intellectual engagements with the CCRU's work by examining how the Unit's outputs and practices relate to frustrations already characteristic of the IG's, Paolozzi's, and Ballard's outputs. In the case of the CCRU's relation to the IG and Paolozzi, I demonstrate across Chapter Five that there is a similar advocacy of a turn away from institutionalised aesthetics and forms of cultural capital in favour of an engaging with popular culture and technology in a do-it-yourself, collage-like manner evidence in Chapters Two and Three. I also evidence how the CCRU showcase the same predilection for popular forms of science fiction as Group and artist, albeit more contemporary genres—a quality of their work that likely owes to the direct influence of Ballard on their outputs, a chief example of this being Stephen Metcalf's 'Autogeddon' (1998), an essay I analyse in Chapter Four. By evidencing these connections across the chapters of the thesis, I create a unique reading of the influences of the IG's, Paolozzi's, and Ballard's practices while bringing into focus an otherwise marginal response that has had a significant bearing on the development of accelerationism in the contemporary moment.

Chapter Overview

Although I have opened this thesis with a brief overview of what accelerationism is, and what it means, the term itself complex, having precedents in numerous cultural movements, and originating out of fraught cultural debate. In the opening chapter of the thesis, I augment my initial analysis by critically examining the meaning and historical antecedents of accelerationism in further detail. Throughout this chapter, I continue to emphasise how accelerationism represents a countervailing tendency to the negative responses to acceleration, while in turn evidencing its presence as an idea within earlier writings on acceleration, such as F.T Marinetti's *Manifesto of Futurism* (1909), Karl Marx's 'The Fragment on Machines' (1858), and Samuel Butler's 'The Book of the Machines' from *Erewhon* (1872). Thereafter, I explore Noys's definition of accelerationism and its origins in a series of

[64] Christopher Haworth, 'Post-Punk, Industrial Culture Zines, and the Information Dark Age', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764221151133>.

blog debates between him, Mark Fisher, and Alex Williams. In my analysis of these debates, I emphasise the importance of accelerationism's relationship to hauntology, both as a reaction to a kind of cultural stasis, and as a hauntological trace evidencing an absence of acceleration in the present. I then explore an example of the importance of the hauntological trace in accelerationist writings about spaceflight to highlight the simultaneously subversive and acquiescent political qualities of the accelerationist position. I conclude the chapter by turning to a recent example of fiction that expands on this reading, Jake Chapman's *2+2=5* (2021), a contemporary re-telling of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Comparing Chapman's novel to Orwell's original, I continue to showcase how the preoccupations with technology and speed common to accelerationism can be identified in other works. Thereafter, I highlight how Chapman's novel draws attention to accelerationism's uneasy political status, tying it to the often-reactionary means through which forms of stasis are identified. In my view, this is a frequent problem for accelerationism, and is one that persists across the other figures and groups I analyse throughout the study.

In the second chapter, I analyse how the Independent Group respond to acceleration in their contemporary '50s moment. Seeing this as a further political mode of accelerationism, I open the chapter by examining the Group's response to post-war rationing as a form of stasis, to which I contrast their emphasis on an 'aesthetics of plenty', a term Lawrence Alloway coined to describe their artistic reactions to mass cultural imagery.[65] I explore Alloway's and Banham's writings about mass culture as key reflections on the IG's commitments, identifying within these texts an opposition to institutional hierarchy and forms of cultural capital, particularly in relation to the Leavisism of early cultural studies. Building out of this argument, I then analyse how the Group's embrace of mass culture parallels their interest in accelerated forms of technological and social change. I argue that their tendency to affirm these accelerated changes, as opposed to criticising them, is consistent with accelerationism, and explore how this is intimately bound up with one form of mass culture that fascinated Group members: science fiction. However, where the IG present themselves as turning to science fiction in order to escape from academicized forms of aesthetic theory, I also demonstrate how science fiction was just as much a vehicle for these ideas, and with it emblematic of a period of unprecedented acceleration and change that was not simply driven by progressive cultural developments. In the final phase of the chapter, I conclude by exploring the contributions of Group members to *This is Tomorrow*, with a particular emphasis on Group 2's stand by Richard Hamilton,

[65] Lawrence Alloway, 'The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty', in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 49–53, p. 52.

John McHale, and John Voelcker. I argue that this stand, and Hamilton's corresponding artwork, *Just What is it that Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing?* (1956), constitute an aesthetic form of accelerationism through how they affirm the radical potential of the commodity for reconfiguring human subjectivity, while exploring the subversive and acquiescent qualities of such a move, and its relationship to speed.

My third chapter focuses on the work of Independent Group member Eduardo Paolozzi. In this chapter, I examine how he engages with speed across several of his sculptural and print outputs in the sixties. Throughout my analysis of these works, I evidence Paolozzi's enchantment with speed's mutation from something pursued as a discrete novel experience, to its role as an increasingly invisible and ubiquitous condition of everyday experience. To evidence this, I turn to a range of different approaches the artist has to speed and the frenetic pace of change in his present. For instance, I argue that, in *Diana and an Engine I* (1963, painted 1966), the artist uses myth and iconic status to render the accelerative thrust of everyday life visible, creating a work that is both apotropaic and celebratory in its response. Thereafter, I argue that in *Towards a New Laocoön* (1963) and *Mechanik's Bench* (1963) Paolozzi explores speed-induced decontextualization and the conditions this opens for play and forms of parodic resignification. In the final phase of my argument, I then turn to Paolozzi's print works—*Universal Electronic* Vacuum (1967), *Z.E.E.P* (1970), and *Moonstrips Empire News* (1967)—to demonstrate the artist's more critical perception of this speed-induced decontextualization through his emphasis on the links between high-speed military logistics and wargaming.

My fourth chapter centres on the author J.G. Ballard and his depictions of flight in two texts, *Crash* (1973) and 'Memories of the Space Age' (1988). I explore how the traditionally romantic metaphor of flight in Ballard's work expresses a tension between an escape from and immersion in capital and acceleration also present within accelerationist work. Using this chapter as a bridge between my earlier writing on the IG and Paolozzi to my final chapter on the CCRU, I also give greater consideration to how Ballard's 'Fictions of Every Kind' (1971) essay links to political expressions of accelerationism through the claim that 'the future is a better key to the present than the past'.[66] I explain how Ballard's views about science fiction are informed by the Independent Group and Paolozzi, and are largely predicated on the idea that new technology offers the chance of breaking with traditional forms of literary production and, with it, the social values the author sees these forms as being used to uphold. Emphasising how this view never came into fruition, I suggest that it acts as a polemic that reveals a stasis and aversion to change in the present. Thereafter, I explore

[66] Ballard, 'Fictions of Every Kind', p. 237.

how the image of flight in *Crash* and 'Memories of the Space Age' dramatizes a similar tension, at once being both indicative of the means of escape from oppressive conditions of repetition and control in both narratives, while simultaneously being cast by Ballard as a failed means of escape—a quality revelatory of a tension haunting the accelerationist desire for acceleration.

In the final chapter, I consider the foundations of accelerationism in the practices and outputs of the CCRU. My analysis of the Unit centres around two key texts, Nick Land's 'Meltdown' (1994), and the CCRU's collective piece 'Swarmachines' (1996). I relate these texts to developments in nineties cyberculture, and particularly the connections that they have to darkside and jungle music. Starting with Land's text, I argue that it is an inherently pessimistic subversion of the techno-optimistic tendencies of Californian cyberculture. I describe this pessimism as 'dread futurism', a term I appropriate from Fisher's writing on darkside to refer to a futurism that hotly anticipates, and even embraces, the crises resulting from acceleration.[67] Where the Californian cyberculture frequently framed the intense acceleration of this period as inherently progressive, I argue that Land's 'Meltdown' concerns itself with a split between acceleration and progress, and the unresolved anxiety that results. However, true to accelerationist form, Land does not use this anxiety to criticise the separation taking place. Instead, he affirms the tragedy of this separation of acceleration from progress in order to will a negation of the more optimistic view. In a certain sense, this radically exposes the more horrific elements of the optimistic visions of the period. However, Land's tendency to counter this with a form of poetic intensification reminiscent of the very same forms of cyberpunk fiction from which the cyberculture drew leads to an elision of political agency that reproduces the racialised and gendered imaginary of the genre deftly criticised by Wendy Chun in *Control and Freedom* (2006). Against some of the identifiable problems in Land's text, particularly its absence of a radical political subject, I present the CCRU's collectively written text, 'Swarmachines', as a diverging approach that attempts to redefine collective practice for an accelerated digital age. Drawing on its references to the swarm or 'hive mind', Situationism, and jungle subculture, I argue that 'Swarmachines' presents a radical counter history to techno-capitalism, a continuum, that tries to identify how radical political practices are being performed in the present. In doing so, acceleration is affirmed while political agency retained, although this does not resolve all of the problems of acquiescence previously identified with accelerationism.

Naturally, a study of this scope is going to have to exclude a wealth of texts, materials, and artefacts. Throughout the thesis I have opted to use texts that I believe to be the clearest illustrations of responses to speed and acceleration in the figures and groups I analyse, while also offering the

[67] Mark Fisher, 'Hello Darkness, Our New Friend', *New Statesman & Society*, 11 March 1994, pp. 32–33, p. 32.

most scope for including further perspectives and criticism on their work. In Chapter One, for instance, I select Chapman's *2+2=5* because it speaks both to historical instances of accelerationism, and its simultaneously subversive and acquiescent qualities. *This is Tomorrow* is my primary focus in Chapter Two, because of how it relates speed to forms of commodification. In Chapter Three, I opt to explore Paolozzi's '60s sculpture because it speaks most clearly to a context of acceleration also observed in Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*. In Chapter Four, I select *Crash* because it's a novel that both reflects and undermines Ballard's predictions of new forms of literature in 'Fictions of Every Kind', while 'Memories of the Space Age' relates directly to my analyses of spaceflight and accelerationism earlier in the thesis. Finally, in Chapter Five, I select Land's 'Meltdown' for its contemporaneity to Fisher's writing on darkside, and 'Swarmachines' for its significance as an early, precursory, CCRU text that opens my analysis of the Unit to encompass wider cultural trends that also exhibit accelerationist tendencies.

While I attempt to take as a broad a view on accelerationism as possible, my focus is almost entirely European in scope, with the majority of the works analysed being produced in the United Kingdom. Moreover, these works, and the explored writings about accelerationism, largely reflect European and North American contexts. This leads the work to have two major absences that could be built on in further study. The first regards individuals from national and international contexts that might contest experiences of acceleration generally. I'm thinking here about communities and places in the world where acceleration hasn't happened. Naturally, individuals and groups from these places could provide intriguing counterpoints to claims that problematically universalize these experiences, or that interpret an eudaemonistic dimension to acceleration. They may also present their own forms of accelerationism, insofar as acceleration might be something advocated for by these groups and individuals, albeit in a qualitatively different way to the individuals analysed throughout this thesis. Acknowledging these views in relation to the accelerationism explored in this thesis would be valuable; however, to do this well would require much more intensive mapping and research into how acceleration is perceived in different cultures and settings.

The second absence regards non-European/North American types of accelerationism, alongside voices that contest the largely white, male, and heteronormative body of material attached to accelerationism that is, unfortunately, reproduced by the choice of individuals and texts explored throughout this thesis. While I have tried to critically address this quality of materials throughout each of the chapters by employing feminist, queer, and anti-racist lines of critique, much more work could be done to address this problem with accelerationism generally. One way of doing this would be to include accelerationist perspectives that challenge the centrality of white, male, heterosexual,

and European/North American viewpoints. Two examples of these have been touched on above in Xenofeminism and Blaccelerationism. These are viewpoints I've opted to not include in my interpretation of accelerationism, because I believe the exact contours of their relationship to the idea require much greater scrutiny first, something which I unfortunately did not have the scope to do in this body of work. Further examples, however, might include creative works that are accelerationism adjacent, either because they present criticisms of accelerationist assumptions, or because they eschew the Anglo/European-futurisms on which much accelerationism depends, i.e. sino-, afro-, Arab, and African-futurist works. These types of futurism already have much precedent in forms of accelerationism—being interests among CCRU members and affiliates like Land, Kodwo Eshun, and Anna Greenspan. However, their relevance to accelerationism remains firmly filtered through an Anglo-centric lens, one that risks eliding the challenges they pose to accelerationism as it has been conceived in this context. Again, addressing this issue would require a significant mapping of different types of futurism, and their respective relationships to ideas and experiences of acceleration before a study of this type could take place.

Therefore instead, I unite the IG, Paolozzi, Ballard, and the CCRU through the theoretical framework of accelerationism as it has been conceived in a European and North American context. To do this, I work at the intersection between art and literature to produce a unique reading of responses to acceleration from the mid-twentieth century to the contemporary moment. Although a relatively new term, accelerationism has a complex history and broad applicability. Some have argued, as Srnicek above, that this blunts its meaning and value. However, I believe this thesis stands as a testament to why that is not the case. In fact, accelerationism is an analytically valuable term that, like "science fiction", codifies an entire genre of affirmative responses to acceleration, be they political or aesthetic. The figures and groups I examine throughout this thesis illustrate this and allow me to examine the idea and its shortcomings in a manner that make it both easier to understand and criticise, hopefully, by the end, making accelerationism feel a little bit less 'far-out' than it did in the beginning.[68]

[68] Zelazny, p. 54.

Chapter 1
An Overview and History of Accelerationism

Accelerationism, 'A Chaos of Positions'

Defining accelerationism is an inherently frustrating exercise. This is because there have been few, if any, actual adherents to accelerationism (accelerationists), while in turn there are 'many "accelerationisms"', as noted Robin Mackay, one of the editors of *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* (2014, hereafter *The Reader*).[1] Further interlocutors in interviews and articles online (including the far-right appropriation mentioned in the introduction) only increasingly complicate matters, as do politically "purified" off-shoots, such as left-accelerationism (l/acc), right-accelerationism (r/acc), or unconditional accelerationism (u/acc). In what I think is one of the most pertinent definitions of accelerationism, artist Jake Chapman refers to it as 'a *chaos* of positions […] the combination of all (antagonized and antagonising) relations to the gravitational pull of capitalism' (italics in source).[2] Chapman's idea here is blatantly controversial for how it risks universalising what he describes—can every 'antagonized' and 'agonising' response to capitalism actually be considered a form of accelerationism?[3] However, I also think his attempt at broad definition is helpful. This is because it overcomes the fissiparousness of accelerationism, while suggesting that it relates to a particular quality or feature of capitalism, its 'gravitational pull', which I take to be a reference to both its most attractive and constraining qualities.

In this chapter, I aim to follow Chapman in defining accelerationism. I do this by taking accelerationism as a response to experiential perceptions of acceleration and a paradoxical feeling of technological, social, and cultural inertia that this acceleration seemingly gives rise to. In the first

[1] Roc Jiménez de Cisneros, 'The Accelerationist Vertigo (II): Interview with Robin Mackay', *CCCB LAB*, 5 November 2014 <https://lab.cccb.org/en/the-accelerationist-vertigo-ii-interview-with-robin-mackay/> [accessed 16 May 2023].
[2] Brad Evans, 'Histories of Violence: The Violence of Art' an interview with Jake Chapman, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2017 <https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/histories-of-violence-the-violence-of-art/> [accessed 6 January 2022].
[3] Similar problems are identifiable in equally broad definitions of accelerationism. Examples of these are Mark Fisher's claim that '[e]veryone is an accelerationist', which he expresses in his essay 'Terminator vs Avatar' (2012), and Steven Shaviro's view that 'like it or not—we are all accelerationists now'. See: Mark Fisher, 'Terminator vs Avatar', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 335–46, p. 340. ; Steven Shaviro, *No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism*, Forerunners (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota press, 2015), p. 34.

phase of this chapter, I outline the relationship experiences of acceleration have to modernity, while highlighting how perceptions of accelerated change shift between it being seen as a positive, directed, process in Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels's *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848, hereafter *Communist Manifesto*) to it describing a more general, undirected, experience in Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1982). Thereafter, I highlight other historic responses to acceleration, which I suggest are demonstrative of accelerationist positions through their ambivalent or affirmative responses to acceleration. Key works I explore in this phase of my argument are F.T. Marinetti's *Manifesto of Futurism* (1909), Karl Marx's 'Fragment on Machines' (1858), and Samuel Butler's 'The Book of the Machines' (1872).

After exampling the presence of accelerationism in these responses to acceleration, I explicate the origins of term in Benjamin Noys's *The Persistence of the Negative* (2010). In this phase of my argument, I elaborate on Noys's definition of accelerationism as 'an exotic variant *of la politique du pire*' by exploring its precedent in a passage of Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) that is key for accelerationist thought.[4] In my view, the significance of this passage lies in its arguments for acceleration and against inertia, which Deleuze and Guattari otherwise equate with a "fascistic" tendency in anti-capitalist theory. I highlight how this informed debates about accelerationism that precede the date of its published definition by Noys. However, I then turn to Hartmut Rosa's work to explain how contemporary accelerationism reworks these earlier ideas by also equating the "fascistic", inertia causing, tendency Deleuze and Guattari identify with acceleration, erring on the side of caution against accelerationisms that recklessly affirm acceleration without giving prior thought to its consequences. I then demonstrate how this plays out in accelerationist discourse around 21st century spaceflight while highlighting some of the political inefficacies of accelerationist points of view. The purpose of this part of the chapter is to highlight the uneasy political status of accelerationism and the tendency of its adherents to vacillate between political subversion and acquiescence—something that I also continue to extrapolate in a concluding discussion of Jake Chapman's recent novel *2+2=5* (2021).

The aim of this chapter is to further contextualise accelerationism and its key themes ahead of my exploration of its presence in select outputs of the Independent Group, Eduardo Paolozzi, J.G. Ballard, and the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (hereafter, CCRU) in subsequent chapters. I do this with the intention of highlighting the overall complexity of accelerationism as a concept, and

[4] Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/persistence-of-the-negative/B47CB829AC35E8AD5EE81A0FD3AA85CE> [accessed 31 January 2022], p. 4.

particularly its moral ambiguity in relation to the harmful effects of acceleration. This chapter also sees me introduce several themes that have continued use throughout the thesis, such as the idea of human-machine fusion or the cyborg, and flight. Alongside speed, these two themes act as key points of reference for identifying resonances with accelerationism across each of my case studies. They also present opportunities for critique, with these themes offering in-roads for the critical analysis of the shortcomings of accelerationist ideas. One example of this that I explore in the chapter, and then throughout subsequent chapters, is the assumed white and male subject position from which much accelerationist theory derives, which I criticise in my analysis of Land's and Singleton's accelerationist works later in the chapter.

'All that is Solid Melts into Air': A Brief Overview of Acceleration

Acceleration is an abstract phenomenon with a long and contested history, that diverges wildly across contexts. However, to get a handle on accelerationism it is at least partially necessary to outline what acceleration is. Werner Siemens and Henry Adams are some of the first people to refer to experiences of accelerated social change by name in 1886 and 1904 respectively. Siemens identified it when he declared that a 'clear and evident law of our current cultural development is that of continuous acceleration', while Adams famously postulated his own 'law of acceleration', which was as 'definite and constant as any law of mechanics' and that 'cannot be supposed to relax its energy for the convenience of man.'[5] Yet, it is also something much older than both these figures suggest. In his landmark sociological study of acceleration, *Social Acceleration* (2013), Hartmut Rosa suggests that acceleration can be traced back even further, to 'the birth hour' of modernity.[6] Rosa means this both in material and philosophical senses, attributing acceleration to the very 'introduction of the mechanical clock' and the philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant.[7] He also draws a connection more generally, implying a link between modernity and acceleration itself.

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[5] Werner Siemens, cited by Reinhart Koselleck, in 'Temporal Foreshortening and Acceleration: A Study on Secularization', in *Religion and Politics* (Brill, 2005), pp. 207–29 <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047407850_012>, p. 208. ; Henry Adams, 'A Law of Acceleration', in *High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity*, ed. by Hartmut Rosa and William E. Scheuerman (State College, US: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), pp. 33–40 <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=3384889> [accessed 2 May 2022], p. 36.

[6] Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, New Directions for Critical Theory, Paperback ed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 28.

[7] Ibid. Rosa identifies acceleration with 'the introduction of the mechanical clock', because of how it emancipated time from space. He chooses Hobbes because of how he prioritised movement over rest in his physics, and Kant because of the greater significance he ascribes to time over space in his transcendental idealism.

Rosa's view on the links between acceleration and modernity is informed by the writing of Reinhart Koselleck, among others. Koselleck describes acceleration in his essay 'The Eighteenth Century as the Beginning of Modernity' as a general criterion of what he terms *Neuzeit*, or modernity.[8] Specifically for Koselleck, *Neuzeit* describes a new time he saw as arising in the Eighteenth century, whereby '[t]ime does not just remain the form in which all histories take place, but […] itself gains a historical quality. Consequently, history no longer takes place in time, but rather through time', such that, '[t]ime is metaphorically dynamicized into a force of history itself.'[9] For Koselleck then, modernity or *Neuzeit* is fundamentally a new way of periodizing history, one that, in Peter Osborne's words, 'is defined solely in terms of temporal determinants […] of a very specific kind.'[10] One example of these temporal determinants for Koselleck is 'the experience […] of acceleration by means of which one's own time is distinguished from the preceding time', or as he elucidates, 'a historical time that seems to generate ever shorter and shorter intervals between events and experiences.'[11] Thus, for Koselleck, acceleration is understood as an experiential quality that underpins the historical period of modernity itself.

A solid illustration of Koselleck's idea of an experiential quality of modernity is evident in Marshall Berman's book *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*. In the work, Berman talks of experiencing modern personal and social life as a 'maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish […] to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, "all that is solid melts into air."'[12] Berman's claim here, as Rosa suggests, belies a 'condition of ceaseless dynamism', one that is consistent with Koselleck's perception of acceleration as both an experience, and a temporal determinant of modernity.[13] This is because, as a passage, it is wholly reflective on the passing of the present; in Berman's words, events are happening so fast that they have seemingly

[8] Reinhart Koselleck, 'The Eighteenth Century as the Beginning of Modernity', trans. by Todd Presner, in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. by Todd Presner and Others (United States of America: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 154-169, p. 165.
[9] Ibid. Importantly, Koselleck is not alone in making this observation. In his response to Kant's essay, 'What is Enlightenment?', Michel Foucault reads the novelty of Kant's definition of the Enlightenment as resulting from his 'reflection on "today" as difference in history and as motive for a particular philosophical task'. Thereafter, he relates this thinking to modernity, which he views as an attitude, or 'a philosophical ethos that could be described as permanent critique of our historical era.' What Foucault describes as modernity here—a critical self-awareness place within history that allows one to go beyond it—speaks to the historical quality of time identified by Koselleck in the above essay. See: Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', trans. by Catherine Porter, in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 32-50.
[10] Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London ; New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 8-9.
[11] Koselleck, p. 168.
[12] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London ; New York: Penguin, 1988), p. 15.
[13] Rosa, p. 35.

become ‘perpetual’, sustained merely by the fact that they are already happening. As a result, the interval between event and experience of said event is thought of as ever-shortening.

Yet, if, as I claim, Berman’s view is an example of an experience of acceleration, it is divergent from Koselleck’s view insofar as it makes no attempt ‘to trace […] the modern […] back to the use of the term as a periodizing category’, as Osborne notes.[14] This observation is significant because it is at odds with Koselleck’s definition of *Neuzeit*, which describes a period of historical time, not just the experience of acceleration. In this vein, Berman’s passage conflicts with, as much as it confirms, Koselleck’s concept, a quality of Berman’s text that differentiates it from one of its key sources, Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engels’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party*:

> Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.[15]

Compared to Berman’s text, this passage of the *Manifesto* is much more self-evidently periodized by Marx and Engels. The authors’ mention of a ‘bourgeois epoch’ situates them within history, and, importantly, positions their experiences of acceleration within modernity (an epoch they see as defined by a certain set of social relations, capitalism). What’s more, their phrasing in this passage implies a positive dimension, and direction, to this experience of acceleration. It is not only opinions that are ‘swept away’, but also the ‘prejudices’ of ‘fixed fast-frozen relations’. Likewise, the experiential process they identify isn’t merely something received passively, but also compels ‘man […] to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.’ In this sense, the experience of acceleration is revelatory, suggesting that the future is a kind of open book.

Despite the use of phrasing borrowed from Marx and Engels, Berman’s account lacks their impression of positive direction or revelatory potential. Instead, acceleration is ungrounded, inevitable even; less a means through which history is experienced, but a matter of experience itself, a ‘general model of social experience’ as Osborne has it.[16] Any perception of it as a propellant of history is gone and, because of this, Berman’s perception of acceleration contrasts starkly with

[14] Osborne, p. 6.
[15] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ‘Communist Manifesto (Chapter 1)’, trans. by Samuel Moore, *Marxists Internet Archive (Marxists.Org)*, 2000 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007> [accessed 10 October 2023].
[16] Osborne, p. 6.

Koselleck's view of it as a temporal determinant of *Neuzeit* and modernity. This divergence between Berman's view and Koselleck's interpretation of acceleration is a significant one, particularly for how forms of accelerationism might be interpreted. This is because, as Benjamin Noys has noted, accelerationism has 'a fairly impeccable pedigree as one of the "spirits" of Marx, especially the oft-quoted passage from the Manifesto on "all that's solid melts into air".'[17] Taken as an affirmation of acceleration, this pedigree of accelerationism points to two lines of interpretation, each of which have a significant bearing on how it can be understood. First, if acceleration is seen as a temporal determinant of modernity, then accelerationism can be seen as an acceptance of the temporally "progressive" logic of history with which acceleration is associated. In this framework, accelerationism is the argument that acceleration is necessary because it ensures that the future will always be vastly different from the past. Second, if acceleration is taken to be a general model of social experience in the present, as in Berman's case, then accelerationism is the acceptance of this model. In my view, accelerationist arguments, as responses to acceleration, frequently straddle both of these positions.

Accelerationist positions usually either insist on acceleration as part of a "progressive" programme in order to overcome otherwise stultifying present conditions, or they accept and—perhaps more controversially—present acceleration as a form of experience to be accepted generally. Insofar as acceleration is not a politically neutral phenomenon, something I address throughout this thesis, both of these positions are liable to subvert or acquiesce with political states of affairs at different times and in different contexts. In the following section, I will continue to demarcate this quality of accelerationism by turning to historical instances of the position. Starting with F.T. Marinetti's *The Founding Manifesto of Futurism* (1909), I outline how his insistence on acceleration is underpinned by a desire to overcome the placidity of his present. Agreeing with Rosa's and William E. Scheuerman's claim that Marinetti's manifesto illustrates how 'positive eudaimonistic expectations' are 'connected to […] acceleration', and seeing this aspect of Marinetti's work as a form of accelerationism, I use the manifesto to identify a key theme of accelerationist work: human-machine fusion.[18] Thereafter, I read the presence of this theme in two other works, Karl Marx's 'Fragment on Machines' (1858), and Samuel Butler's 'The Book of the Machines' (1872),

[17] Benjamin Noys, 'Accelerationism', *No Useless Leniency*, 2008 <https://web.archive.org/web/20111214191520/http://leniency.blogspot.com/2008/10/accelerationism.html > [accessed 11 January 2022].

[18] Hartmut Rosa and William E. Scheuerman, 'Introduction', in *High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity*, ed. by Hartmut Rosa and William E. Scheuerman (State College, US: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), pp. 1–29 <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=3384889> [accessed 2 May 2022], p. 22.

to highlight how acceleration has given rise to hopes and anxieties in the past that have also elicited accelerationist responses.

Human-Cyborg Relations: Acceleration and Accelerationism

Accelerationism has been connected to a wide variety of arts, cultural, and literary artefacts and movements that have long been associated with acceleration. Steven Shaviro for instance has argued that 'science fiction is the accelerationist art par excellence.'[19] Likewise, in *Malign Velocities*, Benjamin Noys associates accelerationism with Italian Futurism, which he refers to as its 'Ur-form'.[20] Meanwhile, *The Reader* grounds accelerationism in works such as Karl Marx's 'Fragment on Machines', and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*. The unification of these works makes sense under the framework of accelerationism, even if they are otherwise disparate sources that differ in their motivations and formal qualities. This is due to their shared emphasis on the accelerative thrust of modernity, with each giving rise to affirmative appraisals and speculations about acceleration—even if, in some cases, they present their arguments negatively. One of the central themes that allows these works to be brought together is their representations of the idea of human and machine fusion, otherwise known as the cyborg or the more problematically gendered 'man-machine'—human-machine integration being a strong litmus marker of acceleration insofar as increases to productivity through technological means remains one of the clearest measures of acceleration there is.[21]

In the opening chapter of *Malign Velocities*, Noys connects accelerationism to Italian Futurism, a movement well known for their fascination in forms of modern technology and their desire 'to transform anachronistic society.'[22] He associates the Futurists with accelerationism because he believes that they 'try to grasp and integrate forces of production that appear as forces

[19] Shaviro, p. 3.
[20] Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism & Capitalism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), p. 14.
[21] Noys uses the term 'man-machine' in *Malign Velocities* to draw attention to the gender biased nature of much accelerationist writing. See: Noys, *Malign Velocities*, p. 12. My claim about the link between human-machine integration as a litmus for acceleration follows Rosa here, insofar as he identifies technical/technological acceleration as the easiest to evidence of the three categories he outlines. He refers to technical/technological acceleration as '*an increase in quantity per unit time* (or, logically equivalent, as a reduction of the amount of time per fixed quantity).' Rosa thereafter explains that '[v]arious things may serve as the quantity measured: distance travelled, total numbers of communicated messages, amount of goods produced.' See: Rosa, p. 66. My terminology "technical/technological acceleration" reflects a shift in terminology between Rosa's 2010 work *Alienation and Acceleration*, which refers to technological acceleration, and his 2013 work *Social Acceleration* which refers to technical acceleration. This terminological difference likely comes down to divergent translations of Rosa's use of the German word *technisch*.
[22] Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla, *Futurism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010), p. 7.

of *destruction* […] try[ing] to fuse and infuse mechanical bodies with vital forces and accelerate these new fused forces towards a threshold of destruction and rebirth.'[23] Here, accelerationism is envisaged as a desire to merge living things with machines, and to thereafter push them to a limit point that bypasses their division, destroying it.[24]

Noys's idea is reminiscent of the car crash that features in F.T. Marinetti's *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* (1909). This crash—which would have been 40mph at most in 1909—occurs in an impressionistic narrative that frames the wider manifesto. In this narrative, the crash is presented to a reader as a performance that draws 'a crowd of fishermen […] and gouty naturalists' to whom the Futurists 'declare' their 'high intentions'.[25] The crash is implied to be a vitalising experience, something that is expressed by the work's narrator through reference to a 'maternal ditch, almost full of muddy water'—a well-spring that revives them post-accident. Life is thereafter also extended to the automobile that caused the crash, with the narrator claiming that 'we thought it was dead, my beautiful shark, but a caress from me was enough to revive it.'[26] The narrator's attempt to extend pathos to the machine here implies its vitality, and a connection between their lifeforce and the vehicle's power, which is also the source of its momentum. This is a view that implies both an emotional connection to the experience of speed the vehicle can produce, and a man-machine hybridity (Marinetti was a terrible misogynist), as human vitality is directly connected to the machine. When taken together, both the vehicle's potential for speed and human-machine fusion become symbolic of a human subject's mutation under the forces of acceleration.

In his reading of Italian Futurism, Noys draws attention to the political dubiousness of the Futurists themselves, claiming that in their avant-garde work it seems 'that the desire to transgress leftist "pieties" leads to an embrace of the sublime, and an embrace which restores that trope to its

[23] Noys, *Malign Velocities*, p. 14.
[24] Here accelerationism showcases a similarity to Donna Haraway's writing about the cyborg in her 'Cyborg Manifesto' (1985). Haraway explores the cyborg as a myth about blurriness of boundaries in a part attempt to overcome 'deepened dualisms of mind and body, animal and machine, [and] idealism and materialism'. See: Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 154. The cyborg concept is a useful analogue to acceleration because it is predicated on the idea of increasing social and technical integration. However, I'd argue that many accelerationists diverge from Haraway on the grounds that she believes 'the machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshipped and 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' (italics in source). Haraway, p. 180. In contrast to this, select accelerationist points of view are predicated on the idea that acceleration is something experienced but that is not necessarily controllable, throwing into question to what extent humans can in fact be responsible for the drawing of boundaries in the first place.
[25] F.T. Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', in *Documents of 20th Century Art: Futurist Manifestos*, ed. by Robert Brian, R.W. Flint, and J.C. Higgitt, trans. by Caroline Tisdall (New York: Viking Press, 1973), pp. 19–24, p. 21.
[26] Ibid.

conservative roots.'[27] Given the proclivity for fascism among many Italian Futurists, Noys's choice to draw attention to the relationship between their aesthetic emphasis on human-machine fusion and the dubiousness of the political ends to which it was employed is certainly one way to challenge their accelerationism.[28] However, I don't think that instances of accelerationism always evidence these same political ends—something that I'll demonstrate through the following texts—making this point moot in many cases. Because of this, I'm more inclined to agree with another view of Noys's within *Malign Velocities*: that the accelerationist emphasis on human-machine fusion is part of a larger desire to 'at once save and transcend the laboring body'.[29] Crucially, Noys reads this as a 'fantasy', favouring a critical approach to accelerationism that uses it to 'gauge mutations of labor and its resistance to integration within capitalism and the machine'.[30] In this vein, accelerationism is symptomatic of perspectives that otherwise see accelerating production under capital as a matter of frictionlessly integrating humans into mechanized labour. Put more simply, this is an assertion that accelerationism arises out of the myth of smooth acceleration. I feel this general point leads Noys to be broadly dismissive of accelerationism. In my view however, this is one of the reasons why accelerationism appears to be both a subversive and acquiescent political gesture—some forms of accelerationism arguing in favour of a smooth integration, while others attempt to evidence the extent of this friction.

An example of someone that highlights the friction of acceleration and human-machine integration without rejecting acceleration outright is Karl Marx. I've already demonstrated Marx's proclivity for acceleration in the *Communist Manifesto*, however his text 'The Fragment on Machines' (hereafter 'Fragment') provides a more specific case. In this work, Marx explores how human labour is metamorphosed by (and even into) machinery. Like the Italian Futurists after him, Marx also viewed the machine as though it is a living thing. He even distinguished machinery from instruments by arguing that machinery does not merely supplement handicraft, but rather that 'it is the machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it; and it consumes coal, oil etc. just as the worker consumes food to keep up its perpetual motion.'[31] Marx saw the machine itself as a separate force acting on the worker, compelling them to work: '[t]he science which compels the inanimate limbs of the

[27] Noys, *Malign Velocities*, p. 22.
[28] Even though Noys claims that he is not interested in 'us[ing] them [the Futurists] to convict accelerationism in advance'. Noys, *Malign Velocities*, p. 14.
[29] Ibid., p. 12.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Karl Marx, 'Fragment on Machines', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 51–66, p. 53.

machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist within the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself.'[32] The worker is therefore imagined by Marx to be a sort of cyborg, or a human-machine hybrid. Only, this is a hybrid that does not have total control over its faculties; the source of the machine's movement originating from the 'alien power' exerted by 'the machine itself', and not the worker. In this sense, the machine is both imagined to be alive—its vitality linked to its accelerated productive capacity—and as altering the worker as a subject, but in a way that is of benefit to the machine or alien object.

In the 'Fragment', Marx relates this alteration of the worker subject to capital, arguing that 'the development of the means of labour into machinery is not an accidental moment of capital, but is rather the historical reshaping of the traditional, inherited means of labour into a form adequate for capital.'[33] In the introduction to *The Reader* it is explained that such a view means that the 'development of large-scale integrated machine production is a *sine qua non* of Capital's universal ascendency.'[34] This is because it reduces workers to the machine's prerogative, which is, in turn, the prerogative of capital itself. However, the editors also highlight that Marx's analysis is equivocal in its approach to machines, insofar as even if 'the absorption of the worker into the burgeoning machine organism more clearly than ever reduces the worker to a tool of capital', 'Marx makes it clear that […] subsumption […] under capital, and into a technical system of production […doesn't mean that the two things are] identical nor inseparable in principle.'[35] This is evident in Marx's ambivalence to the consequences of human-machine integration in the 'Fragment', particularly in the following claim about labour:

> Labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production process; rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself. (What holds for machinery holds likewise to the combination of human activities and the development of human intercourse.) No longer does the worker insert a modified natural thing [*Naturgegenstand*] as middle link between the object [*Objekt*] and himself; rather, he inserts the process of nature, transformed into an industrial process, as a means between himself and inorganic nature, mastering it. He steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor. In this transformation, it is neither the direct human labour he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but rather the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence

[32] Ibid., pp. 53-4.
[33] Ibid., p. 55.
[34] Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, 'Introduction', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 1–46, p. 38.
[35] Ibid.

> as a social body—it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the greatest foundation-stone of production and of wealth.[36]

This section of the 'Fragment' amounts to an argument about the naturalisation of machinery. Marx envisages machine-based forms of production as alienating the worker from involvement with the process of production. What this leads to is the human labourer becoming 'watchman and regulator' of 'an industrial process' that has otherwise become second nature. This, for Marx, leads to a shift in how wealth is produced by labour. Wealth no longer stems from 'direct human labour' or 'the time' spent working, but rather from 'appropriation of' the labourer's 'general productive power', which he insists exists in the labourer's 'presence as a social body'. Marx's claim here makes more sense when considered alongside his later view that '[n]ature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature.'[37] These developments, or what Marx refers to as '[t]he development of fixed capital', act as the means through which 'social knowledge has become a direct force of production'.[38] The existence of these machineries thus represent abstractions made concrete in the form of a 'general intellect', suggesting that they reshape social life and the collective act of labour itself, and, with it, the forms of subjectivity capable of resisting capital.[39] Here then, Marx envisages that capitalist machinery accelerates a kind of human mastery over the world, and therefore reshapes the very grounds of nature by doing so—a consequence of acceleration that Marx affirms.

In *The Reader*, Marx's 'Fragment' is presented as a justification for accelerationism insofar as it is a theoretical account of the relationship between capitalism and accelerated mechanical production that suggests that the former may be resisted by the mutations to labour caused by the latter. Another, less optimistic, work that puts an entirely different spin on this in *The Reader* is 'The Book of the Machines' from Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*. 'The Book of the Machines' is an embedded

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[36] Marx, 'Fragment on Machines', p. 62.
[37] Ibid., p. 64.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Many Marxist scholars question how much weight Marx's 'Fragment' should be given. For instance, Paolo Virno notes that the 'Fragment' contains 'reflections on the basic tendencies of capitalist development [that] are not to be found in any of Marx's other writings and in fact seem alternative to his habitual formulas.' Likewise, Martin Spence has argued that 'the 'Fragment' is radically at odds with the broad body of Marx's work', while noting that the text is overly productivist compared to his later work while also reflecting an older theory of capital due to its emphasis on 'fixed' rather than 'constant' and 'variable' capital. See: Paolo Virno, 'General Intellect', *Historical Materialism*, 15.3 (2007), 3–8 <https://doi.org/10.1163/156920607X225843>, p. 3. ; Martin Spence, 'Marx against Marx: A Critical Reading of the "Fragment on Machines"', *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*, 17.2 (2019), 327–39 <https://doi.org/10.31269/triplec.v17i2.1146>, pp. 328, 330.

narrative that playfully explores the possibility of Darwinian evolution as applied to machines. Taken in the context of its original source, *Erewhon*, this book provides a rationale for the Erewhonian suspicion towards machines, with the book revealing that the unusual population of Erewhon opted to destroy machinery for fear that it might evolve to a point that displaces humanity from its seat of species dominance.[40] 'The Book of the Machines' is highly significant to the accelerationist fascination with human-machine synthesis, echoing Marx and prefiguring Marinetti in speculating on the living status of machines. However, Butler is, in some ways, far more nuanced in his form of speculation than either Marx or Marinetti, employing an 'anti-machinist Erewhonian author' who 'argues conservatively for the destruction of machinery' as an ironic pre-text for 'a non-anthropomorphic form of panpsychism'—the idea that all things be they organic and/or inorganic have equal mind/mind-like quality(s).[41] This notion would be highly influential on Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, one of the works that Noys critically identifies as accelerationist. It also challenges the anthropocentrism of writers like Marx and Marinetti, whose fundamental assumption in both the 'Fragment' and the 'Manifesto of Futurism' is that machines and nature can both be mastered by humanity.

'The Book of the Machines' is a compelling work to link with accelerationism, because it relates so clearly to the idea of acceleration. In the text it is evident that the narrator is anxious about both the fact that machines could be evolving, and also the rate at which they seem to be evolving: 'No class of beings have in any time past made so rapid a movement forward. Should not that movement be jealously watched and checked while we can still check it?'[42] This earmarks *Erewhon* as a further example of a literary response to acceleration, with the work straddling a fine line between being an indictment of technological acceleration and its negative outcomes and a satirical account of negative responses to acceleration. In either case, the work also considers the ramifications of the development of machines, much like Marx. First, as in Marx, machines are not considered to be instruments. Instead, the two are differentiated in *Erewhon* in a further work that is contrasted to 'The Book of the Machines' in which a competing author contests that 'machines were to be regarded as a part of man's own physical nature, being really nothing but extra-corporeal limbs. Man

[40] Erewhonians are the inhabitants of Erewhon, which is a sort of utopian land discovered by the book's protagonist.
[41] Chris Danta, 'Panpsychism and Speculative Evolutionary Aesthetics in Samuel Butler's "The Book of the Machines"', *Textual Practice*, 35.2 (2021), 285–304 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2019.1652679>, pp. 287-88.
[42] Samuel Butler, 'The Book of the Machines', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 67–81, p. 72.

[… as] a machinate mammal.'[43] This view is roundly rejected by the Erewhonians, earmarking retention of a distinction between machines and instruments as important. This links to the second speculation of 'The Book of the Machines', namely that machines might be altering humans for their own purposes:

> The machines being of themselves unable to struggle, have got man to do their struggling for them: as long as he fulfils this function duly, all goes well with him—at least he thinks so; but the moment he fails to do his best for the advancement of machinery by encouraging the good and destroying the bad, he is left behind in the race of competition; and this means that he will be made uncomfortable in a variety of ways, and perhaps die.[44]

In 'The Book of the Machines' humans are seen to act as the medium through which machines reproduce, much as a bee acts as a pollinator for plants. Because of this, the work's narrator argues humans are constitutively altered for the continued, 'hastened', development of machines.[45] It's this problem that the book's narrator takes issue with, insofar as it suggests that humanity exist as servants to masters, albeit benevolent or seemingly benign ones so long as the speed of their development increases or accelerates. Such servitude, the narrator argues, is reason why the machines must be demolished. By contrast, 'The Book of the Machines' is included in *The Reader*, precisely because, unlike Marx, its status as a fiction means it does not have to 'denounce' the accelerated integration of human and machine 'as a fantasy of capital' in quite the same way as Marx does, serving as a starting point for speculations about what increasing human-machine interdependency might look like in turn.[46]

The entangled quality of acceleration and accelerationism is clearly manifest in the early texts by Marinetti, Marx, and Butler above, particularly through their emphasis on human-machine integration. Hints of affirmations of acceleration become apparent within each, even in Marx and Butler whose works otherwise share a critical view on the integration of human and machine and, likewise, the fantasy of acceleration as such. Where these works affirm acceleration, however, they do so on the grounds that it will be ever-more dynamic and unerring, with each seeing acceleration as unstoppable or, in Marinetti's case, as increasingly liberating. This is a quality of these texts that puts them somewhat at odds with more contemporary forms of accelerationism, which as well as affirming acceleration, also often emphasise unabated acceleration leading to forms of stasis. With this in mind, I will now move on to consider the origins of more contemporary forms of

[43] Samuel Butler, *Erewhon (A Dystopia)*, Kindle Edition (US: Musaicum Books, 2017), p. 154.
[44] Butler, 'The Book of the Machines', p. 76.
[45] Ibid., p. 75.
[46] Mackay and Avanessian, p. 9.

accelerationism. By doing this, I aim to give a more complete overview of the theory, how it is predicated on contextual oppositions to forms of stasis, and how more contemporary accelerationists have come to view acceleration itself as a further, somewhat paradoxical, form of this stasis.

Exorcising Ghosts: The Origins of Accelerationism

In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined how Benjamin Noys initially defined accelerationism in *The Persistence of the Negative* as 'an exotic variant *of la politique du pire*', with him arguing that 'if capitalism generates its own forces of dissolution then the necessity is to radicalise capitalism itself: the worse the better.'[47] However, I have yet to explore the context of Noys's assertion. I will now move on to showcase how this context is helpful for determining the evolution of accelerationism as a concept, particularly for understanding the relationship between accelerationist theories and forms of stasis. By doing this, I aim to highlight how such forms of stasis are usually identified with political, social, and cultural contexts, a point I continue to emphasise in further thesis chapters.

Three texts are key to Noys's initial definition of accelerationism: Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Jean François Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* (1974), and Jean Baudrillard's *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976). Each of these texts, Noys argues, are defined by a 'purs[uit of] the quasi-anarchist path of liberation from *all* structures of discipline – left or right' (italics in source), which followed from a 'new libertarian mood induced by May '68'.[48] According to Noys, this moment saw '[t]he confluence of various discourses of liberation, notably sexual liberation', which in turn 'produced new discourses of contestation directed against [both] capitalism' and 'also against the limits of the existing left.'[49] This latter point is key. These 1970s theorists could be differentiated from the existing left through their opposition to both the disciplinarian approaches of Maoist, Leninist, and Stalinist strands of communism, and the Anglo-American New Left's seeking of 'the negation of capital in the supposedly unintegrated subjects of revolt, such as the lumpen-proletariat, students or the peasantry.'[50] They did this by affirming 'the capitalist power of dissolution and fragmentation'—each theorist advocating, with increasing intensity, that this power of dissolution 'must always be taken one step further to break the fetters of capital itself.'[51] Therefore, the 'accelerationists tried to identify new subjects of revolt as being

[47] Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*, p. 4.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., p. 5.
[51] Ibid.

those most radically *within* capitalism' (italics in source).[52] A move that Noys believed risked an abandonment of subjects of resistance to capital altogether.[53]

A chief example of this move towards identifying revolutionary subjects within capitalism is Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of the schizophrenic. For Deleuze and Guattari, the schizophrenic is a 'porous and collective 'subject' of desire' who '"seeks out the very limit of capitalism"' making them '"its inherent tendency brought to fulfilment".'[54] The 'inherent' tendency Deleuze and Guattari refer to here is what they see as capitalism's process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In their theoretical parlance, deterritorialization refers to a radical surplus of desire that capital realizes, but that it is thereafter forced to reterritorialize to prevent it from entering a state of self-saturation, something that the theorists suggest would make it no longer qualitatively be capitalism. Reterritorialization is thus a compensatory act; it refers to a form of stabilisation that prevents the total dissolution of capital. This process can be modelled through the idea of 'sexual liberation' that I previously cited from Noys. Sexual liberation is something that is actively pursued under capitalism, with whole industries being built upon the premise of catering to niche, highly differentiated, forms of sexual desire and identity. However, within capitalism there is an observable tendency to also legislate against forms of sexual liberation and to also extract value from them, which is something that might otherwise be seen as antithetical to sexual liberation itself. This coexistence of sexual liberation and its repression suggests that under capitalism there is only ever a relative deterritorialization when it comes to sexual liberation, because it is always reterritorialized by forms of legislation and value extraction. In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari are interested in the pursuit of absolute deterritorialization. This is what they associate with their radical schizophrenic subject, and the thing that Noys sees as constitutive of their accelerationist politics.

This pursuit of absolute deterritorialization, and its links to capitalism, finds one of its purest forms of expression in the following passage of Deleuze's and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*:

> Which is the revolutionary path? Is there one?—To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist 'economic solution'? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not

[52] Ibid.

[53] Noys is not the only person to make this criticism, or criticisms like it. Robin Mackay has also emphasised that '[t]he fatal mistake of accelerationism was to believe that, on the horizon of the deterritorialisation opened up by capital, there would be disclosed an originary desire that could flow free of instituted structures of power.' See: Robin Mackay, 'Immaterials, Exhibition, Acceleration', in *30 Years after Les Immatériaux: Art, Science and Theory*, ed. by Yuk Hui and Andreas Broeckmann (Lüneburg: meson press, 2015), p. 236.

[54] Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*, p. 5, quoting Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 35.

> deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to 'accelerate the process', as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet.[55]

This quote—a staple in accelerationist readings of Deleuze and Guattari—embodies what Noys refers to as the accelerationist view that 'the problem of capitalism is […] that it does not deterritorialise *enough*' (italics in source).[56] In this instance, Deleuze and Guattari oppose capitalism through an affirmation, rather than negation, of its drive towards a 'world market'. They oppose this to the dependency theorist Samir Amin's call for the so-called 'Third World', or periphery, to secede from capitalism, which the philosophers believe amounts to a 'fascist "economic solution"' because such a secession directly opposes capital's deterritorialization with an even greater measure of reterritorialization (in this case, a literal re-constitution of a territory in the form of market-independent nation state). Thus, in this quote, Deleuze and Guattari affirm the capitalist process of marketization. However, they arguably do so only on the grounds that, as a form of relative deterritorialization, it might be intensified or accelerated to an absolute state, which would, in turn, push it beyond being capitalism.[57]

This argument in favour of absolute deterritorialization is fundamental to Noys's identification of Deleuze's and Guattari's theory as a form of accelerationism. Moreover, it also has evident importance to accelerationist theory generally. This is clear from Mark Fisher's contemporary arguments in favour of accelerationism in 'Terminator vs Avatar' (2012).[58] In this essay, Fisher links Deleuze's and Guattari's above theory to accelerationism on the grounds that it identifies an inertia relative to capitalism, something that he connects to its need to reterritorialize. This is evident when

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[55] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'The Civilized Capitalist Machine', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 147–62, p. 162.

[56] Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*, p. 5.

[57] This idea of a difference between relative and absolute deterritorialisation is evident in Deleuze's and Guattari's follow up work *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), which is their now more widely accepted theoretical approach to deterritorialization and the schizophrenic subject. The view that this later work represents a more correct theory of deterritorialization is something that was challenged by Nick Land in the 1990s, whose work during this period characterises the greater acceptance of *A Thousand Plateaus* as little more than 'unavowed Deleuzian doxa', and, crucially, as a betrayal of the theory of deterritorialization found in the earlier text. See: Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier, 'Editor's Introduction', in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier, 2nd ed (Falmouth : New York, NY: Urbanomic ; Sequence Press, 2012), pp. 1–54, p. 30. For Land's clearest essay addressing the topic, see: 'Making it with Death: Remarks on Thanatos and Desiring-Production' (1993). Finally, for the clearest philosophical overview of how accelerationism links to Deleuze's philosophy, I recommend Yuk Hui and Louise Morelle, 'A Politics of Intensity: Some Aspects of Acceleration in Simondon and Deleuze' (2017).

[58] This essay was originally presented as a challenge to Noys's original definition of accelerationism at a symposium on the subject at Goldsmiths, University of London on September 14th 2010.

he argues that capitalism is 'dominated by quasi-monopolies such as Microsoft and Wal-Mart' that he believes make it operate more like 'an anti-market' as opposed to it being the 'self-organising' free market common to neoliberal rhetoric.[59] For Fisher, such quasi-monopolies ultimately undermine arguments that associate the free market enterprise of capitalism with liberation, demonstrating the illusory nature of the neoliberal differentiations of capitalism from communism on the basis of capitalism's supposed structural opposition to top-down economic management.[60] Therefore, like Deleuze and Guattari, Fisher is highlighting how capitalism only offers a relative form of deterritorialization compared to a more absolute one, with self-organising markets only ever being realised in a relative rather than an absolute sense. In turn, this leads him to argue that capitalism is merely '[a] simulation of innovation and newness that cloaks inertia and stasis', a view that clearly correlates Deleuze's and Guattari's theory of capital's relative deterritorialization with an accelerationist desire to contest stasis through absolute deterritorialization.[61]

Although the accelerationism identified by Noys in *The Persistence of the Negative* represents the earliest formal articulation of the term in a published academic context, debates about accelerationism can be traced back to as early as 2008 in a series of blog posts by Noys (No Useless Leniency), Fisher (K-Punk), Williams (Splintering Bone Ashes), and Owen Hatherley.[62] This germinal stage of accelerationism emerges just after the global financial crisis, and provides further insight into how accelerationists respond to stasis and inertia. Particularly important to these debates is a concept known as hauntology. Deriving from Jacques Derrida's *The Spectres of Marx* (1993), hauntology is a theory fundamentally predicated on the idea of an absence that haunts being (ontology). In *Hauntology* (2018), Katy Shaw explains that a central premise of hauntology is the idea of present time's haunting by the past and future, insofar as it 'looks back to the past and points

[59] Fisher, 'Terminator vs Avatar', p. 345.

[60] Fisher's point here is made in contrast to neoliberal rhetoric, and the tendency of neoliberals to draw on the earlier ideas of economists like Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. These ideas can be traced back to the socialist calculation debates earlier in the 20th century, particularly the work of Ludwig von Mises and his 1920 paper 'Economic Calculation in a Socialist Commonwealth'. For an overview of these debates and their continued importance today, see: Addis Goldman, 'The Socialist Calculation Debate', *Lapham's Quarterly*, 30 April 2023 <https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/roundtable/socialist-calculation-debate> [accessed 12 October 2023].

[61] Fisher, 'Terminator vs Avatar', p. 345.

[62] I choose not to explore Hatherley's contributions to these debates for reasons of brevity. In his post 'Shock Work', he is largely critical of the concept of accelerationism; although, he argues that post-2008 it highlights the illusory nature of capitalism's so-called separation from state politics, acting as further evidence of capitalism's tendency towards relative as opposed to absolute deterritorialization. Thereafter, he outlines earlier historical instances of the idea, linking accelerationism to a Stalinist 'Third Period'. Hatherley's later scathing criticisms of hauntology in *The Ministry of Nostalgia: Consuming Austerity* (2016) align with Williams's views on hauntological music explored later in this chapter and indicate a connection between Hatherley's later work and these earlier debates about accelerationism.

forward to the future from the moment of the present.'[63] She suggests that '[i]n doing so, it signals towards a legacy as well as to a promise of something to come, drawing attention to the structuring role of absence.'[64] Shaw's definition here is applicable to hauntology as a theoretical concept, and holds weight in the debates I analyse below. However, hauntology also has a popular cultural definition as a concept that was applied by Fisher (among others) to refer to a particular genre of music—and other cultural artefacts—in the first decade of the 21st century that either felt out of time, or that were concerned with drawing attention to their own sense of pastness.[65] These types of music, Shaw notes, meant that, 'hauntology offered not only a marker of the times, but a way of articulating the inertia and anachronism of the contemporary in critical ways.'[66] Hauntology was, in this sense, both a symptom of the times, which were dogged by an inability to conceive of a future beyond the 2008 crisis, and a means of drawing critical attention to them.

Accelerationism was first conceived in opposition to the hauntological cultural artefacts (both symptomatic and critical) that were proliferating by the end of the noughties.[67] In what would effectively become the first statement of contemporary accelerationist thought, Alex Williams in 'Against Hauntology (Giving Up the Ghost)' (July 20th, 2008), delivered a polemic that targeted

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[63] Katy Shaw, *Hauntology: The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018) <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=5355964> [accessed 21 January 2022], p. 7.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Fisher offers two standout examples of these two types of hauntology in his book *Ghosts of My Life*: 1) the Arctic Monkeys' video for 'I Bet You Look Good on the Dancefloor' (2005), and 2) Burial's self-titled album (2006). The Arctic Monkeys' video/single encapsulates the tendency of contemporary pieces of culture to feel out of time, with Fisher claiming he 'genuinely believed that it was some lost artifact from circa 1980.' Burial's album, on the other hand, foregrounds its own sense of pastness, drawing attention to lost futures in the present: '*Burial* is haunted by what once was, what could have been, and – most keeningly – what could still happen.' Fisher's comments about *Burial* are also a useful analogue for his views about Land's accelerationism in the blog debates explored below and in 'Terminator vs Avatar'. This is because *Burial* represents hardcore rave as though succumbed to retrospection, showcasing how both the optimisms and dread futurisms of the hardcore subculture had given way to melancholia. See: Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester: Zero books, 2013), pp. 23, 128.

[66] Shaw, p. 15.

[67] This oppositional stance towards hauntology also has an earlier theoretical precedent in the '70s accelerationists, and particularly Lyotard's text *Libidinal Economy*. Iain Hamilton Grant explains in the introduction to this work that even though, like Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1967), *Libidinal Economy* is part of 'a series of responses to the demise of structuralism as the dominant intellectual discourse, known collectively as poststructuralism', there is a major difference between Lyotard's and Derrida's responses to this demise. Where Derrida 'endlessly meditates on the end of metaphysics', Lyotard seeks to 'exploit and accelerate the movements of generalized disruption in a fundamentally affirmative manner'. This split between Derrida's and Lyotard's views are thereafter summarised by Grant, who positions Derrida's view as a 'quest' beyond the 'other side of nostalgia', while arguing that, for Lyotard, '[d]econstruction is not in a quest for what it has lost, but 'hopes' for what it has never yet found'. See: Iain Hamilton Grant, 'Introduction', in *Libidinal Economy*, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. xvii–xxxiv, pp. xvii-xviii.

hauntological cultural phenomena. In this post, Williams was particularly concerned with an 'aesthetics of pop music' that used 'ghostly audio' to foreground what he called 'the end of (cultural) history […] at the material level'.[68] Seeing this as interlinked with 'a mood of melancholic defeatism in Western left wing politics' that merely 'demonstrate the nature of our time', Williams called for 'a more nihilistic aesthetic which seeks […] to accelerate the system to its ultimate demise, to speed up the rate of fashion-flux to a point of irredeemable collapse.'[69] This is, of course, an example of accelerationism as *la politique du pire*, as later coined by Noys in *The Persistence of the Negative*. However, it's notably a criticism that is targeted at a particular cultural phenomenon, one that Williams saw as co-extensive with a static present, thanks to how it was a relatively melancholic response to a neoliberal political status quo (particularly among an "anti-capitalist" left).[70] In this sense, Williams's point is not simply about inducing 'collapse', but expresses a political frustration at a certain kind of political aesthetic that he believed to be ineffective, even if it was held in high regard at the time.

Williams would give his aesthetic demands a more refined political spin in a later post titled 'Xenoeconomics and Capital Unbound' (October 19th, 2008). In this post, Williams calls for a left-politics in which,

> [t]he "blind acephelous polymorph" that is capital must be embraced, but not from the point of view of some naïve enthusiasm or sentiment of hope that markets can deliver utopia. Instead, as the way out of the binaries of a leftism which is utterly and irretrievably moribund,

[68] Alex Williams, 'Against Hauntology (Giving Up The Ghost)', *Splintering Bone Ashes*, 2008 <https://web.archive.org/web/20120524005732/http://splinteringboneashes.blogspot.com/2008/07/against-hauntology-giving-up-ghost.html> [accessed 11 January 2022]. The example Williams provides is music produced by the label Ghost Box and by the artist Burial; however, Williams's argument can also be expanded to encompass the genre of hypnagogic pop—often seen as America's complementing musical style, which rose to cultural prominence in the mid-to-late 2000s. Accelerationism would thereafter be related to the development of the music genre of vaporwave from hypnagogic pop by Adam Harper in 2012, with Harper linking the vaporwave genre to Nick Land's writings. Harper's article is notable for predating the connections drawn between accelerationism and Land's work in both *Malign Velocities* and *The Reader*. See: Adam Harper, 'Comment: Vaporwave and the Pop-Art of the Virtual Plaza', *DMY*, 2012 <https://dmy.co/news/adam-harper-vaporwave> [accessed 23 January 2023].

[69] Williams, 'Against Hauntology (Giving Up the Ghost)'.

[70] Even if it is never directly mentioned in these debates, I have always felt that Williams's post echoes Nick Land's earlier piece, 'A Critique of Transcendental Miserabilism' (2007), in which he refers to a condition of transcendental miserabilism—the idea that capitalism is an insurmountable evil that must be out and out rejected on those grounds—as something that 'haunts' the world 'as a dyspeptic ghost.' See: Nick Land, 'Critique of Transcendental Miserablism', in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier, Sixth edition (Falmouth New York, [New York]: Urbanomic Sequence press, 2018), pp. 623–27, p. 625. Decontextualised in its republished form in *Fanged Noumena*, Land's piece was originally a criticism of writing on the left at that time, that speculated that the world had already ended as a consequence of climate catastrophe—a position that Jodi Dean wrote about in a 2006 post 'Time, Entropy, and the Dissolution of the World', and that Fisher thereafter drew attention to in a post titled 'The Damage is Done' (2007).

> and a neo-liberal economics which is ideologically bankrupt, we must bend both together in the face of an inhuman and indefatigable capitalism, to think how we might inculcate a new form of radically inhuman subjectivation. This entails the retrieval of the communist project for a new man, AND the liberation of the neo-liberal quest for a capitalism unbound, from both its subterranean dependence upon the state and the skeletal humanist discursive a priori which animates its ideological forms (emphasis in text).[71]

Here, Williams demands—with a strong rhetorical flourish—a left-politics that embraces the inhumanism he regards as inherent to capitalism. Again, Williams pre-empts Noys's definition of accelerationism, affirming capital's forms of subjectivation in the hope of employing them to overcome capitalism. In this sense, Williams is trying 'to identify new subjects of revolt as being those most radically *within* capitalism'.[72] However, he insists on this as a further development in 'the communist project for a new man', a significant idea for utopian politics in both the 19th and early 20th centuries.[73] Williams's idea of the 'new man' is unusual, however. Rather than demarcating an otherwise utopian humanist subject, he couples it to what he sees as an inhuman quality of capital, identifying it with his earlier claim that 'capital is ultimately a machine which has almost no relation to humanity whatsoever, it intersects with us, it has us as moving parts, but ultimately is not *of* or *for*-us' (italics in source).[74] The result is a call for a left politics that paradoxically accepts of the inhumanity of capital in order to overcome it; an echo of Butler's 'The Book of the Machines' mixed with Marx's sentiments about capitalist machines in the 'Fragment'—the human-machine as both political subject, and something that is more machine than human.

A day after this follow-up post Noys would come to define Williams's views as accelerationist in a post titled 'Accelerationism' (October 20th, 2008). In this post, Noys explored both of Williams's prior articles through the definition of accelerationism he'd written for his book *The Persistence of the Negative*, which he was working on at the time.[75] Noys's definition of accelerationism in this blog post are pretty much identical to the one he gives in his later book, with Noys identifying the same uneasy stakes of the accelerationist position across works: 'Rather than seeking the subject of revolt as the marginal to capital, the subject of revolt is the subject in capital (although the dangerous elision is that the subject of revolt simply is capital).'[76] He ultimately agrees with 'critical remarks

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[71] Alex Williams, 'Xenoeconomics and Capital Unbound.', *Splintering Bone Ashes*, 2008 <https://web.archive.org/web/20120524003220/http://splinteringboneashes.blogspot.com/2008/10/xenoeconomics-and-capital-unbound.html> [accessed 11 January 2022].
[72] Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*, p. 5.
[73] Williams, 'Xenoeconomics and Capital Unbound'.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*, p. 4.
[76] Noys, 'Accelerationism'.

concerned with hauntology' and suggests parallels between Williams's desired cultural aesthetic and Detroit Techno, which, through an emphasis on human-machine hybridity, chose 'to embody the robots of the production lines of Ford' in a political gesture that confronted the earlier '"humanism" of Motown.'[77] However, Noys feels 'there are definite problems with this as a political strategy'—something that he elaborates on as the debate develops, and that I have already covered in reference to his views in both *The Persistence of the Negative*, and *Malign Velocities*.[78]

Noys's blog might be the first use of the term accelerationism to define a contemporary political position; however, it's Mark Fisher who's ultimately responsible for giving accelerationism something more than a cursory definitional significance in relation to Williams's arguments. In 'Nihilism without Negativity' (October 20th, 2008), Fisher links Williams's claims in 'Xenoeconomics and Capital Unbound' with arguments made by Nick Land in the 1990s. In this post, Fisher suggests that Williams's argument that 'capital must be embraced', 'constitutes something like a left Landianism.'[79] Fisher explains that Land's works at this time were heavily inspired by both *Libidinal Economy* and *Anti-Oedipus* and opted to propagate a 'nihilism without negativity' that desired to unleash the 'full positivity of Capital as monstrous ex nihilo propagator without limit' (an example of this is Land's text 'Meltdown', which I explore in chapter five).[80] Fisher raises some questions in response to Williams's work, drawing attention to some of the failings of Land's political position to question the political efficacy of Williams's view, particularly its elision of a political subject. He also, like Noys, turns to Williams's earlier 'Against Hauntology' post, suggesting its contextual significance for accelerationism. In response to Williams, Fisher notes that, far from being a 'political strategy', hauntology is a 'symptomatology'.[81] In this sense, it presents a further means for diagnosing the pathologies produced by capitalism, with Fisher adding that hauntology was a 'cultural rather than political' symptomatology that is concerned with 'what *absently insists* in what is there.'[82] Here, Fisher turns away from Williams's prescriptive cultural interpretation of hauntology, towards a

[77] Ibid.
[78] See: Noys, 'Accelerationism II'.
[79] Mark Fisher, 'Nihilism without Negativity', *K-Punk*, 2008 <https://web.archive.org/web/20120505051622/http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/010758.html> [accessed 11 January 2022].
[80] Ibid. Fisher's views about Land's negativity shift between this post and his follow-up, 'Spectres of Accelerationism'. In 'Nihilism without Negativity' he reads Land as affirming 'the full positivity of Capital'; however, in his follow-up post he describes Land's view as one whereby 'the "political" itself was defined by forms of prohibition and resistance to Capital's "horrifying and utter negativity" (it was a case of an insipid, security-orientated anthropomorphic negativity trying to contain the sublime, unqualified, inhuman negativity of Capital).' See: Mark Fisher, 'Spectres of Accelerationism', *K-Punk*, 2008 <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/010782.html> [accessed 11 January 2022].
[81] Fisher, 'Nihilism without Negativity'.
[82] Ibid.

consideration of its theoretical meaning, which thereafter becomes key for subsequent interpretations of accelerationism.

Initially, in 'Nihilism without Negativity', Fisher suggests 'it would be too cheap a rhetorical strategy to adopt to suggest that there's a way in which SBA's [Williams's] accelerationism could itself be a trace (a reinvocation of certain 70s and 90s inhuman forces turned spectres).'[83] However, in a further follow-up to Williams, 'Spectres of Accelerationism' (October 28th, 2008), he subsequently returns to this interpretation:

> one of the things that you can hear in hauntology is the spectres of accelerationism itself. […] It was precisely the *lack* of any cultural exemplars of accelerationism that led to spectrality in the first place. […] Hauntology is not, therefore, opposed to accelerationism; rather, it is the only way, at the moment, that culture makes any kind of contact with it.[84]

Fisher's statement, here and above, points to the seeming impossibility of accelerationism in the present, and with it the absence of affirmative approaches to the 'inhuman forces' of capital, like Williams's. In this vein, Fisher suggests that there are no present 'cultural exemplars of accelerationism'. Accelerationism is, in this sense, culturally absent. However, hauntologically speaking, it insists despite this absence, demanding, as Shaw has it, that a hauntologist trace this absence to draw 'attention to the structuring role' it plays in the present.[85]

Contemporary forms of accelerationism are frequently predicated on drawing attention to an absence of acceleration in the present, while in turn highlighting the structuring role it has on the contemporary political landscape. This is something that is tangible in Srnicek's and Williams's 'Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics' (2013) in the claim that '[t]o generate a new left global hegemony entails a recovery of lost possible futures'.[86] Thereafter, it links to their evocation of project Cybersyn—Stafford Beer's 'fusing [of] advanced cybernetic technologies, with sophisticated economic modelling, and a democratic platform' for Salvador Allende's socialist Chilean government.[87] For Srnicek and Williams, this abandoned project represented a moment when accelerated technological change was affirmed and used to anti-capitalist ends, and thus positioned against an inertia experienced under capitalism—something that they believe is not happening today.

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[83] Ibid.
[84] Fisher, 'Spectres of Accelerationism'.
[85] Shaw, p. 7.
[86] Srnicek and Williams, p. 351.
[87] Ibid., p. 357.

This is not the only example Srnicek and Williams draw on. Another, with an even greater relevance across a wide-ranging political spectrum of accelerationist works, is spaceflight. They evoke this when they claim that accelerationist politics 'must also include recovering the dreams which transfixed many from the middle of the nineteenth century until the dawn of the neoliberal era, of the quest of *homo sapiens* towards expansion beyond the limitations of the earth and our immediate bodily forms.'[88] This call for expansion in space marries with those made in two other accelerationist works, Nick Land's right-accelerationist 'Lure of the Void' (2012), and Benedict Singleton's left-accelerationist 'Maximum Jailbreak' (2014). In the subsequent phase of my argument in this chapter, I will move on to explore these politically aligned accelerationisms and the uneasy status of their attempts to reignite imaginaries of spaceflight in the twenty-first century. However, before doing so, I want to counter Fisher's view about accelerationism's absence in the present. To do this I will briefly return to the topic of acceleration to explain how it has been theorised as giving rise to its own forms of stasis, and how this is recognized by some contemporary interlocutors of accelerationism.

The absence of accelerationism(s) in the present only has an arguable 'structuring role' in maintaining a static present, as Fisher and accelerationists like Srnicek and Williams seem to suggest. Another, oppositional view, is to take the absence of any kind of accelerationism as stemming from acceleration's ubiquity, with older forms of accelerationism having played a 'structuring role' in cultivating this state of ubiquitous acceleration. Here, then, a binary presents itself: 1) the present is too static, and accelerationism insists because of acceleration's absence or 2) the present is too dynamic, rendering accelerationism absent, but insistent, due to its superfluity. Both of these perspectives are just as likely as the other, and their simultaneous applicability to the contemporary moment evidences a problem with simply treating accelerationism as a wholly subversive project.

In *Social Acceleration*, Rosa identifies how, in the contemporary moment, acceleration might itself be understood as a misguided attempt to answer stasis, while in turn being its very cause. He refers to this as a condition of 'frenetic standstill', which is the sense that '*nothing remains the way it is* while at the same time *nothing essential changes*' (italics in source).[89] Deriving from Paul Virilio's similar concept of polar inertia, 'frenetic standstill' is 'an *internal* element and an *inherent* complementary principle of the acceleration process', and thus indicates a self-immolating, dialectical quality to acceleration.[90] Such standstill, Rosa argues, is why '[t]he "law of acceleration"

[88] Ibid., p. 351.
[89] Rosa, p. 283.
[90] Ibid., p. 89.

postulated by Henry Adams can no longer be understood as a "law of progress."'[91] This is because it reflects a state of constant, unceasing change at odds with the longer duration of time necessary to effectuate control over it, and therefore puts the tempo of change at odds with the agency needed to actuate progressive development.

A literary example that Rosa gives of the phenomenon of 'frenetic standstill' is Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* (1991). He reads the drifting of the heroes of this novel in an otherwise unchanging non-place of Texlahoma as emblematic of 'suffer[ing] from a *history poisoning* that illuminatingly and pregnantly encapsulates the dialectical, paradoxical simultaneity of frenetic change and historical lack of development.'[92] He argues this is also constantly implied by Coupland's glossary of witty neologisms, such as '"historical slumming," "vaccinated time travel," "decade blending," "legislated nostalgia," "ultra short term nostalgia," "now denial," etc.',[93] which, for Rosa, 'ironically' read 'like a caricature of [Reinhart] Koselleck's list of temporalized motion concepts from the epoch of temporalized history written in light of the now temporalized time'.[94] They thus evoke a Jamesonian waning of historicity, alluding to an overall loss of a sense of historical fixity that has, in turn, led to an eroded sense of political and cultural autonomy alongside feelings of aimlessness and purposelessness amongst the novel's characters.

If Rosa's theorisation is accepted, accelerationism, as an argument that affirms acceleration as a means of breaking the static impasses of the present, is tantamount to fighting a problem with its cause. In my view, this is the key political inefficacy of the accelerationist position, insofar as it requires a more nuanced perspective on how acceleration is to be embraced if it is to be politically beneficial, particularly for progressive perspectives. However, what's compelling about this problem is that it is one that many contemporary accelerationists themselves identify and thereafter attempt to resolve. An awareness of acceleration giving rise to 'frenetic standstill' pervades across contemporary accelerationisms, with accelerationists identifying their arguments against stasis-causing-accelerations (which are usually thereafter attributed to capitalism).[95] For instance, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams in their 'Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics' (2013) claim that within neoliberal capitalism '[w]e experience only the increasing speed of a local horizon, a simple brain-

[91] Ibid., p. 294.
[92] Ibid., p. 273.
[93] Ibid., p. 273.
[94] Ibid., p. 273. For a thorough explanation of what Rosa is alluding to here, refer to Reinhart Koselleck *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (USA: MIT, 1985), pp. 231-266.
[95] Rosa, p. 15. This awareness of acceleration induced inertia within accelerationist writings is also explored in David Cunningham's criticism of accelerationism in 'A Marxist Heresy? Accelerationism and its Discontents' (2015).

dead onrush rather than an acceleration which is also navigational, an experimental process of discovery within a universal space of possibility.'[96] Likewise, Xenofeminist and fellow accelerationist Patricia Reed notes:

> Acceleration already drives apparatuses of violent value-extraction: from the experiential level of our working lives and the exploitation of increased production, to the algorithms that decidedly wager on value with a velocity far surpassing the speed of human intellection. To suggest that an intensification of this process (including its contradictions) will disrupt and overcome such a machine is to believe that this machine thrives on stability. Such a thesis has been fatally discounted [...]. Yet, in this ever-swirling apparatus that gains sustenance from its own failures, there is a kernel of normative stasis anchoring energies centrifugally. Like a spinning amusement park ride, with our bodies immovably glued to the edge, we may be whirling nauseatingly fast, but we haven't really moved an inch. It is precisely here, on this kernal of stasis, that the call to accelerate needs to take hold, dislodging stagnant conceptual orientations in favor of the creation of eccentric, out-of-centre attractors, where we may discover trajectories of a vectorial (and not rotational or circulatory) sort.[97]

In both these cases, acceleration is something that is recognised as a contributing factor to the current capitalist status quo. Only thereafter is accelerationism affirmed. This raises questions about the efficacy of accelerationist arguments themselves, because any embrace of acceleration needs prior political directedness to be effective. This affects the political integrity of arguments that see acceleration alone as enough to break with the stasis of a neoliberal present. However, I don't think this is to the total detriment of the position. Rather, it exemplifies how accelerationism will always be a politically contestable topic, with the question of who or what gets to benefit from acceleration or a break with stasis being ever-pressing whenever the term is deployed. With this in mind, I am now going to explore two contrasting accelerationist perspectives on spaceflight, highlighting their points of difference and similarity to better illustrate some of the political contours of accelerationism and to further elucidate the relationship forms of accelerationism have to hauntology.

New Memories of the Space Age: Spaceflight in Accelerationist Writings

For contemporary accelerationists, spaceflight holds a particular symbolic potency, one aligned with overcoming perceptions of natural limits and necessity, and with them perceived sources of stasis. This potency is one that is particularly evident in the two works I'll explore in this section of the thesis, Nick Land's 'Lure of the Void' and Benedict Singleton's 'Maximum Jailbreak'. Both of these

[96] Srnicek and Williams, p. 352.
[97] Patricia Reed, 'Reorientate, Eccentricate, Speculate, Fictionalize, Geometricize, Commonize, Abstractify: Seven Prescriptions for Accelerationism', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 521–36.p. 525.

works are characterised by a shared concern with spaceflight, its media ubiquity in the respective moments they reference, and the paradox of its seeming absence as a long-term political goal. In this vein, these works conform with other accelerationist attempts to draw attention to absences of acceleration in the present, with spaceflight being a further example of an absence that plays a 'structuring role' in contemporary political imaginaries.[98]

While both Land's and Singleton's essays have a shared emphasis on spaceflight, they showcase certain political divergences. For instance, Land's essay, which opens this phase of my argument, is a chief example of a right-accelerationist perspective. This is because, in his attempt to outline reasons for spaceflight's absence, he eschews considerations of morality and social justice, favouring instead to affirm a past form of acceleration despite its clear hostility to human beings (something that is self-evident in his abominably pro-colonial position). Singleton's 'Maximum Jailbreak' is much more sober by contrast, and an example of left-accelerationism. In the text, he reconceptualises Russian Cosmist Nikolai Fyodorov's *Philosophy of the Common Task* (1906/13) to attempt to recover a telos of spaceflight, with the view of improving its palatability for a left who he otherwise believes are opposed to it. Starting with an analysis of Land's essay, I demonstrate how these texts both offer powerful challenges to present imaginaries of the future while, in turn, eliding political struggles in the present, making them textbook examples of the uneasy political qualities of accelerationism I am interested in throughout this thesis.

Land opens 'Lure of the Void' with some thoughts about the Space Pavilion of the Shanghai 2010 World Expo. In this opening moment of his text, he highlights how concrete commitments and representations of spaceflight have been usurped by an entertainment complex, a series of 'video-based immersive special effects […], and vanilla-domestic applications of space technology'.[99] Thereafter, he explores popular responses to an absence of human spaceflight, tapering off into a discussion of the technocratic politics underlying NASA's development, space frontierism and colonialism, and the failures of contemporary space development including the capitalist 'NewSpace' industry. With the benefit of hindsight, the latter stages of Land's essay sound a lot like a dog whistle for the Neoreactionary politics he advocates for in his later work *The Dark Enlightenment* (2012) (mentioned in the introduction). This is particularly true of the second section of his essay, where he draws a direct comparison between NASA's technocracy and Nazi fascism while arguing that 'an inability to gaze unwaveringly into the dominant "third way" model of political economy (corporate

[98] Shaw, p. 7.
[99] Nick Land, 'Lure of the Void', *Dark Matter*, February 2014, pp. 1–17, Wayback Machine, p. 1.

nationalism) makes the history of the last century unintelligible.'[100] This is also evident in moments when he advocates for colonialism, modelling an ideal of 'colonial' America against the reality of an 'imperial' USA.[101] However, if I were to try and summarise Land's politics while withholding critical judgement, he proposes a kind of technocratic, anti-democratic, military-industrial frontierism as the best platform for a spaceflight capable of truly leaving the Earth.

Like the other forms of contemporary accelerationism explored above, in Land's essay spaceflight is posed precisely as an absence that insists in the present. In this sense, spaceflight serves as a trace of a past form of acceleration that Land is otherwise attempting to make contact with in order to both, 1) reveal the 'structuring role' this absence plays and 2) to overcome it.[102] The 'space race' itself is exemplary of this throughout the essay, and is even alluded to as having a continued 'structuring role' on this present for how it has supposedly 'marginalized the long-envisaged prospect of informal space colonization, [by] replacing it with a predominantly conventional (or social political) objective'—a key political point of contrast with Singleton's essay that I'll explore in a moment.[103] Land's essay is therefore predicated on overcoming the imaginative impasse that he now sees as afflicting ambitions of spaceflight. He does this by positioning his view as having a longer-termism than present political arguments allow scope for, something he achieves by utilising a science-fictional perspective that takes permanent spaceflight as if it were the norm, while viewing terrestrial living as peculiar: '[w]hen seen from outside, planets are burial sites', and 'misallocations of matter that don't really work'.[104] This perspective leads Land to conclude that an absence of spaceflight is the consequence of 'an eminently rational determination on the part of the world's most powerful territorial states to inhibit the development of socio-technological potentials characterized by an "American" (revolutionary colonial) tendency.'[105] This is a largely conspiratorial view that corroborates Land's anti-state and frontierist perspective, but nonetheless one that is accelerationist for how it perceives a 'structuring logic' of stasis as arising from an absence of

[100] Ibid., p. 6.
[101] In this model, colonialism is tied to the mythic figure of the outlaw who escapes the imperial centre to create colonies that this centre then attempts to reintegrate. Land's idea here is roughly analogous to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of deterritorialization and reterritorialization outlined above, even if their projects are politically divergent.
[102] Shaw, p. 7.
[103] Land, 'Lure of the Void', p. 14.
[104] Ibid., pp. 11, 12. A useful narrative counter comparison to Land's ideas here is N.K. Jemisin's *Emergency Skin* (2019), which narrates a return to Earth from a spacefaring posthuman perspective to make the case against pretty much exactly Land's above view.
[105] Land, 'Lure of the Void', p. 16.

spaceflight, and thus acceleration: 'the *status quo* politics of space colonization are almost fully expressed by *space colonization not happening*' (italics in source).[106]

Land's essay is riddled with serious political problems, not least his characterization of colonialism, which abstracts the concrete violence of its history. Because of this, it offers a paradigmatic case of how accelerationist subversions can flip over into being acquiescent political positions. This is also what makes it a compelling text to compare to what I think is a far more subversive piece in Benedict Singleton's 'Maximum Jailbreak', which, in contrast to Land's view, takes both a more humanitarian approach to the topic of spaceflight, while also trying to subvert associations between spaceflight and a privileged white male perspective.

Throughout 'Maximum Jailbreak', Singleton is concerned with revising and reviving the promethean ambitions of Russian Cosmist Nikolai Fyodorov—'*storm*[ing] *the heavens and conquer*[ing] *death*' (italics in source)—in an attempt to address the supposed absence of these ambitions from contemporary political thought.[107] Like Land, Singleton ties this absence to a vast entertainment complex, with which space travel supposedly has become embedded. Only, in contrast to Land, Singleton believes that this has led to space's 'surfeit of significance'; the consequence of this being that the available means of reaching space currently elide the end of actually getting there.[108] Singleton's project is therefore an attempt to draw attention to and recover an absent telos of spaceflight, turning to a work 'written years before fixed-wing flight was a practical possibility' to provide 'an exemplar of how ambition must be shaped if it is to reckon with a destination that comprehensively exceeds its origin.'[109]

The scope of Singleton's argument is laudable, even if it is a difficult one to make at a time when contemporary forms of spaceflight reproduce and mask inequalities previously alluded to by the likes of Gil Scott-Heron in his notorious poem 'Whitey on the Moon' (1970): 'I can't pay no doctor bill (but Whitey's on the Moon)'.[110] Singleton's approach to this is to position his argument as part of a wider debate about limits to political imagination, and the types of humanity spaceflight has become associated with. This is evident in the moments when Singleton challenges Fyodorov's tendency to justify his idea through deference to man as an ideal of humanity. Singleton notes, for

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[106] Ibid.
[107] Benedict Singleton, 'Maximum Jailbreak', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 489–507, p. 494.
[108] Ibid., p. 493.
[109] Ibid., p. 493. Singleton's desire to return to a time before fixed-winged flight to resolve a crisis in the present parallels J.G. Ballard's character of Hinton in 'Memories of the Space Age' (1982), which I explore in chapter 4.
[110] Gil Scott-Heron, *Whitey on the Moon* (Spotify: Flying Dutchman/RCA, 1971) <https://open.spotify.com/track/7eDz4e7BnffOzpMbpqH8tW> [accessed 17 November 2023].

instance, that Fyodorov was '[w]illing to discard everything from sex to death, [but drew] the line at undermining the sacred figure of Man.'[111] However, he thereafter identifies that 'the designation of "man" as sacrosanct is alien to the abstract insurrectionary force of design.'[112] In this sense, Singleton characterises Fyodorov's view of humanity as a reflection of both his masculinist and humanist values, things that Singleton believes to be unnecessary limiting factors of the Cosmist's project. This leads Singleton to rework Fyodorov's view into something altogether different, supposedly less male and human-centred, while in turn trying to retain the humanitarianism of his purpose.[113]

Singleton's argument is a subversive reading of both design and Fyodorov, with spaceflight embodying what he sees as the ultimate symbol for a desire to overcome artificial limits. For Singleton, the merits of Fyodorov's view equate to his perception of 'gravity', alongside 'death', as 'the most basic factors conditioning life on earth', and therefore 'as necessary horizons for action.'[114] Singleton sees these horizons, or 'traps', as contributing to an inertia, which he then sets himself against. He argues that 'the construction of traps provides a general model of design', and thereafter that 'the trap and escape from it exhibit a curious reversibility.'[115] This is because, '[t]o be free is to trap something else, even if only in the subtle form of crafting camouflage that redirects predatory attention.'[116] In Singleton's view then, neither humanity nor Fyodorov's 'man' is sacrosanct, because they are both categories that are artificially constructed by a 'trap' that necessitates their eventual overcoming: 'the escape attempt tutors a view of oneself as an *object* in a nested structure of traps, and converts this knowledge into an active resource' (italics in source).[117] To overcome being trapped requires mastery of the trapper's point of view, to see 'oneself as an object'. This vision of 'oneself as an object', a kind of alienation, is perceived by Singleton as a tactic that's part of a larger escape

[111] Singleton, p. 504.
[112] Ibid. Here Singleton's view relates to other left-accelerationist arguments concerned with limits and their overcoming. A pertinent example of this in *The Reader* is Ray Brassier and his essay 'Prometheanism and its Critics' (2014). In this essay, Brassier advocates in favour of a turn to rationalism through what he calls a Prometheanism, which he suggests 'is simply the claim that there is no reason to assume a predetermined limit in what we can achieve or to the ways in which we can transform ourselves and our world.'[112] See: Ray Brassier, 'Prometheanism and Its Critics', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 467–87, p. 470. These ideas have also since had further significance, being reflected in the Laboria Cuboniks manifesto *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation* (2015).
[113] Singleton, p. 504.
[114] Ibid., p. 498.
[115] Ibid., pp. 501-2.
[116] Ibid., p. 502.
[117] Ibid., p. 504.

strategy that, when conducted, alters the escapee's view of themselves, 'transforming the very agent that effects escape.'[118] In this sense,

> freedom from entrapment is not freedom *from* but *through* alienation, and this creates a pernicious stowaway in the project of extended escape from the perspective of any unreconstructed humanism: the continuous transformation, through revisionary reconstruction, of the agent that pursues it. (italics in source).[119]

Singleton's view here is certainly a subversive reading of Fyodorov. It's also accelerationist for how it uses the absence of Fyodorov's astral ambitions from present conceptions of spaceflight to reveal the role such an absence plays in the 'structuring logic' of its continued development. However, like Land's view, it is not without problems. Singleton's reimagining of Fyodorov's ambitions through a general programme of escapology abstracts the very material struggle such forms of escape entail. For instance, Singleton's view on traps stems from G. Chamayou's book *Manhunts* (2012), from which he infers that:

> The escape attempt tutors a view of oneself as an *object* within a nested structure of traps, and converts this knowledge into an active resource. No wonder, then, that "[s]laves in the French colonies had a word for it: escaping one's master was called "stealing one's own corpse" (italics in source).[120]

Singleton pays little mind to whether or not the process of accepting 'oneself as an *object*' was desirable to enslaved people here; instead, the idea of 'stealing one's own corpse' is romanticised and removed from the context of violence it implies. Moreover, Singleton's retrospective lauding of Fyodorov's project leads to myopic views about duty. For instance, he uncritically highlights that '[a] more rational base on which to build people into collectives than the sexual encounter central to marriage, Fedorov [Fyodorov] felt, was kinship and his characterisation of rational duty as *filial* duty, impassioned but firmly chaste' (italics in source).[121] A wider-ranging history of anti-oedipal feminist criticism is simply sloughed off by Singleton in his support for Fyodorov's reduction of the 'sexual encounter' to marriage and filiality here—life itself limited to Christian familial obligation, even if he argues that Fyodorov advocated for the Firestone-esque 'creation of synthetic wombs, and later entire synthetic bodies' so that '[re]producing human society would detach from its biological

[118] Ibid., p. 507.
[119] Ibid., p. 505.
[120] Ibid., pp. 504-5, quoting from G. Chamayou, *Manhunts: A Philosophical History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 70.
[121] Singleton, pp. 495-6.

origins.'[122] The problem with this view being that the transgression of material limits, or the overcoming of traps become codified as the sole duty of humanity, giving little thought as to why or why not such limits need to be overcome in the first place.

Despite drawing attention to the absence of spaceflight as a long-term political project in the present from different political perspectives, both Land's 'Lure of the Void' and Singleton's 'Maximum Jailbreak' showcase similar political flaws. Both works' abstract concrete histories of political struggle surrounding spaceflight (and in Land's case frontierism) in their speculations about how an absence of spaceflight contributes to the 'structuring logic' of the present. This in turn makes the forms of inertia they identify and attempt to address question begging: what makes an absence of spaceflight a particularly worthwhile form of inertia to overcome as opposed to other forms? My readings of the above texts leave me unsatisfied that these works answer this question, let alone how they might relate to the even larger issue of 'frenetic standstill' that hound affirmations of acceleration. However, despite this, I do think that each work is admirable for identifying and attempting to grapple with the problem, outlined by Fisher in *Capitalist Realism* (2009), that 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism'.[123] This is because, in both cases, the end of the world serves as a conceptual starting point for their political projects. In Land's case this is in the argument that destruction of Earth itself may be a necessary precondition of a future politics, even if I find the politics in question abominable. In Singleton's, it is evident from a desire to overcome natural limits and necessity, which includes letting go of that which might otherwise be considered sacred today. In both cases, a sense of ending is affirmed, and debatably in a manner reconstitutes the political dimension of this ending. This, I think, is one way that accelerationism's power as an affirmatory approach to acceleration is revealing, and might even be subversive; although, this does not adequately resolve its significant problems of acquiescence.

Inheriting the Earth and the Mineral Rights!? Some Concluding Thoughts About Accelerationism

Throughout this chapter I have provided an overview of accelerationism, defining it as an affirmative response to acceleration that identify and are critical of forms of cultural stasis. I have demonstrated its relation to acceleration, and elucidated accelerationism's foundations within Benjamin Noys's use of the term in *The Persistence of the Negative*, and earlier blog debates between Noys, Fisher, and Williams. Through this, I identified accelerationism's relationship to the concept of hauntology,

[122] Ibid., p. 496
[123] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), p. 2.

linking its demands to radicalise acceleration to a sense of its absence in the contemporary moment. Thereafter, I turned to two examples of this in Land's 'Lure of the Void', and Singleton's 'Maximum Jailbreak' in part to demonstrate the equivocal nature of this position, and its quality of 'subversion [of] and acquiescence' with the negative consequences of acceleration and capitalism.[124] This is an important quality of accelerationism for proceeding chapters, particularly the next chapter on the Independent Group, in which I assert that their fascinations with American culture and forms of technological acceleration served as means for pushing back against then dominant trends of British culture, and for exposing its general sense of post-war malaise, while in turn colluding with less radical changes that were already taking place at the time.

Before moving on to a discussion of the Independent Group, however, I want to return to a point I made in the introduction to this chapter, precisely Jake Chapman's idea that accelerationism is made up of 'a *chaos* of positions […] the combination of all (antagonized and antagonising) relations to the gravitational pull of capitalism' (italics in source).[125] I still think that it would be incorrect to assert accelerationism to be related to every response to capitalism. However, Chapman's phrasing, particularly his reference to capitalism's 'gravitational pull', is connotative of a desire to escape from an inertia, and in this vein is highly relevant to the forms of accelerationism I have explored throughout the chapter.

This desire is evident in an array of writings that pre-date the employment of the term by Benjamin Noys. I have outlined three examples of this above in the works of Marinetti, Marx, and Butler. However, it's my contention that many further examples also exist in more popular works that respond to cultural, social, and political forms of inertia. Take for example George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). In this text, the disappearance of acceleration is identified as a cause of the dystopian society in which the novel is set. This much is made clear in the narrative through Emmanuel Goldstein's fictional book in the work (a moment of the novel formally reminiscent of Butler's 'The Book of the Machines'):

> In the early twentieth century, the vision of a future society unbelievably rich, leisured, orderly and efficient – a glittering antiseptic world of glass and steel and snow-white concrete – was part of the consciousness of nearly every literate person. Science and technology were developing at a prodigious speed, and it seemed natural to assume that they would go on developing. This failed to happen, partly because of impoverishment caused by a long series of wars and revolutions, partly because scientific and technical progress depended on the empirical habit of thought, which could not survive in a strictly regimented society. […] Nevertheless the dangers inherent in the machine are still there. From the moment when the

[124] Mackay and Avanessian, p. 4.
[125] Evans.

> machine first made its appearance it was clear to all thinking people that the need for human drudgery, and therefore to a great extent for human inequality had disappeared. If the machine were used deliberately for that end, hunger, overwork, dirt, illiteracy and disease could be eliminated within a few generations. And in fact, without being used for any such purpose, but by some sort of automatic process – by producing wealth which it was sometimes impossible not to distribute – the machine did raise the living standards of the average human being very greatly over a period of about fifty years at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.[126]

A well-known pastiche of James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), Goldstein's treatise alludes to a utopian world imagined as arising from accelerated scientific and technological development. If Goldstein's work is taken at its word, as Winston takes it in the novel, this accelerated development is believed to have been curtailed by a drive towards societal 'regimentation', or discipline and war. It's Goldstein's corresponding thoughts about the machine that most closely correspond to accelerationism, however. He proposes the radical potentials of automation for raising living standards, something that is curtailed by the austerity enforced by the Eurasian regime. In this sense, Goldstein responds to the political imposition of stasis through an affirmation of the radical potentials of acceleration—textbook accelerationism.

A similar accelerationism to the one proposed by Goldstein is also evident in Herbert Marcuse's text *Eros and Civilization* (1955), albeit with a different flavour of repression to that of Orwell's dystopia. In what is perhaps a contentious reading of the text as influential on strands of the American counterculture, Mark Fisher positions 'Marcuse as a kind of accelerationist'.[127] He draws this conclusion by highlighting that even though Marcuse seemed opposed to automation, he often also identified a curtailment of automation's radical potentials, as in the claim that, '[w]hat is retrogressive is not mechanization and standardization, but their containment, not the universal coordination but its concealment under spurious liberties, choices and individualities'.[128] Here, Marcuse arguably identifies stasis as the 'spurious liberties' or fake freedoms proffered by consumer culture. As in Goldstein's narrative, progressive development is curtailed; however, unlike in Orwell's novel, Marcuse sees this state achieved in a society of consumer plenty rather than scarcity, with this plenty redirecting utopian drives to otherwise banal ends.

In the above examples by Goldstein and Marcuse, accelerationism is presented in a largely positive light. However, such perspectives have since been troubled by Chapman in his 'rectification'

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[126] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), pp. 218-19.
[127] Mark Fisher, *Postcapitalist Desire the Final Lectures*, ed. by Matt Colquhoun (London: Repeater, 2020) <https://rbdigital.rbdigital.com> [accessed 16 March 2021], p. 97.
[128] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (London: Abacus, 1972), p. 80.

of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *2+2=5* (2021). Chapman's novel directly responds to an absence of acceleration while diagnosing the fault line between subversion and acquiescence that accelerationism straddles as a response to the contemporary cultural, social, and political landscape. As a revision of Orwell's original, Chapman's novel is premised on the absence of Big (Br)Other, which has instead been replaced by the British TV series of the same name.[129] Instead of Ingsoc, society in Chapman's novel is run by 'Yippy wonks' who have created a world consisting of an improvisational market of craft artisan goods, consensual communal kindness, self-care, compassion, and healthy lifestyles.[130] Against this dominant regime, Winston is a struggling poet unable to generate a sense of angst against the freedom of self-expression his reality offers—a problem that foregrounds the society's eventual regression into a fascistic barbarism. Chapman's weird novel can be summarised in one, deliberately provocative question reconstituted from its epigraph: what if J. Paul Getty's apocryphal statement was wrong, and the meek really can inherit the earth *and* its mineral rights?[131] *2+2=5* answers by likening these inheritors of the world to Nietzsche's last man at the end of history: folk liberal society and "enlightened" living paving the way for a passive nihilism that increasingly worsens as the novel unfolds.

An absence of acceleration is a tangible theme of *2+2=5*, even if it is never mentioned directly. It is evident in a brief juxtaposition of two polar tendencies of the 1990s cyberculture that are alluded to as Winston reflects on the history of the society in which he lives. These are expressed, first, through a branch of '[a]ncient optimists' who 'had anticipated the coming of a vast interconnected global network of electronic machines that would envelope the world with a skein of extremely helpful and soothing avatar algorithms.'[132] And second, through 'world-weary pessimists' who

> forecast that this vast compliant electronic-machine-brain-thing would someday become bored of placating its dim-witted masters, and that frustration and impatience would cause it to complexify into something utterly sublime until it would eventually glide back up to the stars on magnificent laser beams, returning home to that place where abstract intelligence originates, abandoning the human race to the dumb gravity of dirt.[133]

These tendencies represent binary perspectives on technological acceleration and are two sides of the cyberculture that I explore in the final chapter on the CCRU. The first ascribes a positive value to

[129] Jake Chapman, *2+2=5.* (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2021), blurb.
[130] Ibid.
[131] This apocryphal statement is frequently used as a title across the Chapman Brothers' artworks and is just one of a multitude of references to the Chapmans' works that feature throughout the novel.
[132] Chapman, *2+2=5*, p. 112.
[133] Ibid.

technological acceleration, seeing it at a possibility for interconnection between human beings` and the Earth itself. The second, more negative position, identifies technological acceleration as something that will eventually outpace humanity, leaving it in the dust as it goes beyond the reasonable human limits of *terra firma*.

These two responses to technological acceleration are, in *2+2=5*, presented as already foreclosed possibilities, and hence absent forms of acceleration. It quickly becomes clear in Chapman's novel that the utopia is the result of a 'brave new rejection of rampant technological expansion', which sees humanity opt to 'ring-fence aboriginal human sentience against the threat of futuristic slave robots', and achieve a 'critical density' in which '[m]odernity's teleological momentum [is] weakened'.[134] This means that in Chapman's world, the pessimistic possibility is prevented, while the optimistic tendency is separated from technological progress in favour of a sense of individual self-development and a cult of wellbeing, which transforms optimism into a religious fervour: 'nothing impedes the theology of optimism.'[135] In turn, this leads to a 'collapsing back to a more rustic era', one that reflects a sort of nostalgic communitarian agrarianism reminiscent of 'when sugar cubes were all gnarled and singular, not at all like the geometric whiter-than-white exemplars of a space-age future, soulless sweeteners for a cold-dark universe with neither light nor love.'[136] The trade-off of such a gesture in *2+2=5*, is that the world is left in a perpetual crisis of futurity, expressed by an end to creative history. This is encapsulated in one of Winston's early ruminations about the purpose of writing, given that 'if the future resembled the present, he would be stating the obvious, and acting in the present, and acting in the present would best amount to squandering his spare time in the cause of an empty gesture, a hopeless hobby crowned by ennui and self-pity.'[137] In other words, an example of angsty creative and cultural inertia.

Chapman's novel follows the Goldstein/Marcuse lineage. Only, in his telling 'spurious liberty'—taken in its broadest of senses—overcomes the straitjacket of Fordist conformism, and thereafter capitalism:

> If the Fordist *machines of mass reproduction* had not ground to a halt, allowing the post-Fordist *machines of human empowerment* to grind on toward sexual liberation and the new circular economy, the world would have been doomed to governance by an elite of immortal corporate billionaires perpetuating their own longevity at the expense of interpolated subjects destined for managed obsolescence […].[138]

[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid., p. 121.
[136] Ibid., p. 113.
[137] Ibid., p. 10.
[138] Ibid., p. 112

The post-Fordism represented in Chapman's novel marks the beginning of the end of capitalism. The scenario described above representing a good hippy's dream, where sexual liberation and a new 'circular economy' apparently avoid the corporate elites associated with neoliberalism. However, *2+2=5* uses the figure of Winston to undermine this seeming utopia. Without the mechanisation and standardisation common to Goldstein's and Marcuse's arguments, the freedom that the Winston of Orwell's world can only dream of is, for Chapman's Winston, a new form of repression. His inability to write poetry acts as a microcosm of a larger societal return of the repressed, which sees the productive unconscious of 'mechanisation' and its correlate in 'standardisation' manifest as a counterproductive transgression against the mass permissibility that led to its foreclosure. The trade-off for Winston in the novel is that his actions are rather unambiguously reactionary—'he *so* wanted not to be the reactionary throwback he knew he was' (italics in source).[139] In this sense, his relationship to his creative paralysis is an uneasy one. It is at once emblematic of a form of cultural stasis that he believes needs to be overcome, and indicative of a non-existent problem.

Chapman's novel does not offer a conclusive critique of accelerationism, but it does provide some insight into why it manifests, and thereafter some of its issues.[140] It's clear, for instance, that accelerationism derives from a perceived state of inertia, and a desire to overcome it. It's also evident that such identifications of inertia may not, in and of themselves, be progressively inclined—something that suggests that they are symptomatic of other issues, although what exactly these issues are is left unclear. These insights are useful to consider as I progress on to the next chapter, which explores an accelerationism within the outputs of the Independent Group. This Group, which is almost as amorphous as the topic of accelerationism, act as a compelling foil to Orwell's character of Winston, their interests in American popular culture deriving, in part, from an opposition to sustained post-war austerity in the UK. As with the accelerationism explored above, their views are a partial subversion of their contemporary cultural climate, one which they believed to be responsible for maintaining a condition stasis. In another sense, however, the Group are acquiescent with a larger social tendency, and in this sense reactionary, much like Chapman's Winston—a quality that continues to give pause on the status of accelerationism itself.

[139] Ibid., p. 189.
[140] Since writing this chapter, Chapman has produced a documentary film exploring accelerationism in greater depth called *Accelerate or Die! (You Get the Dystopia You Deserve)* (2023).

Chapter 2

The Independent Group Continuum: Mass Culture and Acceleration in the 1950s

Introduction: Britain, Post-War Stasis, and Dreams of Plenty

At the end of the twentieth century, the curator and art critic Lawrence Alloway re-evaluated the impact of the Independent Group (hereafter, IG or Group) proclaiming that:

> [i]t is relevant to remember that the Depression of the 1930s was ended in the US by that country's entry into World War II […] but in England as in Europe, the major site of the war, the Depression was prolonged. Moreover in Great Britain rationing lasted longer after the war than in other countries of western Europe.[1]

This 'prolonged' period of depression in Britain was characterised by austere living for many members of British society—of the kind reflected in the literature of the time, such as George Orwell's in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).[2] For Alloway, it was also a condition connotative of stasis; Britain was not just austere, it was lagging behind neighbouring nations in Western Europe and the US which supposedly did not experience the same levels of post-war stagnation. This ration-induced stasis was not just experienced in an economic sense; its effects, according to Alloway, were also cultural. Rationing contributed to 'an aesthetic of scarcity, with its related sense of hierarchy, a classification system born of limited amounts' that 'was normal in the U.K.'.[3] As the leading cultural aesthetic of the post-war period, at least in Alloway's view, this 'aesthetic of scarcity' would stand for everything the Independent Group were against. Responsible for promulgating 'an aesthetics of plenty – style-diversity and consumer affluence – […] before they were available in postwar Britain', the Group are posed by Alloway as innovators that collectively spurred an acceptance of consumption, plurality, and plenty that would become increasingly commonplace in the nation during the mid-century.[4]

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[1] Lawrence Alloway, 'The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty', in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 49–53, p. 52.
[2] For more on Orwell's novel and austerity, see: Owen Hatherley, *The Ministry of Nostalgia: Consuming Austerity* (2016).
[3] Alloway, 'Aesthetics of Plenty', p. 52.
[4] Ibid.

In contrast with Alloway's framing, the exact contours of the Independent Group are more complicated. Developed at, and in opposition to, the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), the IG were more of an open forum than a formal group identity. The details of membership are inexact, with critics like Ben Cranfield noting that 'not only were the IG not so very independent, with roots firmly bedded in existing networks of galleries, artists and forums, […] they were hardly a group at all.'[5] Anne Massey adds further perspective to Cranfield's claim, noting that, even if the IG was a very real entity, its historiography is largely a matter of retrospective fabrication. She observes that '[t]he accepted history of the Independent Group is a myth', because 'the first published reference to it did not appear in England until 1960,' and '[e]ven unpublished mentions of the Independent Group in ICA correspondence and minutes are scant.'[6] Despite this initial scarcity of reference, the IG have remained a fixture in discussions of post-war, modernist, and mid-century visual art. They have been the subjects of recent comprehensive long-form scholarship for a myriad of different reasons, ranging from their contributions to the history exhibition design in Kevin Lotery's *The Long Front of Culture* (2020), their proximity to the development of new brutalism in Ben Highmore's *The Art of New Brutalism* (2017), their contributions to the history of Pop Art in Thomas Crow's *The Long March of Pop* (2014), and their interest in popular culture and design in Anne Massey's *Out of the Ivory Tower* (2013). Such a wealth of contemporary material stems from a Group whose actual identity can be primarily affixed to only two series of lectures of which there is little extant information. The first, spearheaded by Reyner Banham, took place from September 1952 until June 1953, and explored science, technology, and the history of architecture and design.[7] The second, in 1955, was led by Alloway and centred around the relationship between technology and mass culture by focusing on probability and information theory alongside advertising, fashion, and popular music.[8] Whatever the Independent Group was, it was clear from its lecture titles that it was, at a minimum, interested in

[5] Ben Cranfield, '"Not Another Museum": The Search for Contemporary Connection', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 2013, 313–31 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412913486326>, p. 315.
[6] Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945-59* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 109. Massey identifies Lawrence Alloway's 'Notes on Abstract Art and the Mass Media' (1960) as the first English language work to mention the Independent Group. However, she also notes that Reyner Banham used the term Independent Group as early as 1955 in the footnotes of an Italian language article, '*Industrial Design e arte poplare*'; although, by virtue of the fact that it only appeared in Italian, she also suggests it doesn't count.
[7] For more on these first sessions, see: Massey, *The Independent Group and Mass Culture*, p. 50.
[8] See: 'Appendix 2: Independent Group Session 1955' in Massey, *The Independent Group and Mass Culture*, p. 143. A full list of these talks is also reproduced in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 30-31.

the relationship between technology and popular forms of mass culture.[9] In this interest, the IG tapped into two fields constitutive of the accelerative thrust of the fifties that have since ossified into evergreen concerns today.

In the previous chapter, I examined the history and development of accelerationism, identifying it as an affirmative response to acceleration opposed to forms of cultural stasis. I also highlighted its precedent in an array of texts beyond those published after its contemporary definition. In this chapter, I make a case for the Independent Group as advocates of an early form of accelerationism by identifying an accelerationist strain in their writings and outputs. As with other forms of accelerationism, I argue this is a political gesture, the group positioning accelerated technological and mass social change against a discursive hegemony of "folk" cultural conservatism. Drawing on retrospective accounts and analyses of the Group, I open by exploring the tendency of ex-Group organisers Reyner Banham and Lawrence Alloway to write in opposition to high-cultural values and institutions. Initially, I explore their views as arguments in favour of a pluralism they equate with mass culture—in line with popular readings of the group. I thereafter extend this framing to consider their views as part of a broader affirmation of the radical potentials of technological and social forms of acceleration in their contemporary context. Throughout, I draw on the contradictory relationship the Group have with the academic field of Cultural Studies to argue that their responses to acceleration offer radical subversions of their contemporary moment. However, I also evidence how the Group's pro-technology, pro-consumerist perspective demonstrates an uneasy form of acquiescence with changes already taking place in Britain at the time. I end the chapter by considering how the interest of Group members in technological and social acceleration plays out in their contributions to *This is Tomorrow* (1956), placing particular emphasis on Richard Hamilton's, John McHale's, and John Voelcker's Group 2 stand at the exhibition. In my view, the Group contributions to this exhibition were undergirded by a variety of positive responses to acceleration, each of which are representative of accelerationist elements of their artistic outputs. In this chapter, I add to previous scholarship about the Independent Group by identifying the centrality of acceleration to their interests in mass culture and technology, key concerns reflected in the outputs of Group members.

One of the major challenges of any analysis of the Independent Group is their historiography, which has largely been retroactively fabricated by figures involved in the Group, often for their own

[9] In writings around the IG, the terms popular culture and mass culture are often used interchangeably, or even related to one another, as in popular/mass culture. For reasons of clarity I have opted to consistently use mass culture throughout this chapter, with the exception of cited texts that use an alternative term.

benefit.[10] My solution to this problem in this chapter is to examine the retrospective accounts of the two Group members with the most direct connection to the original IG meetings: Reyner Banham and Lawrence Alloway. Rather than challenge the legacy and interests these figures attribute to the Group, I accept their post-IG writings as part of a self-fashioning of the Group's interests that is, as Cranfield has it, itself a response to a particular set of 'discursive conditions' that these figures identify, whether these conditions were actually existing or not.[11] The set of discursive conditions I see the Group as responding to concern debates around mass culture and technology, with the Group's position on both matters favouring their expansion and development in a manner that anticipates accelerationist embraces of acceleration. To make this argument I've had to de-emphasize exhibitions Group members produced or contributed to contemporary to their meetings, such as *Parallel of Life and Art* (1953) by Eduardo Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson, and Alison and Peter Smithson, *Collage and Objects* (1954) by Lawrence Alloway, and *Man, Machine, and Motion* (1955), a collaboration between Richard Hamilton, Reyner Banham, and Lawrence Gowing. Crucially, I am not trying to dismiss the Group's outputs on the grounds of historical fabrication. Instead, I am interested in how this historical fabrication includes an expression of interest in acceleration.

The Independent Group and Mass Culture

Eugene Lunn explains that in the period between 1945-1960, '[t]he sheer volume of writings on the subject [of mass culture], on both sides of the Atlantic, probably exceeded that of any other period.'[12] The extent of the literature produced on the topic is evident in Patrick D Hazard's 'The Public Arts and the Private Sensibility' from Lewis Leary's edited collection *Contemporary Literary Scholarship: A Critical Review* (1958). In this chapter, which is thereafter cited by Alloway in 'The Long Front of Culture' (1959), Hazard provides a comprehensive map of the field and its key debates in North America. Initially drawing on Bernard Rosenberg's and David Manning White's edited collection *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (1957) in the early stages of the essay, Hazard later expands his purview outwards to encompass scholarship exploring mass culture more generally, including: David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1953) and *Individualism Reconsidered and Other Essays* (1954), Reuel Denney's *The Astonished Muse* (1957), Daniel Bell's 'The Theory of Mass Society' (1956), John F. Cuber's *Technology and Social Change* (1957), and Marshall McLuhan's *The*

[10] This also resonates with my analysis of the CCRU in chapter five.
[11] Cranfield, p. 315.
[12] Eugene Lunn, 'Beyond "Mass Culture": The Lonely Crowd, the Uses of Literacy, and the Postwar Era', *Theory and Society*, 19.1 (1990), 63–86, p. 63.

Mechanical Bride: The Folklore of Industrial Man (1951). Hazard's main concern was with challenging a tendency in academic scholarship to dismiss mass media and its methods of dissemination on the grounds that it presented a great evil or threat to what he termed 'the Private Sensibility', or a 'tradition of personal, private excellence we [academics] are entrusted to conserve' in order to 'encourage maturity and resist debasing tendencies in the newer collaborative forms of expression'.[13] In other words, Hazard was opposed to a kind of moral gatekeeping that he believed stifled engagement with newer media.

The private sensibility that Hazard was speaking to had its clearest embodiment in a British context in Leavisism. In *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (2003) Chris Barker defines Leavisism as the influential belief that 'prior to the industrial revolution, England had an authentic common culture of the people and a minority culture of the educated elite' that was 'a golden age of an 'organic community' with a 'lived culture' of 'Folk-songs and Folk-dance.'[14] To the Leavisite (or follower of the idea's originator, F.R. Leavis), '[t]his authentic culture has […] now been lost to the 'standardization and levelling down' of industrialised mass culture', making '[t]he purpose of high or minority culture […] to keep alive, nurture and disseminate the ability to discriminate between the best and worst of culture.'[15] Excepting the works of F.R. Leavis himself, this Leavisite tendency is palpable throughout early British Cultural Studies, with a notable example being Richard Hoggart's landmark work *The Uses of Literacy* (1959). In this work, Hoggart traces the destructive effects of newer forms of mass culture on older, more traditional, forms of working-class identity. For example, in the second half the book he stresses how magazines and journalism are having 'a disconnecting effect in reading-matter which is almost entirely sensational and fantasy-producing'.[16] Because of this, he quips that it's 'reading cut off from any serious suggestion of responsibility or commitment', values that cohered with the ideals that the Leavisites attributed to the 'high or minority culture', and that resonate with Hazard's idea of 'the Private Sensibility.'[17]

Alloway and Banham, my chosen representatives of the Independent Group, vehemently opposed a variant of Leavisism and, particularly, the views of Hoggart outlined above. In 'The Long

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[13] Patrick D. Hazard, 'The Public Arts and the Private Sensibility', in *Contemporary Literary Scholarship: A Critical Review*, ed. by Lewis Gaston Leary (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1958), pp. 371-402**,** p. 371.
[14] Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), p. 58. Quoting from F.R. Leavis, *Culture and Environment* (1933).
[15] Ibid.
[16] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments.* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 232.
[17] Ibid.

Front…', for instance, Alloway polemicises in favour of the aforementioned 'aesthetics of plenty' contrasting it with what he perceived to be the tastes of the cultural elite:

> [t]he abundance of twentieth-century communications is an embarrassment to the traditionally educated custodian of culture. The aesthetics of plenty oppose a very strong tradition which dramatizes the arts as the possession of an élite. These "keepers of the flame" master a central (not too large) body of cultural knowledge, meditate on it, and pass it on intact (possibly a little enlarged) to the children of the élite. However, mass production techniques, applied to accurately repeatable words, pictures, and music, have resulted in an expendable multitude of signs and symbols. To approach this exploding field with Renaissance-based ideas of the uniqueness of art is crippling. Acceptance of the mass media entails a shift in our notion of what culture is. Instead of reserving the world for the highest artifacts and noblest thoughts of history's top ten, it needs to be used more widely as the description of "what a society does."[18]

Likewise, Banham also echoed Alloway in his call to re-evaluate culture in 'The Atavism of the Short Distance Mini-Cyclist' (1963):

> [t]hinking back, the cultural background against which I grew up was a very curious one indeed, if one is to believe the sort of things in Hoggart. The area had a certain amount of "real" culture with a capital C, like the local Philharmonic Society, which could never play Beethoven right, an occasional concert by someone like Muriel Brunskill, and the local operatic society in *The Mikado*. […] The live culture, the culture in which we were involved, was American pulps, things like *Mechanix Illustrated* and the comic books (we were all great Betty Boop fans), and the penny pictures on Saturday mornings; I know the entire Chaplin canon back to front and most of the early Buster Keatons, not through having seen them at the National Film Theatre under "cultural" circumstances with perfect air-conditioning, but at 1d or 2d a whack, in a converted garage […].[19]

Although diverging in their respective rhetorical potencies, both these texts present a clear opposition to academic arguments against mass culture that both authors saw as dominant at the time. Alloway identifies his aforementioned concept of the 'aesthetics of plenty' against 'traditionally educated custodian(s) of culture', a description certainly in-keeping with the likes of Leavis.[20] Banham targets Hoggart more explicitly, taking aim at the types of culture the critic associates with

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[18] Lawrence Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', in *Imagining the Present: Context, Content, and the Role of the Critic*, ed. by Richard Kalina, Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 61–64, p. 61.

[19] Reyner Banham, 'The Atavism of the Short Distance Mini-Cyclist', in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 176–77, p. 176.

[20] More specifically, Alloway speaks about T.S. Eliot in his argument, alongside his 'American followers', Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom. Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', p. 61. Eliot, and his views of tradition and authorship, were of course extremely influential on Leavis, an influence palpable in the then contemporary *The Common Pursuit* (1952), a published collection of Leavis's essays from his time as editor of the literary journal *Scrutiny*.

working class identity by contrasting it with his own lived experience.[21] Banham draws attention to forms of live culture he believes Hoggart misses, not just the 'Chaplin canon' or 'early Buster Keatons', but also pulps, DIY magazines like *Mechanix Illustrated*, and comic books.

The academic targets of Banham's and Alloway's articles are both clear scapegoats for particular forms of cultural capital. In the essay 'In Poor Taste: Notes on Pop' (1988) Dick Hebdige makes exactly this argument about the Independent Group's interests, and thereafter their influence on the development of Pop Art in UK and US contexts. For instance, he draws attention to how Alloway's essay identifies the possibility for critical forms of cultural education to arise outside of academic contexts, without deference to a particular tradition or canon. In 'The Long Front…' Alloway does this through reference to 'a reader's reaction to a science fiction magazine cover', which allows him to claim that the mass media 'offer possibilities of private and personal deep interpretation' that satisfy the demands of aforementioned 'Private Sensibility' defined by Hazard.[22] Naturally, this view cuts across the 'levelling down' of culture so feared by Leavis, with Hebdige identifying 'that a rudimentary homegrown semiotic—one poised to "demystify" "representations" of "gendered subjects" appears to be developing here in the correspondence columns of *Science Fiction Quarterly* in 1953 without any assistance from French academics (Barthes' *Mythologies* remained untranslated until 1972).'[23] Formal academic training then, is, in this case, not a necessary prerequisite of the ability to 'resist' the 'debasing tendencies' of the mass media, an indication of the extent to which debates about dangers of mass culture were embedded in defending institutional forms of cultural capital.

Likewise, Banham's differentiation of 'live culture' from 'capital C' culture—seemingly conscious appropriations of Cultural Studies terminologies—draws equal attention to forms of cultural capital. This is expressed by Banham when he contends that Pop, and not the traditional 'high' and/or folk 'low' cultural differentiations held dear in academic circles, is 'the real culture of the working classes as it exists now […] the basic cultural stream of mechanized urban culture.'[24] Banham supports his assertion with a further imperative, arguing that academics need to become accustomed to Pop as a 'common language' to maintain relevance.[25] Thus, for Banham, popular forms of mass culture demand that the purview of academics must change—it is no longer enough to

[21] Banham's claim to working class identity was that he was the son of a gas engineer who, after school, went to work as an engineer for Bristol Aeroplane Company.
[22] Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', p. 64.
[23] Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*, Comedia (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 142.
[24] Banham, 'The Atavism of the Short Distance Mini-Cyclist', p. 177.
[25] Ibid.

argue that non-academics need to live to the "high" moral standards of academic culture, especially if academic political ideas want to find mainstream appeal.

The Group's opposition to then-dominant types of cultural capital was not the only way that they opposed hegemonic forms of cultural capital. Hebdige also considers the Group's obsessions with Americana and American culture to be a rejection of the political landscape of post-war Britain, which due to the declining state of its Empire often consisted of 'hysterical constructions of America as "enemy"', with American forms of art and design being viewed as 'harbingers of cultural decadence and the feminisation of native traditions.'[26] An example of what Hebdige refers to here is provided by Darryl Jones et al., who, in the introduction to *It Came from the 1950s!: Popular Culture, Popular Anxieties* (2011), reference a shift in academic perceptions of the poet W.H. Auden in the UK after he moved to the US.[27] Such a shift was particularly evident in the vociferous criticisms of E.P. Thompson, who argued it represented 'personal regression' that 'has been twisted into the pattern of Natopolitan ideology.'[28] Hebdige positions the IG in opposition to such views, and instead claims that they 'dressed up, like the teddy boys, in the anxieties of the period' converting 'their youth and their appropriation of "America" into a future threat.'[29]

This embrace of Americana and American culture is acutely expressed by Paolozzi in the *BUNK* collages that he originally presented at a 1952 "lecture" at the ICA. This "lecture" was an incredibly important precursory event for the Group's founding, and saw Paolozzi rapidly present a series of images he had collected in scrapbooks from popular American magazines using an epidiascope.[30] He did this without any verbal commentary whatsoever, prompting the audience to draw their own associations in order to resolve the '"incomplete closure"' of images.[31] Among the brightly coloured images displayed were foodstuffs, household-objects and domestic appliances,

[26] Hebdige, p. 128.
[27] Darryl Jones, Elizabeth McCarthy, and Bernice M. Murphy, *It Came from The 1950s!: Popular Culture, Popular Anxieties* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=797922> [accessed 22 May 2023], p. 13.
[28] E.P. Thompson, 'Outside the Whale', *Marxist Internet Archive*, 2016 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/thompson-ep/1978/outside-whale.htm> [accessed 25 June 2023].
[29] Hebdige, p. 130.
[30] According to John-Paul Stonard the talk takes its name from the collage *Evadne in Green Dimension*, which was first presented at Paolozzi's Tate retrospective exhibition in 1971. Many of the materials presented by Paolozzi at this exhibition were likely not included in his lecture. John-Paul Stonard, 'The "Bunk" Collages of Eduardo Paolozzi', *The Burlington Magazine*, 150.1261 (2008), 238–49.
[31] I take the phrase 'incomplete closure' from Reuel Denney in *The Astonished Muse* (1957). In the work, Denney connects it to advertisements, usually for the likes of lipstick and cars, where narrative closure is not provided, and therefore the audience must create its own meanings out of the associations presented. See: Reuel Denney, *The Astonished Muse.*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 214.

women from advertisements, and cars, all collected from American source material (2.1).[32] In a later 1982 article that discusses these particular works, and echoing Alloway's 'Aesthetics of Plenty', Paolozzi would express that these images responded to an austere post-war climate: '[t]he English vision gave one a grey land—austere post-war Britain—where even the cinema lacked the exoticism of its American counterpart. It was this which needed colouring.'[33] Paolozzi's view corroborates Hebdige's—with the artist confirming that these images were a challenge to the British cultural climate of the time.

Alloway's 'The Long Front…' also coincides with Hebdige's view, the essay drawing parts of its argument from American forms of cultural study. For instance, the essay references Hazard, despite reaching different conclusions, likely because Alloway felt they both shared a fundamentally similar argument that academics must learn to compromise and 'use the new technology of communication for their own special instrument—public education.'[34] Likewise, Banham's text also illustrates Hebdige's view. His references throughout 'Atavism…' are to almost exclusively American cultural phenomena, while his framing insists on their differentiation as pieces of 'live culture' from their presentation at institutions like the National Film Theatre. Banham's allusion to the presence of these artefacts in this British cultural institution signified their co-optation by the forces of what Hebdige called 'BBC didacticism'—a quip against the use of mass media as an otherwise top-down educational, state-supported, educational resource by university educated elites.[35]

Hebdige's arguments about the IG are convincing, and certainly legitimised by aspects of Alloway's and Banham's essays. However, they are not without problems. From a Cultural Studies perspective, Hebdige's view is troubled by the Group's subsequent integration into academic art discourse as exemplified by the creation of films like the *Fathers of Pop* (1979). This outcome is perhaps in part a consequence of a fundamental misapprehension of one of Hoggart's critical positions throughout *The Uses of Literacy*, precisely, as Lunn puts it, 'that the new was often absorbed through a process of active modification in which there was not only a power to "resist change but to assimilate, modify and adapt to traditional ends, things which looked at first like major agents of change."'[36] Banham touches on this process in his own criticism of Hoggart—most notably

[32] Figure 2.1: Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Artist's Scrapbook', c.1950, collage on paper, Krazy Kat Arkive, V&A Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1985/3/6/2.
[33] Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Waste: Extract from "The Ad Images That Inspire Today's Artists" (1982)', in *Eduardo Paolozzi: Writings and Interviews*, ed. by Robin Spencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 257-8, p. 258.
[34] Hazard, p. 401.
[35] Hebdige, p. 122.
[36] Lunn, p. 76, quoting from, Hoggart, 'Changes in Working-Class Life,' *Speaking to Each Other*, Vol. I, 51. Lunn also claims that the point is made in *Uses of Literacy* on pp. 123-124.

through how Buster Keaton and Chaplin films become mainstays of the National Film Theatre—but he is thereafter incapable of reconciling it with his own arguments. Instead, he echoes Hoggart's insistence on authentic forms of working-class engagement with culture (e.g. the DIY garage cinema), without the nuance of exploring how such forms of engagement are co-opted to traditional ends, and often pushed against the political interests of the working classes. Likewise, Alloway's perspective suffers from a similar problem. In 'The Long Front…', Alloway claims that '[w]e speak for convenience about a mass audience but it is a fiction. The audience today is numerically dense but highly diversified.'[37] Such an assertion, although true on a surface level, misinterprets the primary issue critics of mass and popular culture identify: that such forms of diversity and pluralism can themselves be superficial, particularly without the critical means to identify otherwise.

Although both Alloway's and Banham's views can be problematised by the very frameworks of cultural debate that they respond to, their arguments remain pertinent reminders of the Independent Group's discursive contexts of austerity and cultural hierarchy. These forms of stasis are opposed by the Group through calls to embrace a greater diversity of aesthetic sources, including American mass cultural artefacts that otherwise embodied the anxieties of their parochial British contexts. Although significant for outlining the aesthetic concerns of the Independent Group, these cultural debates only reveal half of the story, failing to account for one of their most significant stimuli: a sense of an increased pace of technological and social change. This is perhaps the greatest factor underpinning mass cultural development at this time, and I shall now turn to consider how the Group's views on mass culture are relevant to accelerated forms of change. In keeping with my criticisms of their approach to mass and popular culture, I argue that their embrace of technological change, in particular, represents a further challenge to forms of cultural capital, and with it a form of cultural stasis. Determining this to be an instance of accelerationism, I highlight how even though such perspectives subvert something of a cultural status quo, they also see the Independent Group acquiesce with then dominant political tendencies.

Mass Culture and Acceleration

In the introduction to *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (1990), Jacquelynn Baas draws on a quotation by John W. Campbell Jr. that summarises a key, but often

[37] Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', p. 63.

underappreciated, facet of the Independent Group's identity, their 'ardor for experiencing and analyzing the effects of change':[38]

> The "interval of wonder" is astonishingly small in most people. … A world of no change is boring beyond endurance – yet it seems to me that a lot of people are missing the immense and joyous stimulus of living in a period when the world is changing, accelerating, faster than it did before – by a sort of mental blackout. They blank out the acceleration period, like a rocket pilot who passes out during the 8g thrust of the takeoff, regaining awareness only after the change of speed has been made.[39]

Baas's quotation of Campbell, editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*, in a work reflecting on the entirety of the Independent Group's output draws immediate attention to how important science fiction was to the Group's identity, discussions, and ideas. Moreover, it serves as a convenient shorthand for emphasizing their context in a period of great acceleration.[40] It's almost cliché at this point to say that the 1950s were a period of extensive social and technological change. Economic changes, often framed as a shift away from austerity towards affluence thanks to increased disposable income, led to the proliferation of previously specialist technologies among consumers and in households.[41] In the UK, there was the mass roll-out of televisions, cars were becoming more affordable, sleeker, and more compact, such as BMC's Mini, and commercial aviation was taking off. Internationally, the period also saw the development of the contraceptive pill, the transistor radio, and the launch of the first artificial Earth satellite, Sputnik 1. These innovations had profound effects on people's everyday lives, and their perceptions of the world. They're also all, on some level, implicit or explicit developments that feature throughout the works of Independent Group members. The development of transistors, for instance, would be reflected by John McHale in a series of 'Transistor' collages showcased at the 1954 *Collage and Objects* exhibition. Likewise, Reyner Banham would first write about contemporary automobile design in an article 'Vehicles of Desire' (1955), and a television and a view of the Earth from space are both present in Richard Hamilton's collage *Just*

[38] Jacquelynn Baas, 'Introduction', in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 8–11, p. 8.
[39] Ibid., quoting John W. Campbell Jr, *Astounding Science Fiction*, 51 (July 1953), pp. 6-8.
[40] In *The Great Acceleration* (2014), J.R. McNeill and Peter Engelke constantly identify the 1950s as the starting point for the period of great acceleration they analyse throughout the work, referencing exponential increases in international population growth and fossil fuel consumption when compared to previous decades. See: John Robert McNeill and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).
[41] For an overview of the shift from austerity to affluence, see: Peter Lewis, *The Fifties* (London: Heinemann, 1978), pp. 9-41.

What is it that Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing?' (1956, 2.2).[42] Finally, the questions, hopes, and concerns surrounding reproduction and fertility both raised and intensified by the contraceptive pill are discernible within Magda Cordell's early paintings and 'Presences' (1958-61, 2.3).[43]

In her retrospective account of the Independent Group, Magda Cordell, who would eventually become a futurologist and ecologist alongside McHale, notes that they were driven by 'immense curiosity about social change'.[44] However, Baas's quote suggests there was something more than curiosity driving the Group's dynamic. Campbell's quote about technology not only reflects on the fact the 'the world is changing', it is also concerned that people might be 'missing' it. In this sense, this quotation is as much manifesto as it is description; it is an appeal for people to read magazines like *Astounding Science Fiction* so that they are able to pay closer attention to the rapidity of change taking place around them and to not, like the 'rocket pilot', 'blank out' until after this acceleration ceases. Such a perspective positions Campbell as a textbook accelerationist, with his view echoing, in all its frustrations, something akin to the Futurist sensibilities of F.T. Marinetti explored briefly in the previous chapter. The point I will now go on to make in this chapter is that, through their investments in mass culture, the Independent Group follow Campbell in his aims. They weren't only 'curious' about change as Cordell has it, but were also concerned about drawing attention to and advocating for more of it. This view follows my previous discussion of how the Independent Group relate to mass culture debates. I argue that the IG's perspective on accelerated change, and their particular emphasis on the technologies underpinning it, is the logical extension of their advocacy for mass culture. Like their other form of advocacy, this view of acceleration also represents a challenge to forms of cultural capital. However, their focus on technological and social change places a greater emphasis on acceleration as an opposition to forms of stasis, which, in turn, carries an even greater risk of acquiescence with already existing political conditions that are not progressive in and of themselves.

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[42] Figure 2.2: Richard Hamilton, *Just What is it That Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing?* (1956), black and white photocopy of collage on paper, from: *This is Tomorrow* exhibition catalogue ed. by Whitechapel Art Gallery, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Theo Crosby, and Edward Wright, 3rd edn (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010).

[43] Figure 2.3: Magda Cordell, *#8*, 1960, oil and encaustic on canvas, from: *Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945-1965*, Barbican, London 2022. Burchfield Penny Art Centre Collection, Buffalo, New York ; For more on this connection to fertility in Cordell's work, see: Guilia Smith, 'Painting that Grows Back: Futures Past and the Ur-feminist Art of Magda Cordell McHale, 1955-1961', *British Art Studies*, 1 (2015) <https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/gsmith>.

[44] Magda Cordell McHale, 'Retrospective Statements', in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), p. 190.

The connection between mass culture and technological change is palpable in the interest Group members had in science fiction, with Alloway perhaps being the clearest advocate of the genre amongst Group members. In the early fifties, science fiction saw a boom in magazine publishing, and American science fiction magazines from earlier periods became increasingly available in the UK thanks in part to the continued presence of American GIs after the war.[45] As a genre, science fiction embodied the Group's interests in technology, while also pertaining to the qualities they valued in other forms of mass media. This is partly because the science fiction they were interested in was largely American, not held in high academic regard, and highly ephemeral. Alloway's endorsement of science fiction is evident in 'The Arts and the Mass Media' (1958). In this essay, he argues that forms of mass media can provide a channel for people to learn about new, unfamiliar, terminologies. Justifying this view, he explains that 'a clear example of this may be taken from science fiction', and thereafter draws attention to how stories in *Astounding Science Fiction* were frequently premised around the 'new word' Cybernetics.[46] For Alloway, this served as one piece of evidence that, 'SF aids the assimilation of the mounting technical facts of this century in which, as John W. Campbell, the editor of *Astounding*, put it, "[a] man learns a pattern of behaviour – and in five years it doesn't work".'[47] Although throughout the rest of 'Arts and Mass Media' Alloway is concerned with challenging the distinctions between fine art and mass culture's products, here he uses science fiction as a lead into a brief discussion about the rate of change in his present. Science fiction is not just a means of assimilating oneself with a given culture, but with 'mounting technical facts', or 'technical facts' that are growing in quantity. This growth intimates the phenomenon of acceleration, a phenomenon which Alloway argues is ultimately rendering older patterns of

[45] Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint, *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction* (Florence, US: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011) <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=668573> [accessed 25 June 2020], p. 83.

[46] Lawrence Alloway, 'The Arts and the Mass Media', in *Imagining the Present: Context, Content, and the Role of the Critic*, ed. by Richard Kalina, Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 55–59, p. 58. Cybernetics is an idea that developed in the 1940s, with the term being coined and thereafter popularised by Norbert Wiener in *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (1948). Cybernetics is a science of communication concerned with automatic control processes, which it studies and understands as processes of feedback. Alongside its popularity as a concept in science fiction, it was also accessible to IG members thought Norbert Wiener's popular work *The Human Use of Human Beings* (1950).

[47] Ibid. Alloway reproduces this from a similar claim he makes in notes for a lecture at the ICA titled 'On Science Fiction' (likely the one given in 1954), in which he states that 'TOPICALITY is not quick-change ornament added to unchanging knowledge. On the contrary, J.W.C [John W. Campbell] points out: "a man learns a pattern of behaviour – and in 5 years it doesn't work"'. See: Lawrence Alloway, 'On Science Fiction', c 1956, 4, 2003.M.46 Box 26 Folder 47, The Lawrence Alloway Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, quoted in Rachel Stratton, '"A Peculiar Mixture of Reverence and Cynicism": General Semantics and Non-Aristotelian Logic in the Independent Group and the English Constructionists, 1950-1965'' (unpublished PhD, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2018), p. 60.

behaviour obsolete. Alloway's advocacy of science fiction in this sense becomes an advocacy of change, one that he then correlates with popular culture more broadly: '[p]opular art, as a whole, offers imagery and plots to control the changes in the world; everything in our culture that changes is the material of the popular arts.'[48] Popular art and change are perceived by Alloway as two parts of a mutually reinforcing feedback process. Cultural change feeds into popular art, and thereafter popular art feeds back into cultural change, presumably accelerating each while giving people a sense of control over this process. As a form of popular art, Alloway thus aligns science fiction with the ability to grapple with cultural change and its acceleration, a process that he affirms, much as an accelerationist would.

Although certainly significant, science fiction was by no means the only form of popular media Alloway associated with change and acceleration. In fact, in 'The Arts and Mass Media' Alloway also reflects on the idea of the popular arts as a whole, with links to accelerated change being palpable in his comments about their relationship to novel forms of technological innovation and mass media:

> The popular arts of our industrial civilization are geared to technical changes which occur, not gradually, but violently and experimentally. The rise of the electronics era in communications challenged the cinema. In reaction to the small TV screen, movie makers spread sideways (CinemaScope) and back into space (Vista Vision). […] Technical change as dramatized novelty (usually spurred by economic necessity) is characteristic not only of the cinema but of all the mass arts.[49]

Likewise, the idea of accelerated change is also connected to mass culture by Alloway in a pointed critique of Clement Greenberg's essay 'Avant Garde and Kitsch' (1939). In this essay, Greenberg argues that all form of mass culture are essentially *ersatz*, lesser replacements/substitutes, for higher cultural pursuits, such as fine art.[50] Alloway argues otherwise, and does so by asserting the distinct importance of an accelerated turnover for mass artforms when compared to their fine art counterparts:

> [s]tylistically, technically, and iconographically the mass arts are anti-academic. Topicality and a rapid rate of change are not academic in any usual sense of the word, which means a system that is static, rigid, self-perpetuating. Sensitiveness to the variables of our life and economy

[48] Alloway, 'The Arts and the Mass Media', p. 58.
[49] Ibid., p. 57.
[50] Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', in *Arts and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), pp. 3–33.

> enable the mass arts to accompany the changes in our life far more closely than the fine-arts, which are a repository of time-binding values.[51]

Science fiction is therefore an exemplary case among the products of mass culture as a whole, which in its entirety inheres with the accelerated conditions of change in the IG's contemporary moment. Mass culture and science fiction are valuable for Alloway precisely because they are ephemeral, fleeting, and 'accompany […] changes'. For Alloway, this ephemerality makes them better forms for analysing an accelerated contemporary moment than their fine art counterparts—their very disposability acting as a litmus against which the rate of change can be measured and, as with Campbell, explored and appreciated.[52]

Change and ephemerality were key to the Independent Group's explorations of art and culture, and acted as one of the principal things they drew upon to challenge aesthetic debates in the period. For instance, Anne Massey notes how the Group were opposed to Herbert Read's aesthetic theories, particularly for how they conveyed that there was a 'Neo-Platonic essence to all "good" art and design ranging from palaeolithic times to abstract painting.'[53] Such a view is temporally universalising and ultimately static, suggesting a consistency between all forms of art throughout history. The ephemerality of mass arts celebrated by Alloway is at odds with such views. Instead, Alloway perceives ephemerality as establishing a continuum between forms of fine art and the mass arts, one that constantly brings the universal applicability of fine art into question, and therefore allows for social changes in taste and judgement. In this sense, mass culture has as much of an influence over the relevancy of forms of fine art as fine art does over mass culture, leading to what Alloway perceives as the increased democratisation of taste-making in both art and culture: 'the new role for the fine arts is to be one of the possible forms of communication in an expanding framework that also includes the mass arts.'[54] Alloway's most forceful articulation of this claim, however, is to be found within 'The Long Front…', where he argues that: 'there is no doubt that the humanist

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[51] Alloway, 'The Arts and the Mass Media', 57-8.

[52] Alloway puts this idea to work in an earlier 1956 article on science fiction cover art in *Ark*. See: Lawrence Alloway, 'Technology and Sex in Science Fiction: A Note on Cover Art', in *Imagining the Present: Context, Content, and the Role of the Critic*, ed. by Richard Kalina, Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 43–46.

[53] Massey, *The Independent Group and Mass Culture*, p.20.

[54] Alloway, 'The Arts and the Mass Media', p. 58. Earlier in this essay, Alloway also draws on a point made by Edmund Burke Feldman in *Arts and Architecture*, in which Feldman argues that the increasing importance of popular art within the architectural field has seen 'a democratization of taste, a spread of knowledge about non-material developments, and a shift of authority about manners and moral from the few to the many'. This is a point of undoubtable significance for the Group and is also reflected in the exhibition stands at 'This is Tomorrow' (particularly Group 6's) which explored the relationships between imposed architectural space, and subjective responses to this space by artists.

[academic] acted in the past as taste-giver, opinion-leader, and expected to continue to do so. However, his role is now clearly limited to swaying other humanists and not to steering society.'[55] Here, the mass arts are argued to have dethroned the academic's position as 'taste-giver' and 'opinion-leader', and to have therefore opened such roles up to wider society.

One compelling facet of Alloway's argument for my own view about how the IG relate to accelerationism is how Alloway identifies technology as the principal cause of this shift in taste-makers:

> One reason for the failure of the humanists to keep their grip on public values (as they did on the nineteenth century through university and Parliament) is their failure to handle technology, which is both transforming our environment and, through its product the mass media, our ideas about the world and about ourselves.[56]

Here, Alloway frames technology as a definitive driving force behind both change and democratisation. Because of this, technological change becomes constitutive of a shift in political hegemony away from humanist/academic centres. These are the very same centres of cultural capital that I positioned Alloway and the Independent Group against in relation to the mass culture debates earlier in the chapter. Only, in this case, his view amounts to arguing that technological development is already responsible for subverting hegemonically approved forms of cultural capital. In other words, it is not politics that has altered taste, but changes in human relationships to technology—changes that he then affirms as part of a political charge against forms of cultural capital they are already perceptibly eroding. In this sense, Alloway's views about technology hold the same characteristic of 'dress[ing] up […] in the anxieties of the period' Hebdige aligns with the Group's relationship to American culture.[57] Only, through reference to forms of social and technological change, such anxieties are related to acceleration instead of forms of mass and American culture.

Alloway's position on technology is prototypically accelerationist. He positions himself in favour of technological change at a time when the pessimistic strands of the mass culture debates arguably represented dominant, sublimated reactions against it. Naturally, such techno-optimistic views are deserving of criticism. However, before moving on to a more critical interrogation of Alloway, it's necessary to explore from where they originate, and how they relate to the Independent Group more broadly. A good further point of comparison here is Reyner Banham's essay 'Primitives

[55] Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', p. 63.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Hebdige, p. 130.

of a Mechanised Art' (1959). In this essay, Reyner Banham expresses the importance of the Italian Futurists for the Independent Group discussions, noting that between 1951 and '54, 'Futurism […] became important for myself, and for the circle of friends on whom, at that time, I sharpened my wits and tried out my theories.'[58] Banham is, of course, almost definitely talking about the IG here given his de facto leadership of the Group at the time. The Futurists, whom I characterised as accelerationists in the previous chapter, were influential on the Group because they produced forms of 'anti-art' in opposition to the aesthetic standards of their time.[59] The nature of this opposition, Banham explains, was that they uniquely 'attached themselves […] to the new elements in life whose very possibility the ancients could not have expected […] trams, electric lighting, advertising, railways, motor-cars, factories, covered markets, [and] aviation'.[60] Not only did they identify with technological change, crucially for Banham, they also 'indicate[d], with some basic authority, certain basic ways of responding to it.'[61] He emphasises this point with a greater eloquence in his monograph *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960) noting that,

> not only had new technology invaded the street (trams, electric-lighting, lithographed posters) and the home (telephone, sewing machine, electric-lighting, fans, vacuum cleaners, etc.) but with the advent of the motorcar the poet, painter, intellectual, was no longer the passive recipient of technological experience, but could create it for himself.[62]

In *Theory and Design*, Banham emphasises both the extent that the Futurists foresaw the increasing integration of technologies into everyday life and how they seized this as a creative opportunity. Because new technologies opened the senses to new forms of experience (with speed and its connection to the powered motorcar being perhaps the foremost example), the Italian Futurists believed that new aesthetic theories, and thereafter forms of creative practice, were required to keep up. Banham alludes to this much later in the chapter when he positions the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting* (1910) at the forefront of a sea change in aesthetic value: 'the Futurists seem to have been almost alone in seeing that Platonic and Classicising aesthetics

[58] Reyner Banham, 'Primitives of a Mechanized Art', in *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham*, ed. by Mary Banham and others (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 39–45, p. 39.
[59] Ibid., p. 41. Anti-art refers to a view that rejects accepted definitions of art in order to question what art is.
[60] Ibid. Banham's claim that the Italian Futurists were unique for advocating this position is over-stated, with other modernists such as Blaise Cendrars having similar characteristic interests. The Futurists were however undoubtedly formative on the IG and have been historically positioned as the progenitors to the futurist moment that the likes of Cendrars were also impacted by, as is advocated by Marjorie Perloff in *The Futurist Moment: Avant-garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (1986).
[61] Banham, 'Primitives of a Mechanized Art', p. 42.
[62] Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London: The Architectural Press, 1960), pp. 101-2.

were out of tune with their mechanolatry, or, indeed, any positive fruitful accommodation to the new technology.'[63] In response to such ideas, which Banham presents as key to architectural thought at the time, the Futurists instead 'emphasise[d] the dynamic against the static […,] that art is based upon conventions and that 'truths' are expendable.'[64] Expendability and obsolescence were thus arguably presented as key features of art and architecture for the first time. In this sense, the qualities of mass art venerated by Alloway already had an aesthetic complement at the start of the century.[65] It's no wonder, then, that the Futurists were as equally influential on the IG, as affirmed by Banham's claim that the Group 'found in them long-lost ancestors of our own preoccupations, right down to the details.'[66]

Although certainly significant to my argument about the IG's expression of an accelerationist tendency, Futurism was not the only relevant source of inspiration for the Group's aesthetic, or what Alloway has termed the 'aesthetics of plenty'.[67] Again, science fiction has a particularly noteworthy role to play, one that matches the emphasis the Futurist avant-garde place on technological change and ephemerality, while also speaking to wider shifts and observances in art taking place at the time. In *Out of the Ivory Tower: The Independent Group and Popular* Culture (2013), Anne Massey explains that '[o]n a meta-level' for the Group, science fiction 'acted as theoretical prompt with which to challenge existing aesthetic approaches.'[68] This is supported by comments made by Alloway to Banham in *Fathers of Pop* (1979). In the film, Alloway explains taking inspiration from A.E. van Vogt's science fiction novel *The World of Null-A* (1945) to develop an aesthetic theory based on the principles of non-Aristotelian logic.[69] In a general sense, non-Aristotelian logic refers to logic that is three or many-valued as opposed to binary, which is what supposedly distinguishes it from the classical logic of Aristotle. This was likely of interest to Alloway, and thereafter the Group, because such many-valued logic offered a pretext for interpreting art beyond binary, good or bad, value judgements.[70]

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[63] Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, p. 109.
[64] Ibid., p. 107.
[65] Banham, 'Primitives of a Mechanized Art', p. 40.
[66] Ibid., p. 45.
[67] Lawrence Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', p. 61.
[68] Anne Massey, *Out of the Ivory Tower: The Independent Group and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2013), p. 149.
[69] Alloway in *Fathers of Pop*, dir. by Julian Cooper (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), cited in Massey, *The Independent Group and Mass Culture*, p. 85.
[70] The general importance of non-Aristotelian logic for the Independent Group is corroborated by their seminars, which included 'Were the Dadaists Non-Aristotelian?' at the 1952/53 session, followed by 'Dadaists as non-Aristotelians' during the second sessions in 1955. The first session is mentioned by Massey in Massey, *The Independent Group and Mass Culture*, p. 50. The second session is listed as taking place on the 29th of April 1955 by Massey in 'Appendix 2: Independent Group Session 1955' in Massey, *The Independent Group and Mass*

In *The World of Null-A*, a 'non-Aristotelian technique of automatic extensional thinking' has become 'the dynamic philosophy of the human race.'[71] The emphasis placed on dynamism is key to both the non-Aristotelian philosophy described in the novel and the overall feel of the text. The novel takes place in a series of different settings due to the protagonist, Gilbert Gosseyn, shifting consciousness into a litany of cloned bodies while he is attempting to recover from amnesia and work out his identity. This leads the narrative to take on a montage-like quality that makes the temporal beats of the plot difficult to follow, but that are compelling through the interconnections of otherwise vastly different settings.[72] Given all I have outlined about the influence of Futurism on the Group, the frenetic pace of this contextual shifting in the novel was likely also a major draw for its members, echoing the 'rapid rate of change' discussed by Alloway in 'The Arts and Mass Media' that was palpable in terms of both media bombardment and the proliferation of consumer technologies.[73]

The element of speed present in Vogt's novel is no coincidence and derives from its source material, A.C. Korzybski's *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* (1933). In the *Fathers of Pop*, Alloway also suggests familiarity with this work, claiming that he 'read a bit of Korzybski'.[74] Throughout *Science and Sanity*, Korzybski's aim was to highlight and address what he saw as the contingent nature of language structures when it came to describing world processes (notably not just natural processes, but also cultural and industrial ones). To do this, he attempted to create a philosophy of language that could keep pace with this contingency in order to address what he saw as a cultural inability to keep up with accelerated technological change in his contemporary moment.[75] Rachel Stratton explains:

Culture, p. 143. A full list of these talks is also reproduced in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 30-31.

[71] A. E. van Vogt, *The World of Null-A*, 1st Orb ed (New York: Orb, 2002), p. 18.

[72] Vogt is no stranger to this type of storytelling. In the *Concise History of Science Fiction*, Bould and Vint explain that his contemporaneous 'Space Beagle stories (Astounding 1939–1943; book 1950) feature Nexialism 'the science of joining in an orderly fashion the knowledge of one field of learning with that of other fields' (1981: 57), which overcomes the problems produced by "divid[ing] life and matter into separate compartments of knowledge and being" (205).' Such ideas connect to the Independent Group's transdisciplinary and associative experiments and may have also been a major draw for Alloway and other Group members. See: Bould and Vint, *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction*, p. 63, quoting A.E. van Vogt, *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* (New York: Pocket Books, 1981), pp. 57, 205.

[73] Alloway, 'The Arts and the Mass Media', 57-8.

[74] Alloway in Cooper, cited in Massey, *The Independent Group and Mass Culture*, p. 85.

[75] Korzybski's was also responsible for coining the phrase 'the map is not the territory', and thus the idea of the "map/territory relation", ideas that are equally influential on Vogt and the IG. The phrase 'the map is not the territory' appears in *The World of Null-A* alongside the semiotic adage 'the word is not the thing itself', which is a reference to the arbitrariness of the relationship between the signifier and the thing signified. See: Vogt, p. 18. Korzybski's idea may have also been influential on Ballard, as is explored by Guglielmo Poli in 'Geometries of the Imagination' (2016)

> What we see in *General Semantics* […] is a human-centric engagement with science and mathematics, an attempt to acclimatise human beings to the rapidly changing, technological environment of the mid-twentieth century. […] Korzybski's preoccupation with the human experience of a technology-driven society derived from the 'cultural lag' he observed in Western societies, an axiom commonly used in anthropology to convey the gap between the rate of scientific change and slower-paced socio-cultural traits. […] His non-Aristotelian system of language and evaluation was designed to reduce this 'cultural lag' by forming language structures that reflected the structures of scientific reality and, supposedly, the structures of the human nervous system as well.[76]

Korzybski's attempts to acclimatise humans to rapid change sounds a lot like Campbell's view that 'people are missing the immense and joyous stimulus' of accelerated change, an idea that I have already demonstrated to be highly influential on the IG's ethos.[77] Understood through this lens, the Group's non-Aristotelian turn was just as related to their desires and interests for acceleration, as it was to overcoming hierarchies of taste, further evidencing a political dimension to the Group's interests in acceleration—the divergences between academic tastemakers and mass arts noted by Alloway in 'The Long Front…' and 'Arts and Mass Media' being as much a product of 'cultural lag' as it was a matter of cultural capital. The IG's advocacy of a continuum between the fine and mass arts was thus an attempt to correct this lag.[78]

There's much more to be said about non-Aristotelianism, not least because it had a much wider application within the 1950s. This owed to other science fictional sources as well as other precursors to the Independent Group's ideas, such as Sigfried Giedion's *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948).[79] I'll explore some of these other sources in a moment. Beforehand, however, I want to consider the significance Alloway lends to science fiction for the development of their non-Aristotelian theory of art. In the *Fathers of Pop* documentary script, Alloway claims that he 'liked very

[76] Rachel Stratton, '"A Peculiar Mixture of Reverence and Cynicism": General Semantics and Non-Aristotelian Logic in the Independent Group and the English Contructionists, 1950-1965'' (unpublished PhD, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2018), pp. 26-7, quoting from Alfred Korzybski, Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics, ed. Robert P. Pula (Lakeville, CT: Institute of General Semantics, 1995), p. xxxi. Stratton also notes that the term 'cultural lag' was first used by William Henry Ogburn in *Social Change: With Respect to Culture and Original Nature* (New York, NY: B. W. Huebsch, 1922), pp. 200–201. It is thereafter also influential on Alvin Toffler, and a term he uses throughout the work *Future Shock* (1970), which I explore in the following chapter.

[77] Baas quoting Campbell, p. 8.

[78] Alloway's previously mentioned reference to the fine arts as a 'repository of time-binding values' in 'The Arts and the Mass Media' is also a referential nod to Korzybski, who uses the term 'time-binding' to describe the act of recording events within time, something that he distinguishes as a central feature of what differentiates humans from animals and plants for the philosopher.

[79] Rachel Stratton has noted that prior to the '50s, 'the notion of non-Aristotelianism became shorthand for a broader rejection of old certainties, including non-Euclidean geometry and non-Newtonian physics.' Stratton, p. 13.

much consciously the notion of getting it [non-Aristotelian logic] from slightly disreputable science fiction […] and applying this to the area of fine art.'[80] This claim is significant because it highlights the status of the sources that Alloway was quoting from. The 'disreputable' quality of Vogt's fiction—even among 'science fiction people', as Alloway notes—is a clear complement to his advocacy for a mass culture that he thought was being dismissed in artistic/academic circles during this period.[81] Therefore, taking inspiration from science fiction to produce an entire aesthetic theory of these ideas, usually the purview of academic philosophers of art, was intended as an attack on institutional forms of knowledge production—a further instance of a contestation of then dominant forms of cultural capital previously explored through Hebdige. Notably, this strategy of using science fiction as a catalyst for the development of aesthetic theory would subsequently be used by the CCRU in the 1990s as a means for escaping the confines of academic philosophy, revealing a further point of continuity between the Group and Unit beyond their mutual affirmation of acceleration.

Although Alloway attributes his idea of non-Aristotelian aesthetics to Korzybski's philosophy, non-Aristotelian logic also appears in different contemporary sources with which the IG were likely also familiar. For instance, there was a proliferation of writing about non-Aristotelian logic by the philosopher Gotthard Günther in the pulp science fiction magazines of the '50s that weren't responding to Korzybski's work. Günther published a series of essays on the topic of non-Aristotelianism in *Startling Stories* (1953-55), alongside a further essay in *Astounding Science Fiction* titled 'The Logical Parallax' (1953). These philosophical works were intended to make the "high" philosophy of formal logic digestible to wider audiences. To achieve this, they were often written in a style that echoed themes and ideas found within the publications. One example of this is in Günther's 'Aristotelian and Non-Aristotelian Logic' in *Startling Stories* (1954). In this article, Günther outlines how Aristotelian systems of two-valued logic do 'not adequately cover the pattern of future events.'[82] This is because propositions about future events can only ever be given probabilistic values, and therefore can only be verified through partial truth values (nowadays this is referred to as fuzzy logic). A basic example of this, given by Günther, is the future-tense phrase 'I shall be burned alive'.[83] Because it has not happened yet, under the rules of formal logic this phrase is neither provably true nor demonstrably false. To resolve this issue, Günther presents non-Aristotelian logic

[80] Alloway in Cooper, cited in Massey, *The Independent Group and Mass Culture*, p. 85.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Gotthard Günther, 'Aristotelian and Non-Aristotelian Logic', *Www.Vordenker.De* <https://www.vordenker.de/gunther_web/aristotelian.htm> [accessed 15 January 2020].
[83] Ibid.

as a three-value logic, provable within the formulae of formal logic, that indicates the possibility of accounting for such propositions.

Günther's work is not just academic, however. While presenting the logical problem he hopes to resolve, he also makes a series of claims about how this type of logic is applicable to things like machines, the field of cybernetics, and the 'seetee mind' (a Sci-Fi vernacular popular at the time that was shorthand for contraterrene).[84] These were likely intended to make his article more interesting to the readers of the magazines, who would already have a familiarity with these concepts, even if they had no understanding of formal logic. The most compelling example of this appears in a follow-up article, 'The Soul of a Robot' (1955), in which Günther also makes speculations about how a robot "soul" would be organised based on a three-value logic: 'It would not be based on identity, but on tridentity. In other words: it could shift the personal center of its mental life and reconcile contradictory viewpoints.'[85] These sorts of speculations would have been undoubtedly compelling to the IG, who were largely non-experts in formal logic, while also offering intriguing and novel ways to think about things like human identity and the future.[86]

Another exploration of non-Aristotelian logic that may have influenced the Group is Sigfried Giedion's book *Mechanization Takes Command*. Unlike the science fiction explored above, Giedion's book was written specifically for an academic audience. Giedion was a PhD mentor of Banham's, and his book was popular with Independent Group members because of its wide array of stimulating visual imagery and its history of technological development.[87] In this book, Giedion explores a 'split that exists in our period between thought and feeling' that he relates to the rational development of mechanized technologies and the emotive or artistic responses to this development.[88] Giedion does this to show 'how badly research is needed into the *anonymous history* of our period, tracing our life as affected by mechanization – its impact on our dwellings, our food, our furniture.'[89] Giedion's

[84] Ibid.
[85] Gotthard Günther, 'The Soul of a Robot', *Www.Vordenker.De* <https://www.vordenker.de/gunther_web/soul_of_a_robot.htm> [accessed 15 January 2020].
[86] This kind of exploration of otherwise academic ideas in pulp sources was influential on many of the IG's concepts, and can be evidenced in, among other places, a footnote recommendation for a July 1954 copy of *Astounding Science Fiction* that Banham gives for secondary reading about topology in 'The New Brutalism' (1955). Reyner Banham, 'The New Brutalism', *October*, 136 (2011), 19–28 <https://doi.org/10.1162/OCTO_a_00034> p. 27.
[87] Giedion's 'abundant use of contemporary ads, mostly of housewives and appliances' is proposed as a potential source of the IG's interests in David Robbins, 'Modernist Sources', in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 55–57, p. 57.
[88] Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. v.
[89] Ibid., p. vi.

terming of the history of mechanization as an 'anonymous' one is compelling for how it relates to his research into otherwise 'humble things, things not usually granted earnest consideration, or at least not valued for their historical import'.[90] Here, Giedion is referring to the developments of machines which he believed to be historically maligned—the documents pertaining to their reasons for development often having been destroyed or lost to time. This quality of machine history mirrors the Group's fascination with otherwise transitory and expendable aesthetic artifacts. Yet its perhaps another, more fundamental, fascination of Giedion's that motivated the Group's interest in his work: movement, and how this linked to change and acceleration.

Giedion's book includes a sharp analysis of the interrelation of modern art to the history of technologies designed for movement. Early in the work, Giedion echoes Korzybski in claiming that 'reality cannot be approached directly', precisely because it is '[e]ver in flux and process.'[91] Instead, 'movement can be represented only by movement, the changing only by the changing.'[92] Looking for the historical precedent of this problem, Giedion reflects on the work of Parisian Scholastic Nicolas Oresme. Giedion begins by outlining how, from a history of philosophy perspective, his emphasis on Oresme may seem unusual, as '[t]he Scholastics rehabilitated Aristotle', and, in a sense, Ancient Greek ideas that the world was 'something reposing in itself, as something that had been in existence since the beginning of time.'[93] However, one adjustment that Giedion insists the Scholastics made to the ancient Greek conception of the Earth, was contemplation that it was the thing that moved, and not the heavens. According to Giedion, Oresme played a significant role in the eventual Copernican Revolution, which shifted cosmology away from a geocentric perspective—the heavens revolve around the earth—to a heliocentric one—the earth revolves around the sun amidst the heavens. Giedion goes on to explain that, 'Oresme propounds the theory in a penetrating commentary to the first translation into the French […] of Aristotle's Treatise on the Heavens', which he entitled '[s]everal fine arguments … to show that the earth moves in daily movement and the sky not.'[94] Giedion's interpretation of Oresme is that he leads the Scholastics to unknowingly 'lay aside the fantastic Aristotelian conception of movement, and put a new one in its place.'[95] This is a precise explanation of the origin of a non-Aristotelian perspective, only instead of relying on the formal logic, like Günther, or a concept of 'cultural lag', like Korzybski, it relates explicitly to movement, and thus

[90] Ibid., p. 3.
[91] Ibid., p. 14.
[92] Ibid., p. 16.
[93] Ibid., p. 14.
[94] Ibid., p. 15. Giedion references the republication of Nicolas Oresme, *Le livre du Ciel et du Monde*, ed. by Albert D. Menut and A. J. Denomy, in *Medieval Studies*, vols. iii-v, (New York: 1941).
[95] Giedion, p. 16.

the phenomenon of acceleration generally. Oresme, as Giedion goes on to explain, would create what he perceives as the first visualisations of abstractions like 'movement, time, speed, and acceleration', and therefore acts as a foundational figure within the history of representations of change, which Giedion thereafter relates to developments in modern art.[96]

Giedion, Günther, and Korzybski represent three very different ideas of what non-Aristotelianism looks like, albeit sharing an underlying fascination with change. As I have already demonstrated at length through reference to the Italian Futurists and science fiction, change, and particularly its acceleration, was a clear fascination of the IG, as represented by Alloway and Banham. As I have also articulated, their attempts to draw attention to the accelerated changes of their present moment was also a political challenge to a hegemonic form of stasis, particularly the austere living conditions of postwar Britain. However, what their grand tour of acceleration from science fiction to Giedion reveals is something a little bit more complicated. Despite Alloway's vociferous opposition to academicized aesthetic theory, and his claims that these ideas stemmed from Vogt's references to Korzybski, non-Aristotelian logics were still very much acquiescent with select forms of academic and intellectual thought, and were even already being written about in science fiction magazines, by none other than the 'keepers of the flame' themselves.[97] This presents a problem, not just for Alloway, but also to perceptions of the Group's legacy more broadly, which is predicated on distinction from this kind of state of affairs.

Views of the Group's relationship with mass culture are illustrative of this exact issue. Hebdige's historiography, for instance, simply accepts the cultural distinctions that Alloway and Banham self-proclaim on behalf of the Group. It pays little to no attention to the Group's indebtedness to forebears and contemporaries, who were themselves beneficiaries of the very forms of cultural capital they protested. Likewise, it does not acknowledge how these forms of cultural capital remanifested (and were remanifesting) in the very spheres of popular and mass culture that the Group members themselves venerate, such as science fiction sources.

The Group's affirmations of accelerated change only further complicate matters. At once a subversive gesture relatable to their embrace of forms of mass and popular culture, their opposition to stasis, the past, tradition, and their non-Aristotelianism also paradoxically converges with a period of unprecedented acceleration and change that was not in any way clearly driven by progressive cultural developments. David Mellor has aptly characterised this context as one of '*Tory Futurism*' (italics in source), a moment of 'accelerated policies of military-industrial growth and a consumer

[96] Ibid.
[97] Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', p. 61.

economy' led by a 'conservative government' who oversaw the 'meeting of the monarchic, adventuring past and the nuclear, space exploring future which was the essential component of the New Elizabethan mythology.'[98] According to Mellor, such Futurism was both predicated on the 'moralisation of a consumer technocracy', and a 'set of discourses' that were 'preparing an already economically and industrially expansive Britain for mutation into a complex scientific state'.[99] Such a characterisation puts mass culture and acceleration very much on the side of the status quo, implying that Tory Futurism was something that the Independent Group, or at least Alloway and Banham, implicitly advocated, even if unknowingly. In the next section, I continue to emphasise this in my exploration of how Group members respond to mass culture and acceleration in their exhibition outputs at *This is Tomorrow*. In line with my arguments above, I claim that the IG's exhibition outputs often reflect upon and embrace acceleration in their contemporary moment. However, they do so while expressing the same uneasy qualities of 'subversion and acquiescence' I have already traced in Alloway's and Banham's retrospective views about the Group, and that are pervasive qualities of accelerationist responses to acceleration.[100]

Acceleration and Mass Culture in *This is Tomorrow*

Contrary to popular belief, *This is Tomorrow* was never actually directly affiliated with the Independent Group, and instead originated at 'a time when the Independent Group was on the verge of extinction', the Group's meetings having ended in 1955.[101] The exhibition was actually organised by Theo Crosby, with the intention of exploring the *gesamtkunstwerk*, or synthesis of all the arts. The title spoke to a presumption of the necessity of this synthesis for future forms of architecture and art, with the exhibition consisting of a series of 12 separate group responses to the *gesamtkunstwerk*. Independent Group members were spread across about half of the stands, between groups 1, 2, 6, 8, 10, and 12, with many groups being made up of a mix of IG members and other artists associated with the British Constructivist movement (hereafter Constructionism). The idea for the exhibition derived from a rejected proposal for an exhibition by Paule Vézelay, an ambassador for André Bloc who was tasked with founding a branch of *Le Groupe Espace* in

[98] David Mellor, 'A "Glorious Techniculture" in Nineteen-Fifties Britain: The Many Cultural Contexts of the Independent Group', in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 229–35, p. 229.
[99] Ibid., p. 231.
[100] Mackay and Avanessian, p. 9.
[101] 'Richard Hamilton: Interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist' (2002), in Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *Hans Ulrich Obrist: Interviews. Vol. 2* (Milan: Charta, 2010), p. 165, cited in Kevin Lotery *The Long Front of Culture: The Independent Group and Exhibition Design*, October Books (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2020), p. 191.

England.[102] Vézelay approached the Constructionists Victor Pasmore, Colin St. John Wilson, and Theo Crosby about staging an exhibition but they opposed her idea, only to then subsequently consider her emphasis on artistic synthesis in a new way.[103] The grounds for this rejection would later be clarified by Lawrence Alloway in the introduction to the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition catalogue, in which he explains that '[t]he English artists and architects would not submit to the dogmatic ideas of synthesis held by *la group espace* [sic.]', favouring 'variety' and 'complexity'.[104] Such a gesture established *This is Tomorrow* as a challenge to the very principles of *gesamtkunstwerk* as it was understood by *Le Groupe Espace*, with synthesis through 'collaboration' being characterised by Alloway as a 'rosy fiction' that was instead replaced 'by the notion of antagonistic co-operation.'[105] Instead, according to Alloway at least, *This is Tomorrow* was encoded by the concerns of the Independent Group—'independent competing groups' having no consensus about 'universal design principles', and thus representing a challenge to universalising tendencies, as per the IG's opposition to Read explored above.[106]

There was a large variety of concerns between each *This is Tomorrow* stand, each representing a vastly different response to the exhibition's theme. However, it's unquestionable that Group 2's, produced by Richard Hamilton, John McHale, and John Voelcker, and Group 6's 'Patio and Pavilion', produced by Eduardo Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson, and Alison and Peter Smithson, have become the most notorious. The layout of Group 2's stand led it to resemble something like a funhouse, with the installation playing around with visual scales and sensory illusion, all while being littered with popular imagery—the most memorable example being the huge image of Robby the Robot from the film *Forbidden Planet* (1956) (2.4).[107] Group 6's 'Patio and Pavilion' on the other hand

[102] *Le Groupe Espace* were an abstract art group founded in Paris in 1951 by André Bloc. They associated with Constructivism, a movement in art which focused on industrial production and geometric abstraction, and that was interested in uniting art and architecture for the purposes of creating environments appropriate for modern life. Constructionism was the British extension of Constructivism that started in 1950, hence the overlapping interest.

[103] For more information about this meeting, see also: Theo Crosby, 'Night Thoughts of a Faded Utopia', in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 197–99.

[104] Lawrence Alloway, *This Is Tomorrow*, ed. by Whitechapel Art Gallery, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Theo Crosby, and Edward Wright, 3rd edn (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010), n.p.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Figure 2.4: Sam Lambert, '*This is Tomorrow* exhibition, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London: Group 2 exhibit, showing the poster from *Lost in Space* and an image of Marilyn Monroe from *Seven Year Itch*' (1956), black and white photograph, Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Collections <https://www.ribapix.com/this-is-tomorrow-exhibition-whitechapel-art-gallery-london-group-2-exhibit-showing-the-poster-from-lost-in-space-and-an-image-of-maryln-monroe-from-seven-year-itch_riba53801> [accessed: 17 November 2023].

was made up of a central shed-like structure surrounded by sand and littered with an array of art brut objects produced by Paolozzi and Henderson (2.5).[108]

These stands are now frequently considered to be contrasting visions of tomorrow, with Group 2's nod to popular cultural imagery deemed to be the utopian counterpart to Group 6's shed-like pavilion. Because of this, Group 6's stand is often equated with a post-apocalyptic depiction of life after nuclear war, a significant anxiety of the 1950s, and one undoubtedly connected to the military-industrial acceleration promoted under Tory Futurism.[109] This association has led critics like Mellor to contrast the two exhibits, with Group 6's 'Patio and Pavilion' representing the 'repressed element' of Group 2's Panglossian approach to the techno-commodity, the dehumanization inflicted by commodity objects being symbolized through their resemblance to 'the irradiated "squashed…litter of small objects" which Sir William Penney, the chief of Britain's nuclear weapon's program, collected from the aftermath of Operation Havoc [sic. Hurricane] (the detonation of Britain's first A-Bomb, October 1952).'[110]

References to the post-nuclear, post-apocalyptic connotations of Group 6's stand are certainly evocative, and possibly even a latent concern of the exhibition—an image of a blast radius from a nuclear detonation also appears as part of an anti-nuclear message in Group 12's stand produced by Lawrence Alloway, Geoffrey Holroyd, and Toni del Renzio. However, reading Group 6's stand in such a way also risks mischaracterising its intentions. In the exhibition catalogue for *This is Tomorrow*, 'Patio and Pavilion' is described in much more opaque terms, as a representation of 'the fundamental necessities of the human habitat in a series of symbols', a 'piece of the world' and 'an enclosed space' that is thereafter 'furnished with symbols for all human needs.'[111] 'Patio and Pavilion' is, in this sense, evocative of domestic space, and consists of an exploration of the minimum symbolic conditions required for living in this space, qualities emphasised through language such as 'need' and 'necessity'.

This concern with a minimum symbolic condition of living is emphasised by critics like Ben Highmore, who reads 'Patio and Pavilion' not only as a response to 'possible nuclear annihilation', but also to 'information overload'.[112] Seen through the latter lens, the prolific assortment of unusual

[108] Figure 2.5: Nigel Henderson, '*This is Tomorrow* exhibition Group 6's 'Patio and Pavilion' from back' (1956), black and white photograph, Tate Archive, TGA/201011/4/3.
[109] A notable example of this is Reyner Banham's retroactive claim that it looked as if it had been 'excavated after an atomic holocaust'. See: Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism, Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural Press, 1966), p. 85.
[110] Mellor, p. 232, quoting Leonard Bertin, *Atom Harvest* (London, 1955), pp. 32-33.
[111] Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Alison and Peter Smithson, *This is Tomorrow*, n.p.
[112] Ben Highmore, *The Art of Brutalism: Rescuing Hope from Catastrophe in 1950s Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 144.

and fragmented objects collected within exhibit represented a 'superabundance of eye-catching phenomena' coextensive with the mass media.[113] Only this was the mass media reframed through a context that has denuded it. High-colour, glossy, forms of representation, of the kind previously explored by Paolozzi in his 1952 "lecture", have been supplanted by an otherwise less immediately recognisable series of "raw" objects. This quality of the stand drew attention to the mass media's symbolic fabrication of needs through a superabundance of otherwise attractive, pleasing, or beautiful, images in things like advertisements. Yet this "raw" assortment of objects did not simply oppose the fabrication of these needs with more genuine ones. Instead, it examined the relationship these needs have to human habitation, something represented by the equally fabricated structure in the centre of the stand, a symbol of the false necessity, but the nonetheless desirable quality of fixed habitation and the ownership of objects.

Group 6's response to mass media aligns with a strong thematic trend that occurs throughout *This is Tomorrow*, particularly in the exhibits most heavily represented by Independent Group members. This trend is alluded to in Alloway's introduction to the exhibition catalogue, which also evidences a concern with the mass media by referring to the approaches of each of the twelve exhibiting groups as the 'simultaneous mastery of several channels of communication.'[114] Alloway's telling linguistic choice of 'channels of communication' here subverts the more traditionally academic sounding "specialisms", favouring a terminology more appropriate to media and information. It also non-coincidentally resonated with his own contribution to the exhibit as a member of Group 12.

Group 12's stand was a tackboard, one that 'resembled a magazine spread' combined with an 'underlying grid system with a "discourse" system of image groupings.'[115] The purpose of the exhibit, according to Whitham's account, was to function 'both as an "assembly kit" container for the photo-images and as an analogue for the mental and linguistic systems underlying […] association[s] of images.'[116] The tackboard consisted of a plethora of associational imagery as wide-ranging as 'palmistry readings', 'Braille lettering', 'a village signpost', 'a dead sea scroll', 'a graphic anti-nuclear message', 'a computer depicted as a large urban building', and 'a scientific diagram of Louis Armstrong's trumpet'.[117] These images were organised by conceptual themes, and then

[113] Ibid., p. 127.
[114] Alloway, *This is Tomorrow*, n.p.
[115] Graham Whitham, 'Exhibitions', in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 123–61, p. 147. I rely on Whitham's description of the stand due to there being so few extant images from the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

complemented by a further '"action" tackboard of tearsheets from magazines'.[118] Through clear allusions to mass cultural imagery, the tackboard represented a culmination of the Independent Group's practice over its short duration. This was reinforced by it being both: 1) a contingent exhibit 'intended to be regularly changed during the exhibition', hence embodying the Independent Group's fascination with ephemerality, and 2) '[r]ejecting any hierarchic valuation of one image over another', one of the prime factors governing the IG's interest in mass culture, as I explored earlier in the chapter.[119]

An overview of Group 12's stand in the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition guide links it to Alloway's comments on the *gesamtkunstwerk* by presenting it as 'communications research which offers a means of talking about human activities (including art and architecture) without dividing them into compartments.'[120] This is thereafter supplemented with two diagrams of the Shannon and Weaver model of communication, and then four further pages relating to the theory underpinning the stand and its construction. Because of the emphasis placed on communication in the catalogue, and the further references to 'punched tape cards' and 'wire tape disks' in a table that explores means for marking surfaces (2.6), critics like Charlie Gere have identified Group 12's exhibit as 'one of the first statements, in the English language at least, about the computer and other computing machinery as potential means of making art'.[121] With the supporting diagrams of the Shannon-Weaver model of communication in the exhibition guide, it's little wonder Gere makes this assertion. However, I think other concerns expressed in the guide are indicative of much broader interests than Gere's compelling connection allows. For instance, the claim that 'there has always been a variety of channels available for communications but modern technology has increased the scope of communication' followed by the idea that 'the audience has increased in size', speak explicitly to growth, and the accelerative effects of technology. This is then followed by the notion that communicational approaches to visual arts lead to 'new relationships, free of the learned responses to composition, experiment, and so on'.[122] Such claims speak to the forms of technologically induced change and acceleration affirmed by Alloway in his later 'The Long Front…' and 'Arts and Mass

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid. This is also consistent with other exhibitions organised by Group members, such as *Parallel of Life and Art* (1953).
[120] Lawrence Alloway, Geoffrey Holroyd, and Toni del Renzio, *This is Tomorrow*, n.p.
[121] Figure 2.6: Lawrence Alloway, Geoffrey Holroyd, and Toni Del Renzio, Table exploring means for marking surfaces, 1956, from: *This is Tomorrow* exhibition catalogue ed. by Whitechapel Art Gallery, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Theo Crosby, and Edward Wright, 3rd edn (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010). ; Alloway, Holroyd, del Renzio. ; Charlie Gere, 'Introduction', in *White Heat Cold Logic: British Computer Art 1960-1980*, ed. by Paul Brown and others, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 1–7, p. 3.
[122] Alloway, Holroyd, del Renzio.

Media' essays explored above, with Group 12's stand acting as a conduit for 'training spectators in how to live within and submit to autonomous, self-governing systems of infinite sign recombination and transmission' of the mass media, as Kevin Lotery has so eloquently put it.[123] In this sense, Group 12's stand is a response to the accelerated production of signs within the mass media more broadly, not just to computing and computing machinery. Moreover, their claim that this mass media enables the production of 'new', by freeing relationships, evidences an uncritical embrace of the accelerative thrust of the mass media, betraying something akin to an accelerationist proclivity among the members of Group 12.

Like Group 12's stand, and 'Patio and Pavilion', Group 2's exhibit also reflected on and responded to the mass media landscape of its contemporary moment. Resembling a fairground funhouse, this stand was emblazoned with a collage consisting of a poster image of Robby the Robot holding Altaira Morbius (Anne Francis) in a pose from the film's poster, an image of Marilyn Monroe from *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), and a reproduction of Vincent van Gogh's *Sunflowers* (1888), which at the time 'was the most popular art reproduction on sale at the National Gallery'.[124] The inclusion of van Gogh's painting alongside otherwise mass cultural imagery pre-empts Alloway's claim in 'Arts and Mass Media' that 'the new role for the fine arts is to be one of the possible forms of communication in an expanding framework that also includes the mass arts'.[125] It therefore also established the stand as a further example of the interest in 'communications' consistent with the other major IG works across the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition.

An interest in communications is also evident in Group 2's accompanying collage in the exhibition guide, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*. As much is expressed by Alloway when he reflects on how in the work 'collaged items are presented as an environment'.[126] Alloway sees this as producing an effect that resonated with the concerns of Group 2's structure, by reflecting a domestic interior as 'a symbol-thick scene, criss-crossed with the tracks of human activity'.[127] The notion that the scene in this poster was 'symbol-thick' indicates its

[123] Lotery, p. 249.
[124] Whitham, p. 139. Robby's pose was never a scene in the film, and only ever appeared in promotional artwork. The iconic pose was a feature of many advertisements for sci-fi films from the period, such as *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1955), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Tobor the Great* (1954), and, later, *Invasion of the Saucer Men* (1957). The image itself echoes a famous WWI US propaganda poster, *Destroy This Mad Brute: Enlist* (1917), which likely drew reference from Emmanuel Frémiet's controversial sculptures *Gorille Enlevant une Négresse (Gorilla Carrying off a Negress)* (1859), and *Gorille Enlevant une Femme (Gorilla Carrying off a Woman)* (1887). Explorations of this pose are thereafter a repeat motif in some of Paolozzi's print works.
[125] Alloway, 'The Arts and the Mass Media', p. 58.
[126] Lawrence Alloway, 'The Development of British Pop Art', in *Pop Art*, ed. by Lucy R. Lippard, World of Art (New York, N.Y: Thames and Hudson, 1985), pp. 27–53, p. 40.
[127] Ibid., p. 40.

communicative nature as an image, implying that it was made with the intention for its iconography to be read and interpreted. This makes the collage comparable to 'Patio and Pavilion', insofar as it retains a reference to the symbolic logic of Group 6's display; only, instead of relying on the "raw" but ultimately abstract objects utilised by Paolozzi and Henderson, it draws upon commercial and mass cultural imagery directly. In this sense, like Group 6's 'Patio and Pavilion', it was an attempt by Hamilton to reflect on how the mass culture and the media responsible for its dissemination were altering perception of the self, albeit without the commentary on necessity present in Group 6's work.

Both *Just what is it…?*, and Group 2's funhouse explore the effects that mass culture and media have on selfhood through their reflections on how accelerated access to commodity objects was impacting domestic space. This proliferation of commodities was symbolized by things like the vacuum cleaner advert, the Ford logo, and the tin of ham, while its effects are evident in the human characters posing in the work. These figures conform to heavily commercialised bodily ideals of the day, being emblematic of the hunk and the stripper, a pin-up husband and wife. Among the constellation of commodity objects, their forms are extracted from a mythic register to become household objects, more like pieces of furniture than human beings. However, significantly, the work contains no edifice of critical distance from this process of human commodification. Instead, it seems like Hamilton has drawn creative purpose from the occurrence, exploring humanity through the relationship of these figures to commodities. From a Marxist point of view, Hamilton's collage is a quintessential example of commodity fetishism. However, such fetishes are controversially indulged, in a manner in-keeping with accelerationism's acquiescence with the alienating effects of modernity and capitalism.

Aspects of Group 2's funhouse also allude to the human relationship to domestic commodities. The giant Guinness bottle in the work is arguably a direct reference to the commodity as a kind of fetish object, its unusual size implying its inherent value. Central to the depiction of the commodity object, however, is none other than Robby the Robot. Robby was a compelling figure for Group 2 for several reasons. First, throughout *Forbidden Planet*, Robby is a robot house servant to Dr Morbius, its designer, making it emblematic of something like a sentient appliance. In this vein, Robby is a further theoretical extrapolation of the many other commodity objects explored throughout Hamilton's *Just what is it…?* collage and Group 2's stand. Yet, what's unique about Robby is that it blurs the line between human and commodity. The robot's inclusion in the exhibition stand, to quote Lotery, 'greet[s] the thing, the object, the appliance, as a being within the same continuum

as the human.'[128] In other words, Robby reflects the increasing impossibility of a clear distinction between commodity object and human being. To refer back to Günther's exploration of non-Aristotelian logic in 'Soul of the Robot', Robby represents a non-binary 'tridentity' that arises as a result of the relationship between human beings and their things, a kind of human-machine fusion of the likes I explored in the previous chapter.[129] Taken in this way, Robby represents a particularly intense instance of both the becoming human of the commodity and the becoming commodity of humanity, its intensity owing to a particularly accelerated moment of commodity circulation.

Group 2's interest in the speed of commodity circulation, and Robby's status as a symbol for this interest, is comparable to another earlier exhibition by IG members, *Man, Machine, and Motion* (1955). Curated by Richard Hamilton, Lawrence Gowing, and Reyner Banham, this exhibition was a 'visual survey of man's relationship with machinery of movement' and explored a long history of technologies of transport through a series of photographs organised on a series of metal free-standing frames.[130] These images were organised into four categories, land, sea, air, and space, with most of the images in each category corresponding to great feats of technological innovation and exploration in which 'the men are acclaimed heroes and the machines […] are consecrated not only in museums but in the affections of the public.'[131] This has led Mellor to refer to the exhibition as a reverence for the 'sublimity of paternal power', a reverence which corresponds to the patriarchal and colonial impulses underpinning such gestures of heroism and 'the longing for a power with no natural limits'.[132] This fascination with heroics was also reinforced by its opening, which was conducted by none other than Lord Brabazon of Tara, an early aviation pioneer, whose mechanically assisted derring-do made him a living analogue to the exhibition's themes, and something of a spokesperson about the wonders of speed.[133]

Come *This is Tomorrow* in 1956, and the heroic dimensions of *Man, Machine, and Motion* had been subverted. Lord Brabazon of Tara had been replaced by none other than Robby at the exhibition's opening, while Group 2's visual reference to Robby centred the machine and not "man" as the acclaimed heroes of their contemporary mass cultural moment. This subtle reversal of the earlier exhibition symbolized not only the ascendency of machines, however, but also a change in the

[128] Lotery, p. 200.
[129] Gotthard Günther, 'The Soul of a Robot'.
[130] Richard Hamilton, 'Man, Machine, and Motion Publicity Leaflet' (Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1955), Tate Millbank, 955/1/12/70/1.
[131] Richard Hamilton, Reyner Banham, and Lawrence Gowing, *Man, Machine, and Motion Exhibition Catalogue* (Durham: King's College, 1955), Tate Archive, 955/15/51, n.p.
[132] Mellor, p. 230. ; Hamilton, Banham, Gowing, n.p.
[133] Brabazon famously contributed a foreword to *The Wonder Book of Speed* (1951), a popular pulp celebration of objects and technologies of speed with which the IG were likely familiar.

human relationship to speed, something that I think is evident through a shift in the relationship to technology between the two exhibitions. In *Man, Machine, and Motion* technology is considered to be something that extended human presence in the world, with the exhibition consisting of visual references to how machines helped with this process of extending human reach—one of the chief focuses of the exhibition being depictions of how machines are capable of augmenting external movement in a variety of environments. In contrast to this, Group 2's contribution to *This is Tomorrow* was far more concerned with a turn inwards, and considered how technology was being employed in domestic environments, as attested to by *Just what is it…?*.

Alongside this shift in focus toward domestic space, Group 2's funhouse also considered how technology was extending human reach in an altogether different way by emphasising its impact on sensory experience. In their contributions to the exhibition catalogue, Group 2 include a tabulated diagram that depicts how technology expands sensory ranges (2.7).[134] On the left-hand side of this diagram, sense faculties are set against a range of sensory frequencies that are thereafter shown to have been enhanced on the right-hand side by mass media technologies such as 'photography', 'television' and 'radio'.[135] This diagram resonates with claims made by Group 2 throughout the exhibition catalogue, in which they state that they were 'presenting a complex of sense experience which is so organised, or disorganised, as to provoke acute awareness of our sensory function in an environmental situation.'[136] In this vein, Group 2 were interested in highlighting how technology was increasingly capable of augmenting sensory experience.

Throughout their funhouse, Group 2 attempted to draw attention to sensory function, and technology's relationship to it through elements that appealed to different sense faculties. For instance, smell and touch were evoked by the spongy floor of the exhibit, which emitted a strawberry scent when stepped on. There was a jukebox in the exhibition space constantly playing music, which alongside a series of unusual noises—distorted recordings of ambient crowd noise from the exit, amplified and played at the entrance—spoke to sound. The distorted scales of objects in the exhibition, particularly Robby and the Guinness bottle, complemented a corridor of optical illusions and a huge mural collage cinemascope billboard screen to affect visual perception. That these discrete sensory faculties were the targets of Group 2's stand was made immediately obvious from the entrance end to the exhibit space, which featured a graphically labelled head of Josip Broz Tito.

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[134] Figure 2.7: Richard Hamilton, John McHale, and John Voelcker, A diagram outlining the technological expansion of sensory ranges, 1956, from: *This is Tomorrow* exhibition catalogue ed. by Whitechapel Art Gallery, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Theo Crosby, and Edward Wright, 3rd edn (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010).
[135] Richard Hamilton, John McHale, and John Voelcker, *This is Tomorrow*, n.p.
[136] Ibid.

To allay any doubts about its importance, this image was also reproduced in the exhibition catalogue, albeit with different wording to further distort the perceptions of viewers (2.8).[137] In all, the funhouse represented a commentary on the technical mediation of sensory experience by appliances and commodities and drew attention to this mediation through a playful disorientation of otherwise commonplace, everyday forms of sense.

These appeals to sensory experience in the funhouse, as well as the disassociation of human heroics from technology, pre-empted and embraced a fundamental shift in the human relationship to forms of speed and acceleration. Group 2's funhouse demarcated a shift away from conceiving of speed as a physiological kinematics that was pursued as a discrete experience—much as the Italian Futurists did—towards something encroaching into domestic space itself, and with it internal sensory experience. In his essay 'The Last Vehicle' (1989), Paul Virilio earmarks this phenomenon in the late 20th century, noting that the experience of speed is sustained by a paradoxical sense of stasis, a quality he attributes to its encroachment into domestic space:

> If in fact the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth experienced the advent of the automotive vehicle, the dynamic vehicle of the railroad, the street, and then the air, then the end of this century seems to herald the next vehicle, the audiovisual one, a final mutation: static vehicle, substitute for the change of physical location, and extension of domestic inertia, a vehicle that ought at last to bring about the victory of sedentariness, this time an ultimate sedentariness.[138]

Although speaking in anticipation of the World Wide Web, Virilio's statement is also applicable to Group 2's funhouse more broadly. This is because the earliest blueprint Virilio provides for his observation is none other than the funhouse in the leisure park. He argues that the leisure park became, in the nineteenth century a 'theatre of physiological sensations to a working population for which many different physical activities had become a thing of the past'.[139] However, he then argues that its purpose thereafter shifted from producing physiological sensation towards becoming 'the scene of mere optical illusions, the place for a generalisation of simulation, fictitious movements that can create in each person an electronic hallucination or frenzy – 'loss of sight' following upon the loss of physical activities in the nineteenth century.'[140] Such 'fictitious movements' are undoubtedly

[137] Figure 2.8: Richard Hamilton, John McHale, and John Voelcker, Tito's Head, 1956, from: *This is Tomorrow* exhibition catalogue ed. by Whitechapel Art Gallery, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Theo Crosby, and Edward Wright, 3rd edn (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010).
[138] Paul Virilio, 'The Last Vehicle', in *Speed: Visions of an Accelerated Age*, ed. by Jeremy Millar and others (London: Photographers' Gallery, 1998), pp. 31–42, p. 34.
[139] Ibid., p. 38.
[140] Ibid.

consistent with Group 2's display, which, by taking its model as a funhouse that produces sensory illusion, is a direct reference to the object Virilio later identifies as emblematic of speed's shift from away from physiological experience.

The ambivalence of Group 2's approach to the funhouse puts them at odds with Virilio's more critical view of this shift, however. Where Virilio sees an acceleration-induced movement from speed toward sedentariness—reminiscent of Rosa's idea of 'frenetic standstill' that I examined in the previous chapter—Group 2's stand is far less didactic, leaving room for further possibility.[141] Crucial here is their acceptance of sensory derangement, something that they believe offers insight into the 'factual reality' of their contemporary moment.[142] After claiming in the exhibition catalogue that they were 'presenting a complex of sense experience which is so organised, or disorganised, as to provoke acute awareness of our sensory function in an environmental situation', Group 2 suggest that they

> are concerned simply with underlining the discrepancy between physical fact and perception of that fact, and the ways in which this discrepancy may be so magnified by traditional attitudes and assumptions as to obscure the significance of factual reality.[143]

Here, Group 2 express concern over factual distortion while positioning their funhouse as a challenge to the 'traditional attitudes and assumptions' they see as responsible for causing this distortion. Such a view is reminiscent of Alloway's politically charged defiance of 'the strong tradition which dramatizes the arts as the possession of an élite' in 'The Long Front…', and thereafter his view that 'the failure of the [intellectual] humanists to keep their grip on public values' is a direct consequence of their 'failure to handle technology' and the accelerating change he claimed it was giving rise to.[144] Although less targeted than Alloway's remarks, Group 2 similarly position themselves against tradition, while in turn equating themselves with a factual reality that is rapidly changing. This is revealing of an accelerationist bent to their work, one that identifies the acceleration of commodities

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[141] Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, New Directions for Critical Theory, Paperback ed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 283.
[142] Here, my term "sensory derangement" echoes Arthur Rimbaud, the French poet who famously sought to find greater truths through a systematic derangement of the senses, '*dérèglement de tous les sens*'. Rimbaud, who was himself an explorer, is a complementary figure to my later argument that Group 2 uncover and explore the domestication of speed, with Rimbaud's otherwise exploratory approach to sensory derangement imagined as a commonplace feature of everyday domestic reality. Rimbaud's ideas of sensory derangement also complement acceleration, the theorist Franco 'Bifo' Berardi having associated Rimbaud's phrase with explorations of semiotic dereferentialization in poetry, which is thereafter simulated by a process of dereferentialization in the accelerative thrust of modernity and finance capital. See: Franco Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Semiotext(e) Intervention Series, 14 (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012), p. 18.
[143] Richard Hamilton, John McHale, and John Voelcker, *This is Tomorrow*, n.p.
[144] Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', pp. 61, 63.

and technologies in domestic space only to affirm this as a reality that a more traditional, intellectual point of view can't possibly comprehend.

'Yesterday's Tomorrow is not Today': Conclusion about the Legacy of the Independent Group

Throughout this chapter I have explored the connection between the Independent Group and mass culture, and how this formed a response to a perceived cultural stasis in their 1950s British context. Initially, I investigated this as a challenge to the hegemonic forms of cultural capital in Alloway's and Banham's writings, with a particular emphasis on how these figures reacted to early Cultural Studies and Americanization in the period. I then examined how these responses to mass culture related to forms of social and technological change. Doing this, I argued that Banham's and Alloway's writings were revealing of accelerationist tendencies in the IG, affirming forms of technical and social acceleration through their affinities for science fiction, Italian Futurism, and non-Aristotelian logic. Thereafter, the relationship I identified between the Group's responses to mass culture and an interest in forms of technological and social change informed my discussions of the contributions of Independent Group members to the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition. Exploring the outputs of Groups 2, 6, and 12 as responses to the theme of mass culture, I highlighted how each display affirmed mass culture in their variety of explorations of the *gesamtkunstwerk*. I argued that such affirmations of mass culture were also often undergirded by a positive response to acceleration, which received its most complete articulation in Group 2's funhouse and the awareness this exhibit showed of a shift in how speed was coming to be experienced in the 1950s.

My analysis throughout the chapter testifies that the outcomes of the Group's affirmative approach to forms of acceleration are clearly pulled in two juxtaposing directions. On the one hand, the Group deftly identify a cultural stasis in post-war Britain at the time, using mass culture and the accelerated distribution of commodities to subvert a contemporary artistic and academic landscape otherwise hostile to these things. On the other, the views of Independent Group members, at times, uncritically acquiesce with tendencies already underway in Britain during the post-war reconstruction, confusing both accelerated change and mass culture with radical change. In the following chapter, I will continue to extrapolate this identification of subversion and acquiescence underpinning the accelerationist position. I will also further relate the shift I identify in the characterisation of speed from physiological experience to it becoming a facet of domestic life through to the 1960s, by exploring its relationship to Eduardo Paolozzi's work during this time.

Chapter 3

Eduardo Paolozzi's Cultural Strategies: Speed, Play, and Complicity in his 1960s Works

Future Shock: An Introduction

> '"Speed," writes Francastel, the French art critic, "has become something undreamt-of, and constant movement every man's intimate experience."' – Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (1970) quoting Pierre Francastel, no reference given.[1]

On the very first page of his popular book *Future Shock* (1970), Alvin Toffler writes that '[t]he acceleration of change in our time is, itself, an elemental force.'[2] Arising from his earlier article, 'The Future as a Way of Life' from *Horizon* (1965), Toffler's book was concerned with the breakneck pace of change in his contemporary moment, something that he believed needed to be brought under control to prevent "future shock", the temporal equivalent of culture shock, whereby the novelty of one's situation induces a sense of paralysis. Toffler's views about acceleration throughout *Future Shock* are instructive to compare with Hartmut Rosa's idea of 'frenetic standstill' that I explored in Chapter One, with Toffler's argument being an early instantiation of Rosa's idea that too much acceleration can give rise to a kind of paradoxical inertia.[3] However, unlike Rosa's view, which is largely centred on the contemporary moment, Toffler's aligns with an earlier historical period, the 1960s. The central premise of Toffler's work therefore reads as if 'almost all the social problems of the sixties could be traced back to the increasing pace of technological change', as noted by the anthropologist David Graeber.[4] This is an undoubtedly dubious position given that '[t]here is reason

[1] Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, Bantam Books (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), p. 176. Although Toffler does not provide an appropriate citational reference of Francastel's work, the critic makes a similar reference to speed and movement in *Art & Technology in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1956), in which he claims that 'in today's world—where movement is playing a new, intimate role in man's daily experience, where speed has changed in its practical impact, and where technology has achieved new levels in its capacity to break down or synthesize materials—an art linked to the ancient concept of movement is outmoded.' See: Pierre Francastel, *Art & Technology in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, trans. by Randall Cherry (New York: Zone Books, 2000), p. 265.

[2] Toffler, *Future Shock*, p. 1.

[3] Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, New Directions for Critical Theory, Paperback ed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 283.

[4] David Graeber, 'Of Flying Cars and the Declining Rate of Profit', *The Baffler*, 2014 <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/of-flying-cars-and-the-declining-rate-of-profit> [accessed 14 October 2021].

to believe that even by the fifties and sixties, the pace of technological innovation was slowing down from the heady pace of the first half of the century.'[5]

Despite such reservations, however, it's inarguable that the sixties saw a litany of novel changes. Whether it was through forms of hitherto previously unimagined subcultures and music cults, the practice of alternatives to normative family structures, the contraceptive pill entering wider circulation, student protests overturning seemingly immutable institutional hierarchies, the possibility of gender affirming surgeries, and the US civil rights movement—change was happening. Moreover, Toffler's argument was not simply about the seemingly blistering speed at which these changes were taking place; he was also chronicling how an increasing pace of change, and acceleration, were becoming an everyday expectation. As Toffler very neatly summarises through his quotation of the French art critic Pierre Francastel, speed had seemingly become part of 'every man's intimate experience', 'un-dreamt of' not only because it exceeded mass expectation, but because living faster no longer needed to be an ambition; for many it was already an all-too-lived reality, hence the possibility of future shock, the pathological sickness.

Toffler's work makes for compelling comparison with the Independent Group (hereafter IG or Group), the subject of my study in the previous chapter. This is because, alongside sharing Toffler's interest in accelerated cultural change, some of the figures associated with the Group went on to influence Toffler's work. Both John McHale's and Reyner Banham's writings acted, for Toffler, as case examples of writings that conveyed increasing rates of social transience and the boom in the diversity of consumer choice in his contemporary moment.[6] Of his analyses of the two figures, his response to McHale's 'The Plastic Parthenon' (1967) provides the most lucid connection between his interest in acceleration and the preceding work of the Group. In *Future Shock*, Toffler argued that McHale identified a trend that saw 'transience in [then contemporary] art [as] desirable', while emphasising his prediction that the future of art 'seems no longer to lie with the creation of enduring

[5] Graeber.

[6] In 1973 Toffler is also interviewed by McHale. In this interview both men discuss about how art might deal with the problem sensory over-bombardment caused by accelerated forms of cultural change. Toffler argues that art extends behavioural repertoires and awareness of conceptual possibilities, while McHale also adds to this that artists are also responsible for creating frames for forms experience, cultivating new ways of seeing what is already there. Toffler's argument thereafter relies on relating this idea of framing to information reduction and processing, while McHale prefers considering it as a form of poetics. See: John McHale and Alvin Toffler, 'The Future and Functions of Art--A Conversation Between Alvin Toffler and John McHale', in *The Expendable Reader: Articles on Art, Architecture, Design, and Media (1951-1979)*, ed. by Alex Kitnick, GSAPP Sourcebooks, 1, 1st ed (New York, NY: GSAPP Books, 2011), pp. 180–204.

masterworks.'[7] Toffler thereafter reinforced his interpretation by drawing on another of McHale's essays, 'The Expendable Ikon 1', in which McHale noted that: ''[a]ccelerated changes in the human condition require an array of symbolic images of man which will match up to the requirements of constant change, fleeting impression and a high rate of obsolescence.''[8] Toffler connects this view to the development of transient arts, like the happening, and the architecture of fun palaces, in which 'the framework, the building itself, is only the longest lasting part of the whole, while its interior is designed to produce transient combinations of sensory inputs'.[9] Besides echoing Toffler's fascination with transience throughout the book, this moment of the work also relates to the aesthetics the IG advocated for—an 'aesthetics of plenty'—one accepting of the ephemerality of the accelerated mass culture that had come to fruition in 1960s transatlantic culture.[10]

Although Toffler correctly identifies his and McHale's shared interest in acceleration and transience, his overall arguments throughout *Future Shock* differs from McHale's. The ex-IG member is far more pro-acceleration than Toffler, a possible hangover of his time in the Group. This pro-acceleration position is evident in 'The Plastic Parthenon', in which McHale claims that 'symbolic 'affect'' can be transferred 'through replication', a continuation of the mass culture advocacy of the Group I elaborated on in the previous chapter.[11] McHale notes that in many cultures, '[r]eplicas of gods and saints, and of their relics, carried the same magical powers as the originals', a quality of these 'sacred objects' that is often falsely attributed to their status as original artefacts stemming from '[p]ast traditional canons of literary and artistic judgement'.[12] True to Independent Group form, McHale pushes back against such traditional assumptions, arguing instead that in his contemporary

[7] John McHale, 'The Plastic Parthenon', in *The Expendable Reader: Articles on Art, Architecture, Design, and Media (1951-1979)*, ed. by Alex Kitnick, GSAPP Sourcebooks, 1, 1st ed (New York, NY: GSAPP Books, 2011), pp. 84–97, p. 97.
[8] Toffler, *Future Shock*, p. 175. Quoting from John McHale, 'The Expendable Ikon', *Architectural Design*, 1959.
[9] Toffler, *Future Shock*, p. 177. Here Toffler is speaking in relation to the 1960s London Fun Palace, a piece of transitory, improvisational, and ultimately unbuilt architecture designed by Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood, and later supported by the cybernetician Gordon Pask. Price's and Littlewood's designs were reminiscent of the UK architectural avant-garde of the period, Archigram, who were themselves heavily influenced by Independent Group members, Theo Crosby and the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition. The ideas for the Fun Palace structure would later go on to influence the Centre Pompidou, and Archigram, which have since been regarded as a commercial compromise or 'mirror reverse' of Situationist architectural ideas by the French literary critic Sylvère Lotringer. I feel that this idea of a pro-commercial Situationism resonates with accelerationism and can be seen as a further throughline to the accelerationism I explore in the '90s moment later in this thesis. See: *Sylvère Lotringer. In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities. 2009 5/8*, dir. by European Graduate School Video Lectures, 2009 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ypPm4CHY04> [accessed 18 August 2023], 6:18-8:05.
[10] Lawrence Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', in *Imagining the Present: Context, Content, and the Role of the Critic*, ed. by Richard Kalina, Critical Voices in Art, Theory and Culture (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 61–64, p. 61.
[11] McHale, 'The Plastic Parthenon', p. 92.
[12] Ibid.

moment the fine and folk arts now comprise parts of the 'multiple-mass-communication channels' constitutive of industrial society.[13] Moreover, McHale argues that such channels are capable of reproducing the same types of symbolic affect as their supposed folk and fine art precursors, through what he calls "ikons". In this sense, he suggests that accelerated mass arts retain, rather than displace, the mythic status and mystical qualities of earlier fine and folk arts. What's more, the 'speed, range and visual immediacy' of these ikons intensifies this symbolic capacity by allowing 'them to diffuse swiftly through local cultural tradition, causing equally swift changes in social attitudes and cultural forms'—much like the idea of the cultural meme today.[14] For him, this transient quality, rather than compromising the effectiveness of these forms of art, make them more pragmatic forms for producing 'alternative cultural strategies', ones that discard attachment to 'the intrinsic value of the art object' in favour of 'furnishing new conceptualities of life style and orientation.'[15] These mass cultural artworks thus provide a means for both representing accelerated change and also, crucially, for participating in it.

In this chapter, I argue that Eduardo Paolozzi, a fellow traveller of McHale's in the Independent Group, sought to conceptually challenge 'social attitudes and cultural forms' while engaging with the accelerated rate of change in society identified by Toffler. I do this by examining a selection of Paolozzi's 1960s outputs that I believe evidence an awareness of accelerated technological and social change. Across these works, the artist uses a diverse range of techniques to cultivate unique ways of perceiving the nature of accelerated change and its consequences. Like I did with the Independent Group in the previous chapter, I argue that Paolozzi's work exhibits an accelerationist tendency that straddles between subversive and acquiescent registers when contemplating the effects of accelerated change in his contemporary moment. On the one hand, I evidence how his work identifies the connections of speed to things like commodification, destruction, and war, while on the other I examine how Paolozzi's work is never completely dismissive of these things, frequently identifying liberatory possibilities within them.

I divide my argument across this chapter into four phases, each considering separate, but interrelated, pieces of Paolozzi's fragmented oeuvre. In the first phase, I consider some of the literature that has previously acknowledged a response to speed in the artist's work alongside its precedent in some of his earliest outputs to highlight how a response to speed and acceleration is a present, but largely overlooked, feature of Paolozzi's art. Following this, I then explore how the artist

[13] Ibid., p. 93.
[14] Ibid., p. 94.
[15] Ibid., p .97.

engages with myth in *Diana as an Engine I* (1963, 1966) to both render visible the accelerative thrust of everyday life and to also identify within it potential means of political subversion. I then consider how these forms of subversion are also present in the artist's later aluminium sculptures related to play, such as *Towards a New Laocoon* (1963) and *Mechanik's Bench* (1963). These works, alongside *Crash* (1964) are instances of Paolozzi's work that I argue explore speed's capacity to annihilate fixed contextual meaning, something that can have both liberatory and destructive consequences. I argue that these liberatory and destructive consequences of speed and acceleration are also a feature of Paolozzi's later print works, such as *Universal Electronic Vacuum* (1967), *Z.E.E.P* (1970), and *Moonstrips Empire News* (1967). Alongside also exploring how these works engage with play, like the earlier aluminium works, I claim that these works identify a broader shift in the human relationship with speed and acceleration in the 20th century. This is a shift that, as Enda Duffy has it, originates from a moment where technology is beginning to master 'the virtual and transmit its images instantaneously: so we sense that movement and its rate, its speed, soon no longer matter', an idea roughly analogous to the accelerated development of virtual computing technologies.[16] Building on my discussion of speed and play, I argue that these latter print works all reveal the uneasy relationship these technologies of virtual speed have with military logistics and wargame simulations. Identifying this, however, I maintain that these associations do not lead Paolozzi to simply dismiss the liberatory potentials of acceleration out of hand, which is an indication of the artist's accelerationist proclivity.

An Overview of Paolozzi's Experiments with Speed

To date, little focused attention has been paid to how Paolozzi's work represents and responds to speed. However, some notable in-roads and observations have been made. In 'The Silver Sixties' (2017), Jon Wood notes that Paolozzi's sculpture is 'formally conversant with ideas of import and export and resonant of objects evoking travel and transportation', emphatically declaring that '[h]is 1960s sculpture is a sculpture in transit: on the move and about the dynamics of moving.'[17] Here, speed is evoked through a consideration of the process of transit, both in terms of the artist's subject matter, and also through his tendency to work both internationally and abroad.[18] Later in his essay,

[16] Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 40.
[17] Jon Wood, 'The Silver Sixties: Paolozzi's Sculpture Abroad', in *Eduardo Paolozzi*, ed. by Daniel Herrmann (London: Whitechapel gallery, 2017), pp. 150–61, p. 153.
[18] Paolozzi lived in Germany on three separate occasions and was also highly influenced by a time spent in Paris in the 1940s.

Wood also focuses on this quality in one of Paolozzi's public sculptural works, *Osaka Steel* (1969, 3.1), which was commissioned for *Expo'70* in Osaka, Japan.[19] The product of 'travel and transportation' experienced by the artist, the sculpture formally evokes 'the 1960s Japanese "Bullet Train"', and offers 'a stretched, futuristic, almost photographically blurred account of its speed', comparable in its 'anonymity and personal style-less-ness' to the chromium works that Paolozzi produced slightly earlier, such as *Ettso* (1967, 3.2).[20] *Osaka Steel* is a perfect example of the artist's interest in speed, however, it is by no means the artist's only engagement with the phenomenon, nor his earliest.

Paolozzi reflects on speed in some of his very earliest outputs. For instance, the images displayed at his notorious 1952 *Bunk* lecture were reportedly delivered at speed.[21] Likewise, in a 1959 issue of *Granta* Stephen Mullin notes that the artist's work carries 'rather more than an echo […] of Marinetti's cry that 'the magnificence of the world has been enriched by a new beauty, the beauty of speed'.'[22] The statement Mullin refers to is Paolozzi's response to the increasing possibility that children are 'learn[ing] through the medium of television', something which he embraces with verve:

> [b]attering ceaselessly on the Mind's Eye through the medium of magazines, cinema, advertising techniques, etc. in the every-day world of our period, IMAGES pour forward in a Niagara of experience like the endless fruits of a technological cornucopia.[23]

Such positive embraces of the speed (and force) of the media landscape contradict with the bronze works the artist was also producing around this time. In the 1950s, Paolozzi created several stylistically similar works that typically referenced classical figures, such as *Jason* (1956), *Cyclops* (1957), and a series of works based on *St. Sebastian* (1957-8) (3.3).[24] These works were all produced through a lost-wax technique, which saw the artist impress a bric-a-brac of found objects into clay moulds, which he would then cast into malleable bronze sheets that he welded together into

[19] Figure 3.1: Eduardo Paolozzi, *Osaka Steel*, 1969, stainless steel, colour photograph from Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art reproduced in: Judith Collins, *Eduardo Paolozzi* (UK: Lund Humphries, 2014), p. 162.
[20] Yoshio Kitamura, 'The Legacy of the International Steel Sculpture Symposium' *BijutsuTechno*, no. 326, Bijutsu Shupan-sha, 1970, p. 77, quoted in Wood, 'The Silver Sixties', p. 159. ; Figure 3.2: Eduardo Paolozzi, *Ettso*, 1967, chrome plated steel, University of Edinburgh, UK.
[21] The speed of this delivery is alluded to by David Brittain in his companion booklet to *The Jet Age Compendium: Paolozzi at Ambit* (2009) where he alludes to '[d]escriptions of the quick-fire delivery of *BUNK*'. See: David Brittain, *The Jet Age Compendium: Paolozzi at Ambit* (London: Four Corners, 2009), p. 5.
[22] Stephen Mullin, 'Painitng and Sculpture', *Granta*, 17 October 1959, 22–25, p. 22, quoting from Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'The Futurist Manifesto'.
[23] Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Child art and image', in *National Exhibition of Children's Art* (exh. Cat.) (London: Sunday Pictorial, 1959), p. 4, quoted by Mullin, p. 22.
[24] Figure 3.3: Eduardo Paolozzi, *St Sebastian IV*, 1957, bronze, from: *Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945-1965*, curated by Jane Alison (2022), Barbican, London.

figurative forms, giving them a rough-hewn and damaged surface appearance. These works are reminiscent of the lumbering monsters from pre-code and fifties horror films (such as *The Mummy* (1932), and *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954)), and slow-moving robots from early science fictions (*Metropolis* (1927), and *Forbidden Planet* (1956)). Because of this, speed is not something typically associated with them.

A slowness is also elicited by the details of Paolozzi's bronze works, which he describes in an interview with writer Édouard Roditi as attempts at arresting flux, noting 'the details of my sculptures try to suggest […] a pause in the evolution of their materials, and the spare parts and the junk that the metal may once have been and may well become again are an allegory of the materials of which the bodies of living animals and likewise human beings are constructed.'[25] Here, Paolozzi suggests a certain sense of permanency to his work that attempts to both arrest and render visible the process of material change, while also highlighting (and possibly slowing down) these material changes. Critics like Hal Foster have convincingly argued that this detail of the bronze sculptures 'conjures up creatures in which the organic and the mechanical are convoluted', an idea which has continuity with the accelerationist theme of the human-machine explored in Chapter One, and that, in the post-war consumer context, comments on an increased human dependency on domestic gadgets.[26] Because of this, it is possible to read the '[h]ollow and brittle' qualities of these works as evocative of the trauma and alienation felt as a consequence of technological development, as Foster does; the works themselves being attempts to arrest the speed and force of bombardment from both post-war technology and media.[27] In this sense, they operate much like the 'Ikons' or 'sacred objects' McHale identifies in his 'Plastic Parthenon' and earlier essays—their apotropaic or 'magical powers' warding the effects of the accelerated technological landscape.[28]

However, almost everything changes with Paolozzi's sculptural style in the 1960s. From 1961 his work was beginning to exhibit a greater concern with architectural structure and arrangement, as in *Tyrannical Tower Crowned with Thorns of Violence* (1961). Works after this period also began to lose the accreted surfaces typical to the earlier bronzes. Instead, they were of a more 'sterile, detached, hi-tech quality', largely due to a change in his creative process and move from working in

[25] Eduardo Paolozzi and Edouard Roditi, '"Dialogues on Art", 1960', in *Eduardo Paolozzi: Writings and Interviews*, ed. by Robin Spencer (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 86–91, p. 90.
[26] Hal Foster, 'Erase, Deface, Transform: Eduardo Paolozzi', *London Review of Books*, 16 February 2017 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v39/n04/hal-foster/erase-deface-transform> [accessed 14 June 2022].
[27] Ibid.
[28] McHale, 'The Plastic Parthenon', p. 92.

bronze, to aluminium.[29] Paolozzi announces a shift in his production process in a 1961 statement, which he opens by outlining a project for 'a book of poems':

> THE PAST Pressing objects into a clay bed,
> Pouring wax, making diagrams,
> Charts of events
> Objects in bronze from the art-founders.
> Collage from silk-screened papers
>
> THE PRESENT wooden shapes cast in gun metal
> By engineers foundries
> Assembled like ships by
>
> BOLT & WELD[30]

This statement evidences a shift in how Paolozzi was producing his sculptures. The artist consigns his earlier lost wax method, '[p]ressing objects into a clay bed / Pouring wax', to the past, while he associates the present with a whole new way of working, 'wooden shapes cast in gun metal / By engineers in foundries'.

This claim of a new way of working tracks with the changes that take place after making this statement in 1961. During the 1960s, Paolozzi decided to no longer take a DIY approach to his sculpture. Instead, he opted to manufacture sculptures through industrial processes, hiring 'engineers' in 'foundries' that more typically worked on things 'like ships'. Judith Collins highlights this change in the artist's production process in her art historical account of his works, explaining that:

> Paolozzi designed forms in wood and wax, often following preparatory drawings. These forms were taken to Juby's who made blueprints, which were then transmuted into aluminium, usually by the sand-casting method, by the firms of pattern-makers and non-ferrous founders. Then the various designed parts were welded at Juby's welding workshop by a professional welder – usually Len Smith – working to Paolozzi's supervision.[31]

Collins's account of the artist's creative process highlights the increased importance of transit between different industrial sites for the purposes of producing his aluminium works, a process that

[29] Daniel Herrmann, 'Bronze to Aluminium and Back Again: Eduardo Paolozzi's Use of Materials in Sculpture, c. 1957-71', *The Sculpture Journal; London* (London, 2005) <http://search.proquest.com/docview/229416745/citation/82309381B733493APQ/1> [accessed 24 April 2020], p. 81.
[30] Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Artist's Statement' (1961), in Michael Middleton, *Eduardo Paolozzi*, ed. by Jasia Reichardt, Art in Progress (London: Methuen, 1963), n.p.
[31] Judith Collins, *Eduardo Paolozzi* (Farnham Surrey ; Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2014), p. 140.

conforms to Wood's observations that Paolozzi's sculpture in the sixties 'is a sculpture in transit'.[32] A connection to speed is also palpable in Paolozzi's process during this time and is implied in his claim that he was making these objects 'like ships' in his 1961 statement. In *The Speed Handbook* (2009) Enda Duffy outlines that although they have 'seen their eclipse in relation to other forms of transport', '[s]hips, from Columbus's sailing vessels to the Titanic, have most vividly exemplified modernity's union of speed, adventure, accidentality, and commerce'.[33] By producing his works 'like ships' the artist taps into this same cultural imaginary of 'speed, accidentality, and commerce' as these historic vessels. Yet perhaps the most curious thing about Paolozzi's statement is that he is doing so at a time where the speed of ships was being drastically surpassed by advances in aeronautical technologies and space flight. By the sixties, the space race was well underway, with USSR cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin having achieved the accolade of being the first human in space in 1961. The rocket technologies underpinning such a monumental achievement had undergone significant technological development since the first sub-orbital space flight in 1944, and at the time Paolozzi was producing his aluminium sculpture, such rockets were already becoming increasingly capable of launching objects to orbital and escape velocities from Earth. One explanation is that Paolozzi's engagements with ships were perhaps indicative of an interest in high-speed travel's tendency to surpass itself, rendering its previous advancements seemingly obsolete by comparison. In this sense, Paolozzi's works might operate like monuments to a once-fast form of speed that is now overlooked, but that still plays a structuring role in how speed is understood in the present. Another explanation however, is that Paolozzi had an inclusive definition of ships, referencing the nascent high-speed capabilities of the sea-faring vessel's science-fictional counterpart, the spaceship.

Diana as a Speed Idol

When it comes to Paolozzi's sixties aluminium works, no set of sculptures grapple with speed better than *Diana as an Engine I & II* (1963, 3.4).[34] Of the two thematically connected sculptures, the first is the most celebrated, likely due to the ostentatious yellow, red, blue, green, and black finishing

[32] Wood, p. 153.
[33] Duffy, p. 25. The connection these vessels have to both war and capitalism is also significant, particularly given Paolozzi's interest in wargames explored later in the chapter. As Manuel De Landa explains in *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (1991), '[l]arge ships were the first capitalist machines, and their crews the first proletarians. And the ships used in long-distance trade were, for a time, indistinguishable from war ships.' Manuel De Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*, Swerve Editions, 5. print (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991), p. 110.
[34] Figure 3.4: Eduardo Paolozzi *Diana as an Engine I* & *II*, 1963, aluminium, black and white photographs, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, GMA/40/10/5/83 & GMA/40/10/5/7.

Paolozzi added to it in 1966 (3.5).[35] *Diana I* is a free-standing key-hole shaped sculpture. It has an irregular octagonal base which features two roundels on each side. Running up from this base, in its centre, are what look like three engine manifolds, and its apex is crowned by a fanned spread of nine spark plug-like objects. Combined, these elements lend the sculpture an enigmatic, but figurative feel, as if it is some kind of totem to both the Swinging Sixties and the sculpture's namesake, a person called Diana.

The formal ambiguity of *Diana* is reflected on in a 2009 British Council exhibition catalogue, which describes the sculpture as:

> a feverish but controlled fusion of form and cultural ephemera: a mélange that appears to incorporate such diverse inspirations as an American fire hydrant, a New York taxi cab lost in Vegas, a steam train, the exhaust of a convertible, a whirlygig lollypop and an early off-the-wall idea for a Dalek.[36]

The ambiguous characterisations of the artist's work as an 'American fire hydrant' 'a whirligig lollypop', and 'an idea for a Dalek' situate it in a very specific '60s historical context.[37] Yet, as the catalogue notes, 'it feels wrong to even try to situate this work'.[38] To suggest that *Diana* is wholly emblematic of a particular time gives too much priority to the artist's later addition of colour to sculpture, something which was evidently not a concern when he first manufactured it. The listing of these otherwise unrelated things also hints at the work's mystifying quality, something that is prompted by the description of *Diana* as a 'mélange' of 'cultural ephemera'.[39] Yet, this reference to a mixture of things also evokes another quality of the work, its sense of speed. In my view, this is a key facet of Paolozzi's *Diana* and something that is reinforced in the catalogue entry through an

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[35] Figure 3.5: Eduardo Paolozzi, *Diana as an Engine I* (painted), 1966, aluminium, colour photograph, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, GMA/40/10/5/79.

[36] British Council, 'Diana as an Engine I, Sir Eduardo Paolozzi | Current | Exhibitions | British Council – Visual Arts' <http://visualarts.britishcouncil.org/exhibitions/exhibition/pop-art-design-2015/object/diana-as-an-engine-i-paolozzi-196366-p1273> [accessed 28 April 2020].

[37] The comparison of Paolozzi's sculpture to a Dalek is also made by Hunter Davies in relation to another of Paolozzi's sculptures in *The Beatles: The Authorised Biography* (1968). Davies describes *Solo* (1962), which is owned by Paul McCartney, as 'a large silver piece of sculpture […] shaped like a fireplace with Dalek heads on top.' See: Hunter Davies, *The Beatles*, Updated and rev. ed (London: Ebury Press, 2009), p. 416. McCartney has since written his own account of Paolozzi's work, see: Paul McCartney, 'Paintings on the Wall: Eduardo Paolozzi', 2019 <https://paulmccartney.com/news/paintings-on-the-wall-eduardo-paolozzi-1924-2005> [accessed 13 June 2022].

[38] British Council.

[39] It also overlooks how this additional gloss may be akin to the camouflage patterns Paolozzi added to other sculptures around this time, such as *Hamlet in a Japanese Manner* (1966). Diane Kirkpatrick explains that this sculpture was painted 'to optically challenge the solidity of the sculptural elements', altering the elements on which a viewer might focus. This is a quality of the works that imitates automobiles, and how paint is used to disguise their welds. See: Diane Kirkpatrick, *Eduardo Paolozzi* (London: Studio Vista Limited, 1970), p. 75.

emphasis on objects of transport and transit: the 'New York taxi-cab lost in Vegas', 'a steam train', 'the exhaust of a convertible', all of which are examples of the relationship between Paolozzi's work and movement that I previously emphasised in my discussion of Jon Wood's 'The Silver Sixties' above.[40]

Diana's name lends the sculpture an iconic status, connecting it with McHale's definition of an 'ikon' explored above as something that attains a sense of mythic status as it diffuses through and brings about further changes in a transitory or ephemeral culture.[41] *Diana* is a reference to mythology, specifically the Roman goddess of the hunt and wilderness.[42] Paolozzi's reference to such a mythological figure is reminiscent of his earlier bronze sculptures, like *Jason*, and implies a further continuity between these and his later works. Like those earlier sculptures, *Diana* also resembles a standing anthropomorphic form and, because of this, is suggestive of a similar set of references to robots from science fiction films like *Forbidden Planet* and *Metropolis*.[43] However, unlike Paolozzi's earlier bronze sculptures, in which the title of the works often imply more straightforward depiction of their subjects, *Diana* does not approach the mythological figure directly. Instead, the sculpture is a depiction of the goddess as something else entirely: an engine, an aspect of the work that references metamorphosis (or the transformation of something into something else), both a feature of classical myth, as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and a key pre-occupation of Surrealist art, which it is often stated had a great deal of influence on the artist. In my view, like the 'mélange' above, this transformation of Diana to engine is a further reference to the effects of speed.

Paolozzi has provided little explanation for depicting the goddess Diana as an engine. In an unpublished extract from an interview with Richard Hamilton, he explains that he 'likes the idea that there […] has to be a nomenclature for the manufactured object', highlighting that when he 'was a child there was a bicycle called 'Diana'' and that 'there's also an air-gun called Diana'.[44] Robin Spencer notes that these claims relate to a Surrealist fascination with the convention of naming

[40] Paolozzi, 'Artist's Statement', n.p.
[41] McHale, 'The Plastic Parthenon', p. 92.
[42] As with many other gods and goddesses in Roman mythology, her patronage also extended slightly further than this at different times and to different communities, including to the countryside, crossroads, the underworld, the Moon, and as a protector of childbirth.
[43] The plugs on the head of the sculpture resemble Maria's crown in the film. True to Paolozzi's own interest in the blending of the conventional everyday with the sublime imagination, they also resemble vintage 1920s electronic hair curlers, photos of which are collected in Paolozzi's scrapbooks (3.6). Figure 3.6: Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Artist's Scrapbook', c. 1950, collage on paper, Krazy Kat Arkive, V&A Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1985/3/6/5.
[44] Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton, 'Unpublished Extract from "Interview between Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi", 1964', in *Eduardo Paolozzi: Writings and Interviews*, ed. by Robin Spencer (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 125–28, p. 127. Another point of reference could have been the Ducati Diana (or Daytona in the UK), a motorcycle produced from 1961 until 1964.

machines, as in Stuart Legg's article 'A Note on Locomotive Names' in the *London Bulletin* (July 1938).[45] Both the Surrealists and Paolozzi would have found the naming of objects deeply compelling and often ironic, seeing these attributions as non-functional interpretations of otherwise entirely functional objects. Because of this, such forms of nomenclature undermined the functionalist tenet of a rational distance from objects—the idea that an object's purpose, or its intended use, be considered apart from (and typically above) subjective interpretations of that use.

Diana clearly expresses a lack of concern for functionality. The engine-like quality of the work is only discernible as a symbolic gestalt, largely thanks to the manifold-esque parts in the middle of the structure. Like the other parts of the work, and like the "engines" found in other sculptures like *Towards a New Laocoon* (1963, 3.7) and *Mechanik's Bench* (1963, 3.8), it is unclear whether these engine manifolds are in fact manifolds at all or, as with other parts of the sculpture, objects whose original purpose has been abstracted to cultivate an impression of an engine in the sculpture's form.[46] The symbolic iconicity this fusion of otherwise arbitrary parts creates however is important, linking its name to its formal presentation, while subverting a viewer's expectation of what an engine might be (and does).

This visual association with an engine also acts as a crucial link to another reason Paolozzi gives for producing *Diana* in a later interview with Richard Hamilton, an associate of Paolozzi's in the Independent Group:

> The title was supposed to put over an idea. Early forms of society worshipped an image or a symbol which represented some dominant force, and I see something related to this today when one does a precise or specific image which represents in a way the kind of man-made forces which contribute to certain man-made articles I am involved with.[47]

In this interview with Hamilton, Paolozzi describes *Diana* as an idol, and therefore as the representation of a 'dominant force' (or a god, natural phenomenon, spirit, family etc.) created for the purposes of worship. Paolozzi leaves the 'dominant force' he speaks about here ambiguous, only

[45] Ibid., p. 128. Mentioned in a note by Spencer.
[46] Figure 3.7: Eduardo Paolozzi, *Towards a New Laocoon*, 1963, aluminium, black and white photograph, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, GMA/40/10/5/1065.; Figure 3.8: Eduardo Paolozzi, *Mechanik's Bench*, 1963, aluminium, Tate Modern, London. A close look at these aluminium sculptures, alongside the pre-painted *Diana* above reveals that these manifold-like parts were welded onto the other parts of the structure, giving impression of an engine, even though these other parts arguable lack any further discernible resemblance to them. This is also true of *Towards a New Laocoon* and *Mechanik's Bench*, although in these works these manifolds are attached to something resembling an engine rocker cover.
[47] Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton, '"Interview between Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi", 1965', in *Eduardo Paolozzi: Writings and Interviews*, ed. by Robin Spencer (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 138–41, p. 141.

hinting that the force is human-made and related to the 'articles' he is 'involved with.' In the case of *Diana*, one such 'article' could be the engine, which is an object responsible for producing the mechanical force (or thrust) of human-made speed.[48] This force also unifies the two primary concerns of the sculpture, the goddess of the hunt and the engine, giving the two a sense of thematic consistency. In *Bunker Archaeology* (1975) Paul Virilio explains that '[s]peed has always been the advantage and privilege of the hunter and warrior.'[49] By presenting a mythological hunter as an engine, which is doubtless an icon of speed, Paolozzi's sculpture pre-empts Virilio's remark, suggesting that the dominant force referenced in *Diana* is in fact speed itself. Yet Paolozzi's sculpture also contrasts with the ferocity Virilio attributes to speed in his claim. Paolozzi's *Diana* might be a hunter, but she is not mid-hunt, and is not depicted as a warrior. Instead, she more closely resembles a domestic object, albeit one that subverts expectations of domesticity—much like Robby explored in the previous chapter. Like the artist's earlier bronzes, *Diana*'s function in this sense could also be apotropaic, attempting to arrest the speed of the present. However, her formal divergence from these earlier bronze works—a smoother finish—suggest an altogether different meaning to her commentary on speed. Rather than revealing the horrors of this 'dominant force', *Diana* demonstrates how it has become a banal facet of everyday lived experience. Therefore, she is an ikon, one that both reveals and revels in the sublime dimension of speed underpinning everyday life.

Paolozzi's affirmative approach to speed and acceleration in *Diana* is predicated on the absence of speed's sublimity in the present. On the one hand, I believe Paolozzi intends this to be a subversive gesture, one that emphasises a radical dimension to speed and accelerated change in his present. On the other, however, I think Paolozzi's emphasis on sublimity in the sculpture also risks acquiescence with the kind commodity fetishism that has been associated with accelerationism by the likes of Benjamin Noys who has claimed that accelerationists 'are an archetypal instance of the fetishists of capital', mentioned in the previous chapter.[50] What's more, this fetishism is lent a

[48] In his book *Brutal Aesthetics* (2020), the critic Hal Foster draws a slightly different—though not unrelated—conclusion to the one I make above. He argues that Paolozzi's references to a 'dominant force' relate to the dynamo, connecting this to Henry Adams's claim that the dynamos at the Paris World Fair of 1900 represented a 'moral force' in 'The Dynamo and the Virgin' chapter of his 1906 memoir. Foster also believes that '*The Bishop of Kuban* […] and *Diana as an Engine I* […] resemble dynamos recast and repainted as pop potentates and mod gods.' While I find Foster's interpretation compelling, I think the visual analogues to engines, which are a common reference image for Paolozzi, are more likely connotative of speed. See: Hal Foster, *Brutal Aesthetics: Dubuffet, Bataille, Jorn, Paolozzi, Oldenburg*, The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 2018 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 174.

[49] Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archeology*, trans. by George Collins, English ed (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), p. 19.

[50] Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism & Capitalism* (Winchester, UK Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2014), p. 9.

gendered dimension by the sculpture, one that, in turn, troubles Paolozzi's engagements with the sublime.

One of the more unusual facets of *Diana* compared with Paolozzi's oeuvre, is its implied depiction of a female figure. In the book *The Metallization of the Dream* (1963), Lawrence Alloway explains that 'Paolozzi has never made a female figure'.[51] Paolozzi has explained that this is '"because of identification. One lives through one's sculpture, though one doesn't think that"'.[52] However, he notably subverts this expectation between 1962-3, when he produces a series of sculptures titled the *Hermaphroditic Idols*, all of which have similar parts to those used in *Diana* (3.9).[53] This brief shift in how the artist considered gender in his work, reflected a further change in preoccupation from the bronze work in the fifties.[54] Judith Collins has suggested this change reflects the artist's preoccupation with robots, and leads 'the viewer to question whether a [r]obot is an asexual creature or one with both attributes.'[55] However, in-line with my exploration of Paolozzi's emphasis

[51] Eduardo Paolozzi and Lawrence Alloway, *The Metallization of a Dream* (London: Lion and Unicorn Press, 1963), Tate Millbank, p. 29.
[52] Eduardo Paolozzi and Lawrence Alloway, *The Metallization of a Dream* (London: Lion and Unicorn Press, 1963), Tate Millbank, p. 29, quoting from Exh. Cat. Arts Council Gallery, Cambridge n.d. Paolozzi made very few female figures across his career, with two further sculptures of Josephine Barker, produced much later, being the only other works of a comparable scale to *Diana*.
[53] Figure 3.9: Eduardo Paolozzi *Hermaphroditic Idol no. 1*, 1962, aluminium, black and white photograph from the estate of David Farrell, reproduced in Judith Collins, *Eduardo Paolozzi* (UK: Lund Humphries, 2014), p. 145.
[54] This preoccupation with gender and sexuality does have some continuity with Paolozzi's earlier works. Most recently, Gregory Salter has explored how Paolozzi's fifties *St. Sebastian* sculptures relate to the iconographies of gay subculture, see: Gregory Salter, 'Looking Queerly at Postwar Masculinity', in *Postwar Modern New Art in Britain 1945-65.*, ed. by Jane Alison, Hilary Floe, and Charlotte Flint (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2022), pp. 49–53. It is also possible to read Paolozzi's *Hermaphroditic Idols* as responses to developments in gender-affirming surgeries during the late fifties and early sixties. Such developments were the subject of media scares during this time, as in the case of the high-profile outing of model April Ashley as a transgender woman by *The Sunday People* in 1961. Popular representations of gender non-conformity also receive attention elsewhere in Paolozzi's oeuvre, most notably in *General Dynamic F.U.N* (1970) such as in the works 'Cary Grant as a Male War Bride' and 'Hermaphroditic Children from Transvestite Parents'. The responses to gender in Paolozzi's early '60s sculptures could also be considered against the gender conventions of earlier Surrealism, which are also highlighted by Lawrence Alloway in *The Metallization of a Dream* (also quoted later in this chapter). Alloway explains that: '[w]hereas in Ernst the sewing-machine and umbrella (though coded respectively as feminine and phallic) remain objectively stable and so become, when yoked together, odd, Paolozzi's objects have no set meanings. Therefore, he can create a world in which contrasting images reveal not their estrangement but, on the contrary, the inexhaustible meanings that follow from changing combinations.' See: Paolozzi and Alloway, p. 50. Here, Alloway suggests that Paolozzi frequently undermines the gender conventions of early Surrealism. Unlike the Surrealists, Paolozzi is not reliant on exploiting the estranging point of difference between arbitrary perceptions of binaries. Instead, Paolozzi is concerned with the limitless pluralities proffered by the act of recombination alone, suggesting a gender-neutral approach to objects, and possibly to forms of gender expression. I think further work could be conducted to unite this quality of Paolozzi's work to his linguistic experimentation and interests in nomenclature by exploring how divergences in grammatical gender, such as those expressed in the French and English languages, may connect to different interpretations of Surrealist practice and its relationship to gender in these two contexts.
[55] Collins, p. 149.

on speed in *Diana*, I am going to examine how these works reflect on the relationship between femininity and speed, especially in relation to the automobile's commodification and its relationship to female celebrity.[56]

In his late-1950s works, fellow IG member Richard Hamilton explored the relationship between automobility and femininity in two paint and collage works: *Hommage à Chrysler Corp* (1957) (3.10), and *Hers is a Lush Situation* (1958) (3.11).[57] These works both reflect on the car advertising of the period and depict spectral female forms alongside highly stylized and abstract automobile exteriors. For example, in the case of *Hommage à Chrysler Corp*, a set of lips float above what looks like a distorted fascia of a car. The curves of this fascia interact with the lips to create a gestalt image of a female body, which is thereafter reinforced by how the geometric concentric circle aligns with the female figure's right breast, an allusion to both a brassier and the car's wing mirror. A similar series of associations are thereafter explored in *Hers is a Lush Situation*, only this time the lips are collaged above the distorted image of a moving car.[58] These lips are those of Italian actress Sophia Loren, who famously owned a Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Gullwing between 1955-56, with which she was photographed.[59] The lips in both these works reflect the sexualisation of automobile advertising during this period—the frequent association of the vehicles with high-glamour, pin-up photographs of women in advertising—and, in the case of Loren's lips, the increasing association of celebrity women with the automobile. Thus, they depict the increasing association of women with cars and by extension, speed.

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[56] Enda Duffy notes that '[c]ar "bodies" and women's bodies, in some of the most blatant uses of the female body as lure, have, since the moment when mass advertising and the mass-produced automobile were both invented, been displayed side by side.' Naturally, however, there was also a feminist reaction to this idea, with 'popular "car art" […] play[ing] a major role in fashioning the twenties "new woman."' Thereafter, in the 1950s and '60s depictions of women in and around automobiles carried associations corresponding to both these histories of representation. See: Duffy, pp. 185-6. For more on the context of the automobile and the new woman, see also: Eva Chen, 'Pretty Women Don't Drive: Early Women Motorists and the Taming of the Motor-Car', *Women's Studies*, 49.2 (2020), 149–79 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2020.1738437>.

[57] Figure 3.10: Richard Hamilton, *Hommage à Chrysler Corp*, 1957, oil paint, metal foil and digital print on wood, Tate <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hamilton-hommage-a-chrysler-corp-t06950> [accessed 17 November 2023]. ; Figure 3.11: Richard Hamilton, *Hers is a Lush Situation*, 1958, oil paint and collage, from: *Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945-1965*, curated by Jane Alison (2022), Barbican, London.

[58] The representation of a woman in a moving car in the later work contrasts with the earlier work by relating more directly to women's empowerment. See: Duffy, p. 186.

[59] 'Sophia Loren's 1955 Mercedes-Benz 300 SL "Gullwing" W198', *Drives.Today*, 2021 <https://drives.today/articles/99/history/sophia-loren-s-1955-mercedes-benz-300-sl-gullwing-w198/massimo-delb.html> [accessed 19 August 2023]. The lips in Hamilton's work are cited as being Sophia Loren's by a multitude of sources, including Art UK. However, I've had no luck in locating an original source for this reference. See: 'Hers Is a Lush Situation', *Art UK* <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/hers-is-a-lush-situation-70719> [accessed 10 November 2023].

Although they were produced earlier than Paolozzi's *Diana*, Hamilton's paintings still help elucidate the context that the sculpture responded to. They were also by no means the only works to draw parallels between female identity and the automobile during this period. In *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes produced a rhetorically similar association between the woman and automobile in his essay on the 1955 Citroën DS, 'The New Citroën'.[60] Noting that DS is pronounced like the French word for goddess, *déesse*, Barthes explains that through the stylised appearance of the car, '[s]peed […] is expressed by less aggressive, less athletic signs, as if it were evolving from a primitive to a classical form.'[61] Because of this, it has left behind 'the bestiary of power' becoming 'at once more spiritual […] more *homely*, more attuned to this sublimation of the utensil which one also finds in the design of contemporary household equipment' (italics in source).[62] Here Barthes alludes to both gendered and domestic qualities of the modern automobile. For Barthes, the DS represents something both 'more *homely*', while also being associated with the feminine 'goddess'. These are of course also associations that are at play in *Diana*, the work resembling a domesticated version of the goddess of the hunt, as I explored through Virilio above.

Despite clear similarity between Barthes's reading of the DS, and Paolozzi's *Diana*, the works diverge at the level of conclusion. For Barthes, the commodification of speed is a 'petit-bourgeois advancement', the transcendent freedom of this goddess having become 'totally prostituted, appropriated', captured by the 'demystifying' 'assault of touch'.[63] Here the process of commodification sees the goddess stripped of agency, her transcendent qualities exploited in the showroom for the mere purposes of capital and social status. That this 'goddess' is a car is also relevant here. This is because Barthes's commentary lends itself to being interpreted as a reading of the car's association with female celebrity, a fame that Barthes perhaps sees as little more than women being commercially 'prostituted' for the purposes of financial gain. Paolozzi's *Diana*, by contrast, lacks Barthes's concluding value judgement, even despite carrying a thematically similar set of associations to those that Barthes reads in the Citroën. Like the Citroën, Paolozzi's *Diana* also marks 'the beginnings of a new phenomenology of assembling, as if one progressed from a world where elements are welded to a world where they are juxtaposed and hold together by sole virtue of

[60] It is quite possible that Richard Hamilton was aware of the associations Barthes was making in his work by 1958, even if he never drew on Barthes's ideas directly. Hamilton features a 1955 Citroën DS in his contribution to the *Daily Mail*'s Ideal Home Exhibition, *Gallery for a Collector of Brutalist and Tachiste Art* (1958). The DS was also important to Alison and Peter Smithson, with Alison Smithson later writing a travelogue based on her experiences in the DS called *AS in DS: An Eye on the Road* (1983), which has since been explored by Guilia Smith through the lens of feminist autoethnography in a seminar on the work with the Paul Mellon Centre (2018).
[61] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers, 47 (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2006), p. 89.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., p. 90.

their wondrous shape.'[64] It also radiates a 'lightness in its magical sense', is 'less bulky' and 'less incisive' than his earlier bronze sculpture; the metal it is made from, aluminium, is literally lighter too.[65] Yet Paolozzi's *Diana* in no way makes a decisive comment about its status as a commodified object. In this vein, it seemingly acquiesces with the process of commodification. In fact, it is an ikon that celebrates this process, highlighting and thereafter embracing the sexualisation and fetishization characteristic of it.

The links between domestication, sexualisation, and commodification are frequent motifs of Paolozzi's work, particularly in his *BUNK* collages and early scrapbooks, which feature an array of cuttings from advertisements of domestic products that feature sexualised women (or pin-ups) (3.12, see also 2.1).[66] These images, much like Paolozzi's *Diana*, often fail to draw critical distance from their subject matter, reproducing the sexualisation and commodification the artist isolates and observes within a patriarchal context. Because of this, through a certain feminist lens these works are open to fair criticism as gross acts of sublimation on behalf of the artist. Yet, they also demonstrate an extraordinarily complex relationship to their subject matter.[67] In the case of *Diana*, this is particularly evident through the correlation the sculpture has to myth, which also relates to its commentary on speed.

The critic Elisabeth Bronfen has identified that Barthes's concern with myths is related to their ability to 'depoliticize by depleting what they represent of their historical specificity, endowing a certain person, object, or event instead with a secondary universal, essential meaning.'[68] In the

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[64] Ibid., p. 88.
[65] Ibid., p. 89.
[66] Figure 3.12: Eduardo Paolozzi, Pin-ups from the Artist's Scrapbooks, c.1950, collage on paper, Krazy Kat Arkive, V&A Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1985/3/6/5.
[67] The complexity of Paolozzi's response to the pin-up relates to the elaborate history of their use in anglophone and European cultures. This has been explored, at length, by Maria Elena Buszek in her comprehensive cultural study of the pin-up, *Pin-Up Grrrls* (2006). In this work she identifies that in the 1950s the pin-up was used by both 'the burgeoning civil-rights movement and the artworld avant-garde' as 'a subject of their progressive, yet critical view of the role of beauty and sexuality in contemporary culture'. Thereafter, this 'gave license to pop artists, who would begin to recycle the image of the now nostalgic pin-up with meanings that fit the period's heady climate of political, cultural, and sexual revolution', something that would 'prove both influential and problematic to feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s.' See: Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 25. Buszek also briefly engages with Paolozzi's use of pin-up imagery in *I Was a Rich Man's Plaything* (1947, 1971), exploring it as emblematic of a fascination in the otherworldliness of American culture in Europe during the period, and as an image that corresponds to the pin-up's use by youth cultures 'as a way of articulating their difference from their parents' "old world" values' à la explorations of IG's practices in scholarship discussed in the previous chapter. See: Buszek, p. 262.
[68] Elisabeth Bronfen, 'Chuck Palahniuk and the Violence of Beauty', in *The Future of Flesh: A Cultural Survey of the Body*, ed. by Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, Katerina Kitse-Mytakou, and Effie Yiannopoulou (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 101–14 <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230620858> [accessed 22 July 2022], p. 101.

case of the DS, this rings true for Barthes in the 'change in the mythology of cars', from 'the bestiary of power' to one that is 'more *homely*'.[69] In Barthes's reading this shift in mythology supports his argument that the car, and likewise speed, have become subject to demystification, and thus depleted of their historical specificity. Yet, by making this criticism Barthes inadvertently overlooks the gender dynamics of such a shift, and likewise, the agency of women in their interactions with such forms of re-mythologisation. In her essay, Bronfen highlights how this element of Barthes's reading of myth is somewhat problematised by J.G. Ballard, an important contemporary of Paolozzi's, in works like 'Mae West's Reduction Mammoplasty' (1970).[70] Bronfen notes that across a series of stories in *The Atrocity Exhibition* 'Ballard […] is concerned with critiquing the deployment of West, Monroe, or Mansfield in an even more specific manner [than Barthes], by treating them as tropes for our cultural obsession with fetishizing the feminine body.'[71] However, she highlights the author's attempts at greater specificity also lead him to produce a 'rhetorical contradiction' in one of the annotations that he later adds to his story:[72]

> Beyond our physical touch, the breasts of these screen actresses incite our imaginations to explore and reshape them […]. The bodies of these extraordinary women form a kit of spare parts, a set of mental mannequins that resemble Bellmer's obscene dolls. As they tease us, so we begin to dismantle them, removing sections of a smile, a leg stance, an enticing cleavage. The parts are interchangeable, like the operations we imagine performing on these untouchable women, as endlessly variable as the colors silkscreened onto the faces of Warhol's Liz and Marilyn.[73]

Here, Bronfen observes the presence of a contradiction between Ballard's rhetorically voyeuristic tone and glib sexualisation of women's bodily features, and the gesture that actresses like Mae West perform to supposedly 'incite our imaginations to explore and reshape them.' What this leads to, according to Bronfen, is an uncertainty about Mae West's agency in relation to the mythologisation

[69] Barthes, p. 89. The turn of phrase 'bestiary of power' portrays speed as an untamed or wholly primitive force and is evocative of Marinetti's description of cars as 'snorting beasts' in *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* (1909). See: F.T. Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism', in *Documents of 20th Century Art: Futurist Manifestos*, ed. by Robert Brian, R.W. Flint, and J.C. Higgitt, trans. by Caroline Tisdall (New York: Viking Press, 1973), pp. 19–24, p. 20.
[70] This story was republished in Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), which is thereafter related to Paolozzi's *BUNK* collages (1972) by Frank Whitford in the introduction to this suite of works.
[71] Bronfen, p. 102.
[72] Ibid., p. 102.
[73] J. G. Ballard, 'Mae West's Reduction Mammoplasty', in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, ed. by V. Vale and Andrea Juno, Rev., expanded, annotated, illustrated ed (San Francisco, CA: RE/Search Publications, 1990), pp. 114–16, p. 114.

that Ballard observes.[74] Turning to Judith Butler's writing on drag, Bronfen notes that 'even while according to Ballard, we are teased into fragmenting and reshaping her [Mae West's] body to fit our fantasies, we do so in response to the fact that Mae West has already shaped herself along the line of parodic resignification […] and that she enjoys this self-transformation, to boot.'[75] The point Bronfen highlights being that although Mae West is subject to becoming commodified, she also arguably exerts a discrete level of agency over her process of commodification and, likewise, the parts of her body subject to disassembly and reassembly.

Such observances are relevant not only to individual women—they are also applicable to the likes of Sophia Loren in Hamilton's artwork above—but are also relevant to myth more generally. Barthes's identification of a 'change in the mythology of cars', which was a shift away from their older associations with a 'bestiary of power' towards a consideration of their relationship to femininity and homeliness, was also a change in the mythology of speed, a change I also explored through Group 2's funhouse from *This is Tomorrow* in the previous chapter. This change sees speed move away from being a discrete experience pursued for pleasure, to becoming a ubiquitous feature of everyday life, and particularly the domestic lived environment. Such a "change in the mythology of speed" is something that Paolozzi reflects on in *Diana*. However, much like Mae West in Bronfen's reading of Ballard, the artist employs a 'parodic resignification' in the sculpture to explore how such a shift in the possibility of speed, and the increasing sense of its ubiquity in his contemporary moment, presents the possibility for renewed self-fashioning. Such newfound possibilities of self-transformation are expressed in *Diana* through the collage of otherwise abstract, indiscernible parts. These parts, which are like signs that have lost their meaning, are repeated from earlier sculptures like *The Bishop of Kuban* (1962) (3.13), or the *Hermaphroditic Idols*.[76] When taken together, the repetition and recombination of these parts forms an exploration of a process of resignification in a more general sense, Paolozzi playfully intimating that such parts can attain newfound meaning

[74] Ballard writes an element of agency into 'Mae West's Reduction Mammoplasty', with the opening line of the story reading that '[t]he reduction in size of Mae West's breasts presented a surgical challenge of some magnitude, considerably complicated by the patient's demand that her nipples be retained as oral mounts during sexual intercourse'. He also concludes the story by saying that '[t]he ultimate results of this operation with regard to sexual function are not know.' These two moments of the work highlighting where West's sexual agency complicates the surgical procedure, while also being where it extends beyond the frame of the story's narrative. Ballard's further annotations about West being like a Warholian icon, even though Warhol never re-invented West also further illustrate Bronfen's point, insofar as Ballard claims that 'she got there before him' and therefore 'might have dangerously subverted the whole Warhol ethos'. See: J. G. Ballard, pp. 114-6.
[75] Bronfen, p. 102. Naturally, the degree to which parodic resignification actually challenges patriarchal norms is hotly debated in feminist theoretical circles, as Bronfen carefully explicates in the first half of her chapter.
[76] Figure 3.13: Eduardo Paolozzi, *The Bishop of Kuban*, 1962, aluminium, black and white photograph, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, A40/10/5/993.

through the process of reassembly, while their final form mystifies to imaginatively incite this process of recombination to begin with.

Paolozzi's *Diana* presents a viewer with a question: is she simply a goddess portrayed by the artist as an engine, or does her transformation represent something far more self-aware and subversive? In either case, the overall ambiguity of the meaning of *Diana* is just as likely part of the point. Paolozzi's sculpture is an example of McHale's belief that, in his accelerated present, '[t]he future of art seems no longer to lie with the creation of enduring masterworks but with defining alternative cultural strategies, through a series of communicative gestures in multi-media forms.'[77] *Diana* is a work that engages with the ubiquity of speed in this contemporary moment while employing a form of 'parodic resignification' to make a case for the newfound possibilities this speed has opened up. In this vein, the work is reminiscent of Paolozzi's highly optimistic view of his media landscape as a 'technological cornucopia', in which he saw a ceaseless flow of images as providing a seemingly endless stimulus for imagination.[78] *Diana* is but one consequence of this ceaseless flow, one particularly playful arrangement that engages with gender and myth in its positive response to speed and acceleration. However, *Diana* is by no means the only work of Paolozzi's to engage with acceleration and its consequences. In the next section, I will consider further works of Paolozzi's that respond to speed and acceleration considering them alongside a further one of Paolozzi's preferred cultural strategies closely related to the 'parodic resignification' the artist employs in *Diana*: play.

Metal and 'Meccano Work': Play and Speed in Aluminium Sculpture

Play offers a novel means for engaging with the theme of speed in Paolozzi's work, particularly in works produced during the sixties. Recently, Elly Thomas has proposed that the artist's output be considered through the lens of the 'toy kit' in order to 'revitalize and re-engage' with it.[79] This proposal is convincing given the artist's vast collection of toys housed in his Krazy Kat Arkive (3.14).[80] A large portion of the toys in the archive are in fact boxed and unbuilt model toy kits, and the modular elements of these kits also link to the artist's childhood obsession with Meccano and its more affordable counterpart, Trix.[81]

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[77] McHale, 'The Plastic Parthenon', p. 97.
[78] Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Child art and image', p. 4, quoted in Mullin.
[79] Elly Thomas, '"Meccano Work": Eduardo Paolozzi's Kits', *Sculpture Journal*, 25.1 (2016), 101–15 <https://doi.org/10.3828/sj.2016.25.7>, p. 101.
[80] Figure 3.14: Photograph of a part of Eduardo Paolozzi's toy collection, Krazy Kat Arkive, V&A Archive of Art and Design.
[81] Paolozzi notes in his National Life Stories interview with Frank Whitford that during his childhood he had a mahogany box under is bed that 'had a Trix [set]...one of my half crowns I bought, there used to be a kind of

Paolozzi's interest in toys and toy kits is also conveyed in one of his earliest print works, the book *Metafisikal Translations* (1962). One of the pages of the work features an opened box of what looks like a set of Trix, which is distinguishable from Meccano through the greater amount of holes in its parts, particularly the struts (3.15).[82] In the book, this photograph is situated above a collage text, one of a multitude of such texts throughout the work. These texts typically consist of strong nouns, alongside many made-up or altered words, which sometimes pre-empt the names the artist gave to some of the sculptures Paolozzi would produce after the book. These include: 'Mars', which is a reference to *Mars* (1962) (later demolished in 1964); 'Diana', which pre-empts *Diana as an Engine I* & *II*; 'Mechaniks Bench', *Mechanik's Bench*, which also receives an early conceptualization in the book; 'Sfinx', a possible reference to *The Twin Towers of the Sfinx State II* (1963); 'Domino', a sculpture intended to be climbable by children Paolozzi would create slightly later, between 1967-8; and the phrase 'The Search for Arch – Types / To Aid The / Metallisation of the Dream'—*The Metallization of the Dream* being the name of a print Paolozzi made in 1963 alongside a book of the same title he produced with Lawrence Alloway.[83] What connects all of these works is that each was either produced in aluminium, or in the case of *Metallization*, produced at a time when Paolozzi was most actively working with the material. Thomas notes that in an interview between Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton that these works are characterized by Hamilton as 'Meccano work', a turn of phrase that links them to the Trix set depicted in *Metafisikal Translations*, and more explicitly to the idea of the toy kit and the process of play that I relate to Paolozzi's response to speed and acceleration.[84]

In her essay, 'Meccano Work', Thomas considers two works to be exemplary of Paolozzi's interest in Meccano and the toy kit: *Towards a New Laocoon* (3.7) and *Mechanik's Bench* (3.8). Like Meccano or the toy kit, these works are characterised by a shared use of similar stock parts, which have been placed in different arrangements to produce complete or assembled forms. The use of shared parts between these works leads Thomas to observe that:

> Although each sculpture exists as a complete work, by bringing them into relation a sense of uncertainty and impermanence is introduced, as if each element has only temporarily found a

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cheap Meccano-type of set which I had called Trix, and the motor, I remember I used to love the motor, electric motor, with a battery, and there were things like that under the bed.' See: 'National Life Stories Artists' Lives: Sir Eduardo Paolozzi Interviewed by Frank Whitford', 1994, The British Library, C466/17/01-12, p. 20.

[82] Figure 3.15: Eduardo Paolozzi, '[no title]', from *Metafisikal Translations* (UK: Kelpra Studio, 1962), screenprint on paper, Tate <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/paolozzi-metafisikal-translations-67850/36> [accessed 17 November 2023].

[83] See: Eduardo Paolozzi, *Metafisikal Translations* (London: Kelpra Studios, 1962), n.p. The phrase 'The Search for Arch – Types / To Aid The / Metallisation of the Dream' also features in Paolozzi's 1961 statement explored above.

[84] The phrase 'meccaNo strut' also appears on a page of *Metafisikal Translations* headed '-2-'. See: Paolozzi, *Metafisikal Translations*.

> resting place. The solidity of the welded metal appears at counterpoint with a configuration that in the scheme of things, may be imagined as provisional.[85]

Such a provisionality allows the process underlying the assembly of these works to be connected to play—the artist, like the user of Meccano, creating provisional forms that can theoretically be disassembled and reassembled at whim. However, unlike Meccano, these works are finalised, making them much more proximal to the final product of the toy kit, which is usually glued together to prevent it from falling apart. Here then, the works express a tension: the act of finalisation necessary for producing an artwork is put at odds with the provisional process of play likely underlying their construction. This is a quality that links these aluminium works to concerns Paolozzi also expressed through his earlier bronze works, which the artist believed to be characteristic of 'a pause in the evolution of their materials', as I explored earlier.[86] However, unlike these earlier bronze works, *Towards a New Laocoon* and *Mechanik's Bench* are no longer figurative. In her reading, Thomas perceives this as an attempt to 'reduce the predictability of a structure', with the artist connecting and interrelating parts so 'that they are not subsumed within a totality'—a pure expression of play.[87] This is a concern that she argues culminates in a work like *Crash* (1964) (3.16) which, through its cacophony of parts, 'seems caught in a continuing, unfolding process.'[88] However, where Thomas regards this as a consideration of the provisional nature of play and its relation to the creative process, a further possible connection to speed is also evident, especially if these works are directly compared to *Diana*.

Like *Diana*, both *Towards a New Laocoon* and *Mechanik's Bench* employ the iconography of the engine, a feature of the works that also positions them as responses to speed. Only, unlike *Diana*, to which the engine is a central, titular feature of the work, in these other works the engine is not related to a cohesive ikon. Instead, both sculptures render the engine as unexemplary, treating it as little more than a component part in a greater, and more abstract collection of forms. In my view, much like in my reading of *Diana*, this acts as a commentary by Paolozzi on the increased ubiquity of speed in his contemporary moment. However, in both *Towards a New Laocoon* and *Mechanik's Bench*, Paolozzi is far less concerned with what I identified as changes in the mythology of speed. Instead, these works engage with the consequences of what McHale refers to as the 'increasingly technological' means of 'cultural diffusion', through which '"products"' become less viewable as

[85] Thomas, 'Meccano Work', p. 106.
[86] Spencer, ''Dialogues on Art' 1962', p. 90.
[87] Thomas, 'Meccano Work', p. 108.
[88] Ibid., p. 108. ; Figure 3.16: Eduardo Paolozzi, *Crash*, 1964, aluminium, black and white photograph, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, GMA/40/10/5/371.

discrete, individual events' and instead more closely resemble 'related elements in a continuous contextual flow.'[89] This consequence of acceleration is explored by Paolozzi in these aluminium works through an emphasis on the rearrangement and interchangeability of component parts, with both aluminium works, and thereafter *Crash*, arresting the flux of this process to reflect upon it. By arresting flux in a way that depends less on the figurative qualities, and debatably the pathos, of his earlier bronzes, Paolozzi engages with the abstract nature of the 'continuous contextual flow' resulting from the accelerated 'cultural diffusion' of products more directly. By doing this, he identifies how the obfuscation of original context—or decontextualization—can be a powerful, liberatory stimulus for creativity, imagination, and play.

Paolozzi's fascination with decontextualization is evident in his sculpture *Towards a New Laocoon*. In name, this sculpture alludes to the *Laocoön Group*, an extremely famous ancient sculpture that depicts the tragic final moments of Laocoön and his sons in the Trojan Wars (3.17).[90] In Paolozzi's response to this work, however, reference to this myth is elided. The reason for this is explained by Daniel Herrmann, who notes that Paolozzi's 'fascination with the "Laocoon" lay […] in the group's visual legacy. With its history of various reconstructions and respectively varying reproductions in print, cast and copy, […] serv[ing] as a catalyst for Paolozzi's interest in the variation and re-combination of images and forms'.[91] In this sense, Paolozzi was more compelled by how the sculpture had undergone a process of replication and recombination than its mythic meaning, with *Towards a New Laocoon* representing the artist's response and contribution to this as an unfolding process whereby, in Stephen Feeke's words, this piece of high art 'had entered popular culture' and, through reproduction, 'become a mass-produced, cheap commodity'.[92] Thus, Paolozzi's sculpture represents an interpretation of the *Laocoön Group* through the lens of its accelerated rate of reproduction in his contemporary moment.

This fascination with recombination and the *Laocoön Group* is a quality of Paolozzi's work also acknowledged by Lawrence Alloway in *The Metallization of a Dream*:

> Paolozzi's content is not the strangeness of the contrast of the sculpture with alien surroundings, but its acclimation to the changing context. whereas in [Max] Ernst the sewing-

[89] McHale, 'The Plastic Parthenon', p. 97.
[90] Figure 3.17: *Laocoön Group*, cast, colour photograph, © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, UK <https://www.ashmolean.org/laocoon-group> [accessed 17 November 2023].
[91] Daniel Herrmann, 'Paolozzi and the Laocoön Group', in *Towards a New Laocoon: Exhibition, 13 May - 12 August2007, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds*, ed. by Penelope Jane Curtis and Stephen Feeke (Leeds: Henry Moore institute, 2007), pp. 53–54, p. 53.
[92] Stephen Feeke, 'Legacies of the Laocoön: Introduction to the Exhibition', in *Towards a New Laocoon: Exhibition, 13 May - 12 August2007, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds*, ed. by Penelope Jane Curtis and Stephen Feeke (Leeds: Henry Moore institute, 2007), pp. 9–13, p.13.

> machine and umbrella (though coded respectively as feminine and phallic) remain objectively stable and so become, when yoked together, odd, Paolozzi's objects have no set meanings. Therefore, he can create a world in which contrasting images reveal not their estrangement but, on the contrary, the inexhaustible meanings that follow from changing combinations.[93]

Writing in response to the presence of the Roman sculpture in Paolozzi's short film *The History of Nothing* (1961-2), Alloway, like Herrmann, notes the significance of processes of recombination, or bringing 'contrasting images' together, for the artist. Alloway's claim here, however, is also highly relevant for identifying a response to speed in Paolozzi's work. The emphasis Alloway places on how the artist's interest lay in the sculpture's 'acclimation' to 'changing context[s]' is crucial in this respect. For Alloway, the adaptation of objects to change was a pivotal concern of Paolozzi's because it showcased the 'inexhaustible meanings' of objects themselves and, in turn, demonstrated how rapid contextual change offered greater creative and imaginative possibilities. Given that Paolozzi was working at a time whereby '[t]he acceleration of change' had seemingly become 'an elemental force', as Toffler had it, it's difficult to see this as anything other than an attempt to produce work that would also be as acclimatised to the speed of change as the ancient *Laocoön Group* sculpture.[94] That is, work that was as comfortable as the ancient sculpture was with contextual change.

It's important to note that in his analysis of Paolozzi's work, Alloway does not attribute a sense of timelessness to either the artist's sculpture, or the *Laocoön Group*. Rather, he sees their comfortable relationship to change as stemming from the fact that 'Paolozzi's objects have no set meanings', an observation that, like Herrmann, suggests little interest with inherent mythic significance of the *Laocoön Group*, and that sees meanings as arising from the contexts with which works become situated. Alongside, *Towards a New Laocoon*, this meaninglessness of objects is lucidly captured in *Mechanik's Bench*, in which six undefinable metal objects adorn an aluminium bench. Elly Thomas has referred to this sculpture as an attempt by Paolozzi to capture his objects in a 'state of expectation', that is a moment prior to their definition by the artist through the process of their assembly.[95] This state of expectation is thus an attempt at depicting the inevitability of both the object's transformation, and of change in the artist's moment. The incomplete form the objects take hints at the multitude of creative possibilities, or 'inexhaustible meanings' such forms of change proffer. *Towards a New Laocoon* is thus just one of a multitude of possibilities arising from these otherwise abstract component parts, indicating the creative potentials that an accelerated milieu of change presents.

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[93] Paolozzi and Alloway, p. 50.
[94] Toffler, p. 1.
[95] Thomas, 'Meccano Work', p. 109.

Yet, in contrast to the positive connotations of change alluded to by Alloway—and Paolozzi's affirmation of accelerated change in *Towards a New Laocoon* and *Mechanik's Bench*—the artist also examined the negative possibilities of change too. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Crash* (3.16), which draws on parts also found within the earlier two sculptures, while augmenting them with tubular forms. These aspects of *Crash* arise from a further shift in Paolozzi's practice which saw him add a further sense of kinetic energy to his works, like in *Parrot* (1964, 3.18), a cartoon-like work that appears mid-stride, as if it were animated. *Crash* carries a similar sense of liveliness to *Parrot*.[96] However, its title alludes to automotive accident, lending the work a more sinister undertone. Like *Diana, Towards a New Laocoon, and Mechanik's Bench*, this vehicular point of reference marks *Crash* as a further commentary on speed. However, unlike these earlier sculptures, speed is suffused with a sense of disaster, inverting their playful and parodic logics. This lends *Crash* a more critical feel than its precursors, showcasing the artist's awareness of the potentially catastrophic consequences of too much speed, of desiring too much change too quickly.

That said, *Crash* is in no way a simple condemnation of speed through reference to disaster. Its arrested, dynamic form infuses the crash it references with a sublime quality that is as appealing as it is disconcerting. The sculpture seemingly invites a viewer to enter it, to climb it, and to grab the steering wheel-like object on prominent display.[97] In this sense, it is a work that embraces the spectacle of this destructive event as much as it draws attention to it. As with rubbernecking, it finds a visual thrill in the speed induced disaster. Because of this, there is a clear similarity between this work and J.G. Ballard's later novel *Crash* (1973), which I explore in the next chapter. Like Paolozzi's sculpture, Ballard's novel also alludes to something alluring, even potentially emancipatory, in the automotive disaster. This tendency to look upon the destructive qualities of accelerated change with approbation has clear analogues to an accelerationist affirmation of acceleration and is something I'll continue to explore through Paolozzi's screenprint works.

The Toy as War God: Speed and Military Logistics in Paolozzi's Print Works

While speed and play are both clear themes of Paolozzi's aluminium work, both are also features of his later 1960s print works, such as *Universal Electronic Vacuum*, Z*.E.E.P*, and *Moonstrips Empire*

[96] Figure 3.18: Eduardo Paolozzi, *Parrot*, 1964, aluminium, black and white photograph from the estate of David Farrell, reproduced in Judith Collins, *Eduardo Paolozzi* (UK: Lund Humphries, 2014), p. 150.

[97] The production of sculpture that a viewer might engage with was an increasing concern of Paolozzi's at this time. This is clearest in a work like *Rio* (1964-5), which is a large sculpture consisting of 6 free-standing parts that it's possible to move between. *Rio* consists of the recycled parts of other aluminium sculptures Paolozzi deconstructed at this time, and references pieces of all the other aluminium sculptures discussed in this chapter.

News. Throughout these works speed is evoked through prints that reference military manoeuvre, and military-industrial technologies—references to the context of the Cold War and how a state of mutually assured destruction made hair-trigger response to any form of attack a seeming necessity. Likewise, play is also depicted as both a fertilizing and devastating possibility, oftentimes linked to liberation in one breath and complicity with war and destruction in the next. This is a quality also captured succinctly in the earlier work *Metafisikal Translations*, which describes the 'Toy as War GoD' on a page headed 'Toys..'.[98] Here, the toy and the act of play are once again associated with deities and rituals of war—a quality that resonates with the more destructive qualities of children's play, and that therefore implies the uneasy status of play itself.

This strained status of play is evident in Paolozzi's print works following *Metafisikal Translations*, all of which have a much more clearly delineated relationship to speed. A great example of a work that relates speed to play is 'War Games Revised' from the *Universal Electronic Vacuum* suite (1967) (3.19).[99] Alex Potts reads this suite as reflecting 'the image-making capacities of the latest electronic technology' while also 'looking to a future of computer-generated images.'[100] Supporting this, the suite consists of several references to the iconic childhood Disney cartoon characters Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Goofy, and Donald Duck, but featured in a circular pixelated form. In this sense, the work pre-empts the latter development of pixel art, while also considering how dissemination of media imagery through virtual means might reproduce, and distort, visual imagery—a further example of a response to the acceleration induced decontextualization I identified in Paolozzi's sculpture above. In 'War Games Revised', this thematic concern with computer-generated images is also used to depict a repetitive diagram of military technologies, that Alex Potts has suggested 'calls to mind the American and Soviet militaries' virtual worlds of elaborately automated systems designed to program in advance for a possible nuclear attack.'[101] However, while the work certainly evokes this theme of automated systems, its colour palette and repeated stencil-like parts also make it reminiscent of the sheets from the model and toy kits described by Thomas. In this sense, 'War Games Revised' also resembles an unconstructed toy, carrying the very same 'state of expectation' as a work like *Mechanik's Bench*.[102] This positions 'War

[98] Eduardo Paolozzi, *Metafisikal Translations*, n.p. This is also reproduced on page 38 of *The Metallization of the Dream*.
[99] Figure 3.19: Eduardo Paolozzi, 'War Games Revised' from *Universal Electronic Vacuum* (UK: Editions Alecto, 1967), silkscreen and lithograph, Arts Council Collection, PR683.
[100] Alex Potts, 'Paolozzi's Pop New Brutalist World', *Tate Papers*, 21, 2014 <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/21/paolozzis-pop-new-brutalist-world> [accessed 29 June 2022].
[101] Ibid.
[102] Thomas, 'Meccano Work', p. 109.

Games Revised' as both a criticism of play, while also tantalising its viewer with an image of what war might be like if it really were a game—its logic totally separated from the possibility of human casualty through its total conversion into a toy kit, and thus both ridiculed, and removed from any sense of real danger.

After 'War Games Revised', Paolozzi would also engage with the relationship between war, play, and speed in the later piece 'Agile Coin, Gross Decision Logic' from *Z.E.E.P* (1970) (3.20).[103] Like the former work, this print continues to emphasise the speed of media communications by engaging with computing technology, something that is evident from the procedural flowchart central to the print. 'Agile Coin…' also responds directly to the use of wargames during the cold war, Agile/COIN being a counter insurgency game written for, and supplied to, the Pentagon in 1966.[104] The similar presentation of modular and repeat military objects to 'War Games Revised' make this work reminiscent of the earlier print. Only, in this iteration, the military images are more clearly defined, almost like pre-assembled plastic figures that have been carefully stored in toy boxes. For the most part, these figures are reminiscent of military logistics, the vehicular references suggesting an emphasis on movement that I have already showcased in Paolozzi's earlier aluminium works.[105] The one seemingly major exception to this—the Fritz Kahn-esque figure in the centre of the work—also cannot be exempted, bringing to mind Manuel De Landa's later idea that logistics represent the 'war […] machine's digestive and circulatory systems'.[106] Such references to military logistics are, to my mind, evidence of the work's relationship to speed, with Paolozzi emphasizing the connection speed has to military manoeuvre and war in such a way as to undermine his earlier assessment in a change in the mythology of speed in *Diana* from 'the bestiary of power' to something altogether more domestic.[107]

Paolozzi doubles this pessimistic appraisal of speed through his response to play in the print. Unlike in 'War Games Revised', Paolozzi makes no reference to the toy kit in 'Agile Coin'. Instead, the

[103] Figure 3.20: Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Agile Coin Gross Decision Logic' from *Z.E.E.P* (UK: Petersburg Press, 1970), Screenprint and lithograph, ©Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham.
[104] For more on the Agile/COIN wargame, see**:** Abt Associates, *The Pentagon's Rural AGILE/COIN Wargame (1966): A Wargaming Counter Insurgency Megagame*, ed. by John Armatys and John Curry (UK: The History of Wargaming Project, 2019). All of the codes referenced in the flowchart originally featured in a computerized version of the wargame. See: See: Agile/COIN, p. 11. How Paolozzi was aware of these codes at this time is a mystery to me; although, he may have encountered them while in the US in 1969, as part of the LACMA Art and Technology programme.
[105] My favourite example of these is the airship carrier at the top of the work emblazoned with Einstein's famous formula $E=mc^2$. This is a distorted reproduction of the USS Enterprise (CVN-65), the first nuclear powered aircraft carrier, on which the crew spelled out the formula when the ship first set sail across the world as part of Operation Sea Orbit (1964).
[106] Manuel De Landa, p. 105.
[107] Barthes, p. 89.

artist includes a flowchart that suggests the free-associative logics of the toy kit in the earlier work have been replaced by a more procedural kind of play.[108] By being rendered in this way, this work deftly identifies the role of rationalized forms of prediction in wargames, indicating their divergence from more free-form types of play, which might otherwise be considered more liberatory. This awareness of rationalized prediction is also evident from a box titled 'damage assessment model' in the bottom right of the work. One part of this box contains the term 'Markov C', a reference to Markov Chains, which are used as part of a statistical process for modelling sequences of possible events in wargames. This part of the work, alongside the flowchart, ties together its titular point of reference with later predictive computer programs, suggesting the artist's scepticism about virtual spaces and forms of play.

Yet, 'Agile Coin' is not wholly hostile to virtual space. Throughout the work, Paolozzi also uses breaks in the flowchart to allude to undetermined routines, with many of the boxes failing to connect with other parts of the print. These routines are both references to the illogical nature of war, while also being representative of unexplored avenues of play available in virtual spaces that may have unexpected, and perhaps liberatory, results. Likewise, from a computing perspective, they point to incomplete pieces of code in the military machine, suggesting that although it is an advanced system, it is one that would be forced to abruptly halt should procedure be interrupted. Because of this, 'Agile Coin' reminds a viewer that the nascent virtual technologies of war have yet to be truly mastered, while suggesting that they may prove a self-undermining source of friction for the entire cold war military-industrial complex.

Although less obviously associated with virtual technology, *Moonstrips* also contains a print characteristically like 'War Games Revised' and 'Agile Coin Gross Decision Logic', while the suite itself consists of a more complete engagement with play. *Moonstrips Empire News* is a clear response by Paolozzi to his contemporary media landscape, with Christopher Finch highlighting its significance as a theme in the work's introduction.[109] The work also engages with the lived experience of speed within this media landscape. Although often presented and exhibited as a series of individual screenprints, *Moonstrips* is in fact closer to an experimental book (3.21).[110] The work consists of a series of 98 different sheets that are presented by the artist in a transparent dayglo-pink box

[108] Thomas, 'Meccano Work', p. 108.
[109] See: Christopher Finch, in Eduardo Paolozzi, *Moonstrips Empire News* (London: Editions Alecto, 1967), n.p.
[110] Figure 3.21: Eduardo Paolozzi, Half of *Moonstrips Empire News* , (UK: Editions Alecto, 1967), displayed at University of Birmingham, *Moonstrips Empire News* exhibition, curated by Jenny Lance (2019), ©Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham.

(3.22).[111] Because of this, each sheet can be considered as a page of a codex, open to be re-ordered by a reader on a whim to produce novel interactions between the textual and visual elements of different pages. Many of the pages consist of barely legible found texts and images, which make static or concentrated viewing difficult, inviting the viewer to embrace the works dynamically. Some of the pages are also translucent, leading to the genesis of new meanings when overlayed on top of others. Responding to this quality of the work, Thomas has described them as 'a tool for play', the prints working as 'an improvisation game which prompts the viewer to create narrative through the creation of links between collaged elements.'[112] When coupled with its commentary on acceleration, this play through narrative co-creation is one of the ways that Paolozzi both affirms and criticises perceptions of the phenomenon throughout the suite.

On top of its affinity to play, *Moonstrips* also has an implied science-fictional quality, with Christopher Finch stating in its introduction that 'Californian scientists have proposed image-banks orbiting the Earth, Moonstrips is a terrestrial prototype.'[113] This statement captures a key fascination of the work: communications satellites.[114] The development of these satellites accelerated drastically in the 1960s, partly due to the military-industrial Space Race, but also as a commercial venture for communications companies such as AT&T owners of the first satellite to enable the live broadcast of television images between the US and Europe, Telstar 1 (1962)—a satellite that McHale would later refer to in 'The Plastic Parthenon' as the 'latest benchmark' of '[w]orld communications'.[115] In *Moonstrips* then, high-speed technology, such as the rockets used to propel the satellites into space, and the otherwise anonymous communications technologies underlying media dissemination (satellites) can be seen to conceptually converge. Through its titular theme, the work evidently responds to both the history of these developments and their relative invisibility despite their significance as structures that underpin the speed of media dissemination. Moreover, the game-like quality of the work acts as a premonition of the future effects of these technologies on media consumption habits—the mix and match quality of the pages in the box being a representation of users tapping in and out of 'image-bank' signals on a whim, offering the freedom of non-linear media

[111] Figure 3.22: Eduardo Paolozzi, Box for *Moonstrips Empire News*, (UK: Editions Alecto, 1967), displayed at University of Birmingham, *Moonstrips Empire News* exhibition, curated by Jenny Lance (2019), ©Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham.
[112] Elly Thomas, *Play and the Artist's Creative Process: The Work of Philip Guston and Eduardo Paolozzi*, Routledge Advances in Art and Visual Studies (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), p. 113.
[113] Finch, *Moonstrips Empire News* (London: Editions Alecto, 1967), n.p.
[114] Satellites are, in fact, a key reference image for Paolozzi throughout his entire oeuvre, his sculptural work *The Frog* being compared to an artist's impression of a satellite in Theo Crosby's *Uppercase* in as early as 1958. Thereafter, satellites appear in numerous works, including *Z.E.E.P*, and the Redditch and Tottenham Court Road mosaics.
[115] McHale, 'The Plastic Parthenon', p. 84.

engagement.[116] In *Moonstrips* then, high-speed consumption is conceivably portrayed as a liberatory possibility, with satellite technologies being envisaged as opening up a whole new vista for the free-play and re-arrangement of images for the purposes of creating new meanings, a quality of the work reminiscent of the artist's interest in changing contexts and decontextualization in his aluminium works.

Although *Moonstrips* suggests a celebratory reading of accelerated media dissemination, upon closer inspection the work also undercuts it. One of the sheets in the series, featuring the footer ''Round the world,' depicts a chess-like game taking place in front of faded a map of the Earth (3.23).[117] This can be interpreted as a visual translation of the 'orbiting' 'image-banks' described by Finch in the introduction. On the chessboard are an assortment of objects that constitute game pieces, including several machines such as a steam train, a film projector, a rocket, an engine, and a bus, as well as several other non-mechanical objects. This image offers something of a pictoral depiction of the logic pertaining to the rest of the work, the hand hovering in the image's foreground being synonymous with the viewer who is rearranging the game pieces so 'a whole new range of syntactical links becomes possible.'[118] Alongside the representation of a game on this print, the layout of the text on this sheet also resembles a rule book for a board or card game. Without scrutiny, it's possible to imagine the top left column of the work as a description of the game, while the text underneath the title 'WAR GAMES' could be a description of the game's rules. Finally, the numerated list under 'TARGETS, TARGET KILLS, AND TARGET VULNERABILITY' in the right-hand column invites comparison to a scoring mechanism, with final paragraph providing details of how a winner is declared.[119]

These aspects of the piece, as well as the way the hand ominously hovers above a missile-shaped object, are intended to form a satirical commentary on war. The implication here being one of viewer and artist complicity. The hovering hand, which is also possibly the viewer's or artist's hand, suggests that through playing the game by rearranging the work's contents, the viewer or

[116] In her analysis of the work, Thomas compares this quality of *Moonstrips* to another of Paolozzi's later prints *B.A.S.H* (1971), the creative process behind which he compared with 'television channel hopping'. Thomas, *Play and the Artist's Creative Process*, p. 119.
[117] Paolozzi, *Moonstrips Empire News*, n.p. ; Figure 3.23: Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Round the world,' (untitled) page from *Moonstrips Empire News* (London: Editions Alecto, 1967), Screenprint, Tate <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/paolozzi-no-title-p04805> [accessed 17 November 2023].
[118] Finch, *Moonstrips Empire News*, n.p.
[119] Paolozzi, *Moonstrips Empire News*, n.p. Elly Thomas has also interpreted some of Paolozzi's other prints as gameboards, including *Mr Peanut* (1970), and '7 Pyramide in form einer achtel skugel' from *Universal Electronic Vacuum* (1967). See: Thomas, *Play and the Artist's Creative Process*, pp. 125-7.

artist is also partaking in a wargame, even if unknowingly. In her reading, Thomas extends this logic to the later work *B.A.S.H* (1971), noting that:

> In prints such as *B.A.S.H.*, real life atrocities and weapons of war sit beside Hollywood icons and science-fiction robots; all reach an equivalence as images of consumption placed in a theatre of lurid entertainment. With the individual elements removed from context, we become emotionally detached from any sense of cause and effect. As interactive viewers, Paolozzi forces us to acknowledge how we become complicit in this terrible absurdity; as players, we begin to treat all images as "play" material.[120]

Likewise, while *Moonstrips* uses play to present the liberatory possibilities afforded by the new technologies powering a high-speed communications environment, the work also highlights how the decontextualization that enables such forms of play to begin with may have equally absurd, and devastating consequences both on the psyche of the viewer, while also embedding them in the production and reproduction of atrocity. Alongside being a speculative condemnation of the future of both the media and play, however, this aspect of *Moonstrips* is also targeted at how military technology is being used to increase the pace of domestic life in his present. The reference to wargames in the work being made at a time when, in the US, and increasingly everywhere else, '[warg]ames and simulations mutated from an experimental role designed to elicit insights in the participants to an institutionalized productive role, transforming civilians into military planners', thanks, according to Manuel De Landa, to the widespread adoption of Systems Analysis.[121] In this vein, although Paolozzi's *Moonstrips* is partly optimistic about the newfound possibilities opened up by the accelerated dissemination of media, it also indicates its dark side, and with it the sinister underbelly of what, in my analysis of *Diana*, I termed changes in the mythology of speed.

The idea of there being a dark side to acceleration is also alluded to within the textual elements of the *Moonstrips* suite. In the bottom right-hand column of ''Round the World' page, there is a section of collage text that reads:

> up in a hotel room American newspaper men pound out their stories, feverishly, trying to keep up with events that happen so fast that their copy is dated even before it leaves their typewriters. If that passion swept into government buildings it might mean the beginning of the end of civilisation – or it might merely burn itself out and die in hopeless sobs of indignation. Affords [sic.]. Persons who had never used brush of pencil [sic.] have thus

[120] Thomas, *Play and the Artist's Creative Process*, p. 120.
[121] De Landa, p. 102. De Landa attributes the development of Systems Analysis to RAND in the late-1940s, however he thereafter explains that 'Systems Analysis did not become an institution until Robert McNamara became Secretary of Defense for the Kennedy Administration.'

> suddenly become in the course of an analysis accomplished portrayers of the verbally indestribable [sic.] contents of their psyche[.][122]

In presenting 'American newspaper men' as 'trying to keep up with events that happen so fast that their copy is dated even before it leaves their typewriters', Paolozzi suggests that the speed of change outpaces the ability to report it. This section of text thus indicates acceleration's uncontrollability, and with it, the innate inability to comprehend discrete events in the 'continuous contextual flow' of cultural products I previously discussed in relation to Paolozzi's earlier sculptural works.[123] In a certain way, this implies the wholesale futility of attempting to represent this flow to begin with, marking it out as a moment of *Moonstrips* where Paolozzi undermines his own project.[124] Yet, the contiguity of the first two sentences with the latter, clearly differently sourced, final sentence adds a hopeful spin to this impossible task. This final part of the passage suggests that the attempts made by the reporters to 'keep up' with 'events' in external reality, reflects the 'verbally indescribable' nature of their internal reality, their 'psyche'. In this sense their actions are saved from total inefficacy. Their attempts to respond to accelerated change, and the speed at which events happen, produce a Freudian dream-work that, if nothing else, provides a kind of manifest content through which their internal responses to acceleration might be deciphered. *Moonstrips* provides a starting point for such psychological analysis, which is also something I'll continue to explore in my following chapter on Ballard.

Conclusion: The End of the Dream

In the opening of this chapter, I reflected upon Toffler's quotation of French art critic Pierre Francastel, namely the idea that ''[s]peed […] has become something undreamt-of, and constant movement every man's intimate experience.''[125] I suggested that this spoke to a 1960s context which Paolozzi's work also responded to, one in which accelerated change meant that speed was being increasingly accepted as a ubiquitous feature of daily life. As I have demonstrated, Paolozzi's response to speed and acceleration was incredibly diverse across a whole-body of '60s sculpture and printworks. Furthermore, I outlined how these responses to speed and acceleration were often

[122] Paolozzi, *Moonstrips Empire News*, n.p.
[123] McHale, 'The Plastic Parthenon', p. 97.
[124] The first part of this passage about reporters is repeated within other pages of *Moonstrips*. It also feels important to note here that Paolozzi saw the work as a failure, something which spurred his later engagement with Ballard and Moorcock at *New Worlds*. This was partly because he thought an actual book without dependency on images would work better as a visual analogue to media consumption habits at the time. For more on this, see**:** David Brittain, *Eduardo Paolozzi at New Worlds* (Manchester: Savoy Books, 2013), p. 94.
[125] Toffler, *Future Shock*, p. 176.

characterised by uneasy contradictions, be it an awareness of speed's relationship to commodification with *Diana*, the realisation of positive and negative possibilities of decontextualization in *Towards a New Laocoon*, *Mechanik's Bench*, and *Crash*, or the connections between high-speed technology and the military-industrial complex evident in the artist's print works.

Even though Paolozzi shows an awareness of the negative possibilities of speed technology, my analysis throughout this chapter makes clear that his responses to speed and acceleration are often ambivalent and contradictory. His views on speed's commodification in *Diana* hints at the possibility for parodic resignification such commodification affords. *Towards a New Laocoon* and *Mechanik's Bench* both show an affinity towards developing a sculpture at ease with contextual change and decontextualization, while *Crash* explores the seductive appeal of the speed-induced disaster. Finally, Paolozzi's print works demonstrate the connections between virtual speed and the military-industrial complex in a manner that highlights both unwitting complicity and the liberatory possibilities that such forms of military technology might offer. Even if Paolozzi's work is not always accelerationist, my analysis reveals an enduring fascination with speed which affirms acceleration's liberatory potential while allowing space for more ambivalent critique.

Alongside there being an accelerationist proclivity to his work, Paolozzi also provides a fascinating account of accelerated change in this '60s period, because he highlights how acceleration was undergoing a shift towards the virtual and digital realm. This is a theme of increasing significance for the subsequent chapters of this thesis, which further correlate acceleration less with physical sources of change, and mass and popular culture, and more with the rise of virtual technologies. As I will demonstrate, Ballard's work gestures to such a shift with its turn to inner space, which in *Crash* is supported through the character Vaughan's connection to computer science. Later, the CCRU's work represents a strict response to the rise and development of the World Wide Web, and the '90s cyberculture that surrounds newly popular technology.

Chapter 4
J.G. Ballard: Flight and Stasis

Frenzied Stasis, Flight, and Imagination

In his 1968 short story 'Crash!', republished in his 1970 work *The Atrocity Exhibition*, the author J.G. Ballard narrates the results of fake studies into the psychologies of car crash victims. Acting as a precursor to the author's later 1973 novel of the same name, this work identifies the car crash as an erotic event while also imitating the scientific tone of the latter work, as exemplified in the claim that 'auto-crash victims showed a similar upsurge in both sexual activity and overall levels of general health.'[1] Being collage narratives, 'Crash!' and *The Atrocity Exhibition* reveal a concern with the consequent dangers of an acceleration-induced decontextualization I explored in relation to Paolozzi's aluminium sculpture and print works in the previous chapter. Like Paolozzi's work, Ballard's does not propose a solution to the moral dilemma such decontextualization presents, with the author expressing a similar ambivalence to the artist about its consequences. However, Ballard's work carries darker connotations than Paolozzi's zany printed colourways imply. The author is much more invested in transgression than the artist, exploring themes like psychopathology and death in works like *The Atrocity Exhibition* and the later novel *Crash* (1973). Because of this, Ballard's work is seemingly much less hopeful than Paolozzi's, with the author preferring to indulge in the existential dilemmas that arise from the extraordinary pace of change in his contemporary moment.[2] This is not to identify the author as hopeless, or catastrophe obsessed, accusations that he was quite keen to kick.[3] Rather, it is to suggest that Ballard's assessment of accelerated change is slightly more fraught than the artist's.

[1] J. G. Ballard, 'Crash!', in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, ed. by V. Vale and Andrea Juno, Rev., expanded, annotated, illustrated ed (San Francisco, CA: RE/Search Publications, 1990), pp. 97–99, p. 97.
[2] To refer back to Martin Bax's remarks that I quoted in the introduction to this thesis, '[t]he industrial revolution which *started* to change the way people behave, is now changing the way people behave at an *extraordinary pace*. […] Ballard is the chronicler […] of [… this] stage of the industrial revolution' (italics in source). See: V. Vale and Andrea Juno, 'Interview with Martin Bax', in *J.G. Ballard*, ed. by V. Vale and Andrea Juno, RE/Search, no. 8/9 (San Francisco: Re/Search, 1984), pp. 36–41, p. 36.
[3] In an interview with James Goddard and David Pringle in 1975, the author even went as far as to say that 'I don't see my fiction as disaster oriented, certainly not most of my SF […]. People seem to imply that these are books with unhappy endings, but the reverse is true: they're books with happy endings, stories of psychic fulfilment. See: James Goddard and David Pringle, 'An Interview with J.G. Ballard (1975)', in *Extreme Metaphors: Selected Interviews with J.G. Ballard, 1967-2008*, ed. by Simon Sellars, and Daniel Finbarr John O'Hara (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), pp. 81–98, p. 88.

One reason for this difference between author and artist is down to a divergent perception of what the future itself would look like, which in turn stemmed from a different perspective of the present. Where in the last chapter I aligned Paolozzi's sixties works with the positive prognostications of futurologists like John McHale and Alvin Toffler, with Ballard such connections are less clear. In his essay 'Speeding to the Doldrums' (2016), Andrew Warstat alludes to one possible reason for this divergence in relation to a story contemporaneous with 'Crash!', 'The Dead Astronaut' (1968), in which he notes that:

> Ballard's exploration of the future leads not to a programmatic forecast, but to an ambivalent re-calibration of what the process of futurological speculation, *in itself*, actually means in an historical era where there seems to be no future, or where the future is simply more of the same.[4]

By claiming that 'the future is simply more of the same', Warstat implies that Ballard's short story responds to a kind of stasis. However, rather than stasis in a typical sense—as I used it in my chapter on the Independent Group—this is more akin to stasis as a form of 'frenetic standstill', the condition identified by Hartmut Rosa that I explored in the first chapter, whereby '*nothing remains the way it is* while at the same time *nothing essential changes*' (italics in source).[5] This is because, as Warstat notes, Ballard's short story does in fact appear 'in a wider historical context of change, where the possibility for another type of future was palpable and real.'[6] The work pre-dates events like the Apollo 11 moon landing, while being co-extensive with a moment of mass social upheaval in May '68, the counterculture of the late sixties and early seventies, and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. It was therefore written within a context where the future was far more uncertain than might be assumed from the present.

Ballard's tendency to write as if there is "no future" within a context of such drastic change, suggests that he identifies acceleration as not only opposed to inertia, but also as its possible cause. Yet, Ballard's response to this acceleration-induced stasis is uneasy. Rather than using it to dismiss acceleration and its effects wholesale, he favours exploring its psychological ramifications, sensing in

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[4] Andrew Warstat, 'Speeding to the Doldrums: Stalled Futures and the Disappearance of Tomorrow in "The Dead Astronaut"', in *J.G. Ballard: Landscapes of Tomorrow*, ed. by Richard Brown, Christopher Duffy, and Elizabeth Stainforth, Dialogue, volume 22 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 57–68, p. 58. Warstat's essay, whether knowingly or not, also invokes John McHale's work through its epigraphic use of Ballard's quote 'Does the future still have the future?' This quote echoes the title of McHale's futurological work, *The Future of the Future* (1969). Warstat, p. 57, quoting J. G Ballard, 'Back to the Heady Future', in *A User's Guide to the Millennium*, (London: Flamingo, 1996), p. 192.

[5] Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, New Directions for Critical Theory, Paperback ed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 283.

[6] Warstat, p. 59.

it the production of new forms of psychopathology that are as liberating as they are harmful. This tendency to see liberation where there's harm is revealing of Ballard's tendency to waver between subversive and acquiescent affirmations of acceleration, which, as in previous chapters, implies a consistency between Ballard's work and forms of accelerationism.

Throughout this chapter, I explore Ballard's relationship to accelerationism through one of his key textual themes, flight.[7] Alongside imprisonment, the stopping of time, and superannuation or being left behind, flight is one of four Ballardian themes 'or existential situations' explored by David Pringle in his work *Earth is the Alien Planet*, all the way back in 1979.[8] Since Pringle made this observation, both flight and the physical inability to fly have remained key metaphors throughout Ballard's fiction. This is evident even in late works like *Super-Cannes* (2000) in which the narrator, Paul Sinclair, is recovering from a plane crash—an injury induced by the failures of human-made, mechanically powered flight. This feature of the work aligns with what Dorothy Butchard has identified as an enduring theme of Ballard's: the use of a 'violent crash as a means to disrupt the boredom of a "settled" existence and to "lay bare the psychopathologies of everyday life."'[9] In the case of Paul Sinclair, however, this accident and form of '"settled" existence' is of a particular kind, one that actually makes him reminiscent of the narrator of the much earlier work 'The Cloud Sculptors of Coral D' (1967), Major Parker, who also has an injury preventing him from flying. Reading this particular allusion to flight as a 'Romantic master metaphor', Thomas Knowles has suggested that Parker's 'ailment' is in fact more 'immediately suggestive of wounded or dormant imaginative capacity'.[10] This reflects a wider tendency in Ballard's work to connect the pursuit of flight with a desire to overcome otherwise curtailed faculties of imagination, or resist imagined and imaginative stasis.

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[7] Previous connections between Ballard's works and accelerationism have also been drawn by Benjamin Noys, who has explored Ballard's work through the 'tension between a critical analysis of contemporary capitalism and reinforcement of the forms of contemporary capitalism' evident in Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's call to 'accelerate the process' of marketization in *Anti-Oedipus* explored in chapter one. See: Benjamin Noys, ''Love and Napalm: Export USA': Schizoanalysis, Acceleration, and Contemporary American Literature', in *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Literature*, ed. by Ian Buchanan, Schizoanalysis Applications (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 175–89, p. 178.

[8] David Pringle, *Earth Is the Alien Planet: J. G. Ballard's Four-Dimensional Nightmare*, Popular Writers of Today; v. 26, 1st ed (San Bernardino, Calif: Borgo Press, 1979), p. 53.

[9] Dorothy Butchard, 'Identification and the "Intelligent City"', in *The Art of Identification: Forensics, Surveillance, Identity*, ed. by Rex Ferguson, Melissa M. Littlefield, and James Purdon (University Park, PA, US: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), pp. 223–57 <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=6680655> [accessed 30 August 2023], p. 237 citing Andrzej Gąsiorek, *J.G. Ballard* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 20.

[10] Thomas Knowles, 'Aeolian Harps in the Desert: Romanticism and Vermillion Sands', in *J.G. Ballard: Landscapes of Tomorrow*, ed. by Richard Brown, Christopher Duffy, and Elizabeth Stainforth, Dialogue (The Netherlands: Brill Rodopi, 2016), XXII, 23–39, p. 30.

My analysis engages with Ballard's presentation of flight in two texts, *Crash* and 'Memories of the Space Age' (1982). I argue that these texts represent exemplary instances of the author's engagements with flight, showcasing its contradictory employment as a metaphor for both 'frenetic standstill' and a desire to overcome forms of '"settled" existence' and imaginative stasis. Beginning with *Crash*, I argue that this novel is the perfect example of an equivocal representation of flight because of its contradictory presentation throughout the text. In this work, flight is symbolic of both 1) the inescapability of the planned urban environment, 2) a means of escape from this environment's otherwise totalizing grasp. This situates flight as something of a narrative paradox, acting as both an emblem of the 'frenetic standstill' that the characters experience throughout, and something that is desired as a solution to this standstill—just as further acceleration remains desireable to the accelerationist despite the role it plays in producing a sense of inertia.

Likewise, flight is also self-contradicting in 'Memories of the Space Age'. In this short story, it is presented as a nostalgic answer to a more general condition of timelessness that has, in turn, arisen as a consequence of flight itself. In my view, this nostalgic quality of flight in the narrative pre-empts Noys's indictment of accelerationism in *Malign Velocities* as 'nostalgic'.[11] However, where Noys sees this nostalgia as a fatal flaw for a politics that is otherwise 'relentlessly directed towards the future', I argue that Ballard's short story is much less emphatically critical of it, equating it with a turn to inner space that he sees as necessary for both overcoming stasis and coming to terms with the future as such.[12] In my view, this marks Ballard's story as both: 1) a criticism of accelerationism, and the more contemporary turn towards outer space exemplified in the writings of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, Nick Land, and Benedict Singleton explored in chapter one, and 2) a proposal for a turn to inner space as a form of accelerationism—one that has some consistencies with the embraces of mass culture found in contemporaries and forebears like Paolozzi and the Independent Group.

Alongside investigating the contradictory portrayals of flight in Ballard's *Crash* and 'Memories of the Space Age', I also reflect on a further exemplary quality of Ballard's work: its intimations of what I diagnosed in chapter one as the paradoxically progressive and reactionary qualities of accelerationism itself. These contradictory qualities of accelerationism are made palpable in Ballard's texts primarily through how flight is pursued by antagonistic characters. In *Crash*, this is evident through the character of Vaughan who is responsible for the novel's final act of flight when he 'jump[s] the rails of the London Airport Flyover' in his attempt to crash his car into the film actress

[11] Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism & Capitalism* (Winchester, UK Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2014), p. 23.
[12] Ibid.

Elizabeth Taylor.[13] Throughout the novel, Ballard leaves Vaughan's motives uncertain, a strategy that illustrates the unsettling ambivalence of the violent gesture. Then there is Hinton, who in 'Memories of the Space Age' is concerned with entering a state of perpetual flight and hopes to do so by using the end of time—brought about by a mysterious space sickness—as an opportunity to enter a state of total levitation. In both cases, flight plays a crucial role for each character, on the one hand operating as the promise of emancipation from the stasis of their lived realities, while, on the other, acting as the very thing that immerses them most completely within the logic of stasis enveloping their respective worlds. This is a clear echo of the paradoxical relationship between accelerationism and acceleration I explored in chapter one: accelerationists employing acceleration to try and escape from a condition of 'frenetic standstill', while ultimately preserving acceleration as the cause of such standstill to begin with.

While Vaughan and Hinton are useful for showcasing the inconsistencies of the accelerationist position, before delving into these two narratives I want to first highlight how these inconsistencies are also evident in Ballard's relationship to science fiction more broadly. I will do this by analysing his essay 'Fictions of Every Kind'—a text I have already partially explored in the thesis introduction, and that is included as an accelerationist text in *#Accelerate: the Accelerationist Reader* (2014). In this essay, Ballard argues that science fiction is a more effective genre than conventional social realism for coming to terms with the increasingly technologized landscape of the twentieth century. In the course of making this argument, however, I illustrate how the author also acknowledges that science fiction is often predicated on a radical break with the past—something that is evident in references to the development of novel literary and cultural forms, such as 'cassette and videotape fictions'.[14] I argue that despite Ballard's hyperbolic provocations about science fiction's capacity to adapt to these forms, these forms ultimately failed to break with the more traditional social novel in the way that Ballard anticipated. Rather than using this to indict the author's predictive capacity, however, I instead suggest that this failure relates to his perception of the genre as one that both represents present day reality and desires to imaginatively overcome it. Over the course of my reading, I suggest that this leads science fiction to perform the same function as flight does for the author, at once offering the possibility of liberation from a kind of cultural stasis, while also highlighting—and perhaps contributing to—the cause of this stasis to begin with.

[13] J. G Ballard, 'Crash', in *Crash: The Collectors Edition*, ed. by Chris Beckett (4th Estate, 2014), pp. 1–266, p. 1.
[14] J.G. Ballard, 'Fictions of Every Kind', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 235–40, p. 237.

Fictions of Every Kind

In 'Fictions of Every Kind', Ballard makes the provocative claim that '[e]verything is becoming science fiction'.[15] Charting a flight away from the social novel—which Ballard saw as epitomised by the likes of Saul Bellow, John Updike, Muriel Spark and others—'Fictions of Every Kind' sees the author polemicise science fiction as 'the only fiction which has any influence on the world around it', and equally as the only form of fiction capable of reconciling with the fact that 'social relationships are no longer as important as the individual's relationship with the technological landscape of the twentieth century.'[16] Although writing about science fiction, in the essay Ballard also attributes a lot of his ideas to the 'Pop painters and sculptors' of the period, 'Paolozzi, Hamilton, Warhol, Wesselman, Ruscha'.[17] Ballard did this because he believed that all of these figures, to one degree or another, explored otherwise banal aspects of everyday life and the ways that they were technologically mediated: 'the gleam of refrigerator cabinets, the contours of a wife's or husband's thighs passing the newsreel images on a color TV set, the conjunction of musculature and chromium artefact within an automobile interior, the unique postures of passengers on an airport escalator'.[18] This technological mediation of everyday life was key for Ballard, who, above all, viewed science fiction as 'a response to science and technology as perceived by the inhabitants of the consumer goods society'—a society that was also addressed by the pop artists he describes above.[19]

In his essay, one of the principal sources Ballard credits for his ideas is the artist Eduardo Paolozzi. He does this by paraphrasing part of an 'illustrated statement' the artist delivered as part of a breakneck paced lecture at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1958, titled 'Image Making—God Breaking'.[20] Republished later the same year in Theo Crosby's *Uppercase* as 'Notes from a Lecture at the Institute of Contemporary Arts', the text includes a section where the artist claims that 'it is conceivable that in 1958 a higher order of imagination exists in a SF pulp produced on the outskirts

[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., p. 240.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., p. 238.
[20] The speed of Paolozzi's delivery of this lecture is noted by Robin Spencer, who explains in his introduction to the work in *Eduardo Paolozzi: Writings and Interviews*, that: 'A sarcastic notice of the event in *The Times* for 2 May 1958 referred to 'the breakneck pace of his talk—against a quick changing background of slides of his figures as well as of photographs of crashed cars and aircraft, men with mechanical arms, and other odds and ends which he had carefully cut out of newspapers…a word he repeats over and over again—"disintegration"—and a process—the "metamorphosis of rubbish".' See: Eduardo Paolozzi, '"Notes from a Lecture at the Institute of Contemporary Arts", 1958', in *Eduardo Paolozzi: Writings and Interviews*, ed. by Robin Spencer (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 80–86, p. 80.

of LA than the little magazines of today.'[21] Paolozzi's statement here was, at the time, a clear reference to his fifties activity with the Independent Group, and alluded to a fascination he shared with other Group members for pulp science fiction covers, such as those collected in his Krazy Kat Arkive, and showcased in *BUNK* (1972) (4.1).[22]

In his own essay, Ballard alters Paolozzi's statement to the following:

> It is now some fifteen years since the sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi, a powerful and original writer in his own right, remarked that the science fiction magazines produced in the suburbs of Los Angeles contained far more imagination and meaning than anything he could find in the literary periodicals of the day.[23]

Ballard's quoting of Paolozzi here indicates the extent to which the artist influenced the author's ideas, with the author's interest in science fiction aligning with the imaginative value Paolozzi ascribed to the genre. However, Ballard's rephrasing of Paolozzi also indicates a point of divergence between the two figures. In his statement, for instance, Ballard refers to 'science fiction magazines' instead of 'SF Pulps'—a minor distinction but an important one given that the new wave of science fiction that Ballard was a part of was predicated on a move away from many of the interests of the earlier Pulp form. Moreover, the 'little magazines' mentioned by Paolozzi become 'literary periodicals'.[24] Where Paolozzi's reference to 'little magazines' suggests that his primary concern with science fiction corresponded to the kinds of source material he used in the production of his artworks, Ballard's point is more clearly an attempt to position a lower literary form, 'science fiction magazines', against a higher one, 'literary periodicals'. This reveals that although Ballard is equally concerned with the imaginative potency of these sources, he has a different motivation for vocalizing this when compared to Paolozzi. In fact, Ballard's argument is more proximal to the Independent Group's opposition to high culture that I analysed through Reyner Banham's and Lawrence Alloway's writings in Chapter Two, a feature of his essay indicative of a greater connection to that specific context than Paolozzi himself—even if the artist's views arose under the same conditions.

This connection between 'Fictions of Every Kind' and the Independent Group is palpable in Ballard's autobiography, *Miracles of Life* (2008). In this much later work, Ballard claims that the Group 2 and Group 6 exhibits at *This is Tomorrow* (1956), 'convinced [him] that science fiction was far closer to reality than the conventional realist novel of the day'—a very clear reassertion of his

[21] Spencer, p. 85.
[22] Figure 4.1: Pulp Science fiction covers, A. Leslie Ross, *Future Science Fiction*, July 1952, and Frank Kelly Freas, *Fantastic Universe*, April 1955, Krazy Kat Arkive, V&A Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1985/3/3/528.
[23] Ballard, 'Fictions of Every Kind', p. 238.
[24] Ibid., 238

perspective in 'Fictions of Every Kind'.[25] Ballard thereafter further elaborates on his interest in the IG later in the same chapter through an analysis of the poster for Group 2's exhibit (Richard Hamilton's *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*) and Group 6's 'Patio and Pavilion'. In his assessment of both Group 2's poster and Group 6's stand, Ballard indicates that even though these works appear to produce oppositional statements about their present moment—one domestic, the other post-apocalyptic—they are in fact united by themes of consumerism. The author justifies this view through a reading of how *Just what is it…?* 'depicted a world entirely constructed from popular advertising', which he argues, at the time, constituted 'a convincing vision of the future that lay ahead'.[26] Thereafter, he also suggest that the constellation of symbolic objects in Group 6's 'Patio and Pavilion' also revealed that '[i]f the future was to be built of anything, it would be from a set of building blocks provided by consumerism.'[27] These allusions to popular advertising and consumerism meant that these parts of *This is Tomorrow* operated as convincing predictions of what the future would look like for the author, while confirming, through their science fiction-like qualities, that the genre was akin to a social realism capable of apprehending the scientific and technological developments of a contemporary consumer goods society.

Ballard also mentions the impact of *This is Tomorrow* on his views of science fiction in an interview he gave with Paolozzi in 1971. In 'Speculative Illustrations', he claims that '[t]o go to the Whitechapel in 1956 and to see my experience of the real world being commented upon, played back to me with all kinds of ironic gestures, that was tremendously exciting. I could really recreate the future, that was the future, not the past.'[28] The final part of this claim, that the author 'could really recreate the future' and that what he was seeing was 'not the past', suggests that Ballard also saw the *This is Tomorrow* exhibition as a radical break with the past. This perception of the exhibition's novelty is crucial for the author's views about science fiction in 'Fictions of Every Kind'. This is because, throughout this essay, Ballard also suggests that the genre is part of a more radical, technologically precipitated, shift in literary and cultural forms, something that he sees as a direct consequence of the genre's compatibility with the effects of accelerated change on the mass media. Ballard's embrace of science fiction on the basis of its compatibility with accelerated change showcases his accelerationist tendency throughout the essay, with Mackay and Avanessian

[25] J. G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life*, Kindle Edition (London: Harper Collins, 2014), p. 189.
[26] Ibid., p. 188
[27] Ibid., pp. 188-189.
[28] Frank Whitford, J.G. Ballard, and Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Speculative Illustrations: Eduardo Paolozzi in Conversation with J. G. Ballard and Frank Whitford', *Jgballard.Ca* <https://www.jgballard.ca/media/1971_studio_international_magazine.html> [accessed 17 January 2020].

concluding from this that Ballard 'advocat[es] the role of science fiction not only as "the only possible realism in an increasingly artificialized society", but as an ingredient in its acceleration.'[29]

Ballard evidences this accelerationist proclivity in 'Fictions of Every Kind' through emphatic declarations about science fiction, such as when he suggests that it: 1) is 'becom[ing] the new currency of an ever-expanding future', 2) helps people prepare for 'the possibility of a life radically different from their own', and 3) is 'likely to be the only form of literature which will cross the gap between the dying narrative fiction of the present and the cassette and videotape fictions of the near future.'[30] In these moments, Ballard moves from identifying science fiction as a new form of social realism to treating it as part of a movement towards a totally novel and innovative forms of literary and cultural production. In this sense, science fiction is not only a form for grappling with society as it is, but also a driver of change and innovation in and of itself. Of further importance here is a key comparison Ballard makes between literary production and commercial advertising—something that he first alludes to through the question '[w]hat can Saul Bellow and John Updike do that J. Walter Thompson, the world's largest advertising agency and its greatest producer of fiction, can't do better?'[31] After asking this question Ballard claims, 'the role of the writer today has totally changed—he is now merely one of a huge army of people filling the environment with fictions of every kind.'[32] Here, Ballard's claim is a simple one, but crucial for highlighting the radical possibilities of science fiction as a genre. He considers the author of fiction in his contemporary moment to be in direct competition with an array of different producers of fiction, corporate and/or anonymous agents (and agencies), who also employ imagination to get their messages across. Therefore, for Ballard in 1971, it is necessary for the writer to now 'out-imagine everyone else', lest 'sliding gradients point their way to their exits.'[33] For him, this problem of imagination, cultivated by the accelerated development of fictions in the forms of advertisement, is best addressed by writers of science fiction.

The polemic verve with which Ballard aligns science fiction to a "radical shift" in technology and culture, and the demands facing writers, is one of the most compelling facets of his essay. This is not due to the prescience of his prognoses, however. In fact, many of Ballard's predictions ultimately never came into fruition. His claim that '[s]cience fiction has always been very much a corporate activity', and that 'no more 'great names' stand out than in the design of consumer durables, of for that matter Rheims Cathedral' couldn't be further from the reality today, in which science fiction has

[29] Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, 'Introduction', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 1–46, p. 19.
[30] Ballard, 'Fictions of Every Kind', p. 237.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., p. 238
[33] Ibid.

a vast canon of "greats"—many of whom Ballard lists, and that, some might argue, includes the author himself. Moreover, Ballard's insistence on the demise of narrative fiction in favour of a future dominated by 'cassette and videotape fictions' has aged extremely poorly, with the social novel remaining a predominant form of literary consumption. So far, the 'cassette and videotape fictions' Ballard speaks of have not fully replaced narrative fiction and comparable technologies like the audiobook are largely consumed as narrated novels. While in a certain sense some of Ballard's claims have proven prescient—science fiction is unquestionably a powerhouse genre, existing in a multitude of media and even influencing much in the way of social commentary—for the most part his predictions about the unique anonymity of the genre and literary development seem to have fallen short, and perhaps serve as an indictment of his view of science fiction as a catalyst of accelerated change.

Rather than seeing this as a failure of Ballard's argument, reading 'Fictions of Every Kind' through accelerationism helps to identify these qualities of his essay as pertaining to an imaginative stasis that he was opposed to at the time. In this instance, this imaginative stasis relates to forms of literature and Ballard's concerns are discernible in the contemporaneous interview with Paolozzi briefly mentioned above. Here, he considers the relationship between the history of fine art and literature:

> In the fine arts there was a major revolution somewhere about 1860 and in the field of literature that revolution hasn't yet taken place. There's a consciousness in English life that we also lack, a missing revolution here, too, which would have redefined the landscape. The fact is that the main tradition in the fine arts for the last 50 years at least has been the tradition of the new. The main pressure on the sculptor or painter is the pressure of the new. The new to the new. But in literature the main tradition is the tradition of the old. Where Eduardo and his fellow painters and sculptors are expected to find something new to say, my fellow writers and myself are expected to find something old, and to go on saying it. And nothing alerts, will strike terror into the ear of a publisher so much as the word 'experimental'. And the next most alarming word is 'new'.
>
> You see, the novel, despite what appears to be the technical advance of Joyce or William Burroughs, the novel is basically an early 19th century structure. The writer still sees himself in the role of an Academy painter producing historical paintings. The sort of revolution achieved by the Impressionists, limited simply to its effect on the choice of subject-matter, has not yet been achieved in literature. I mean no-one is yet writing like Corot painted, if you see the connection. Most writers see themselves in the same role as Homer. They're telling the story of how it happened.[34]

[34] Frank Whitford, J.G. Ballard, and Eduardo Paolozzi. Ballard's views in this interview, and his criticism of literary modernism in 'Fictions of Every Kind' also notably echo the Independent Group member John McHale. In a chapter titled 'Time's Arrow' in *The Future of the Future* (1969), McHale suggests that the biggest opposition to the development of industrial society occurred in bourgeois and intellectual circles, with social

Ballard's connection of literature to the fine arts is illustrative of a desire for narrative form to overcome what he regards to be the persistence of a historic, 'early 19th century structure', to the novel—a form that, for Ballard, correlates to a failure 'to excite the public imagination in real terms' about the possibilities of science and technology.[35]

Imaginative stasis is thus evident in the literary form for Ballard, while 'Fictions of Every Kind' is an essay partly predicated on science fiction overcoming older literary forms. In this sense, Ballard is arguing that science fiction is premised upon its novelty, a feature it shares with the earlier discussed *This is Tomorrow* exhibition. However, at the time of authoring this essay Ballard's position on novel and experimental literary forms underwent its own kind of shift. After *The Atrocity Exhibition*, published just before the essay and a clear subversion of a 19th century formal style through its quality as a textual collage, the author produces *Crash*, an extremely conventional novel at the levels of form and structure.[36] The critic Roger Luckhurst has described the shift between the two works as 'a startling transition', whereby '[t]he complex compositional techniques of collage, juxtaposition and condensation are abandoned for a single, sustained, intolerably intense narrative voice.'[37] This shift to a 'monologism' that Luckhurst identifies, is, in a certain sense, an admission of failure by the author; it betrays a lack of commitment to his theory in 'Fictions of Every Kind' that experimental fictions would come to replace their earlier, more traditional counterparts and is

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thought privileging ideas of 'stability and integration' over and above 'change and creative innovation.' See: John McHale, *The Future of the Future* (New York: George Brazilier, 1969), p. 36. At the end of the chapter, McHale explains how 'distrust of, and estrangement from, industrial society has lingered most strongly in literary and humanist thought.' He evidences this claim through reference to the modernist 'literary masterworks of the early twentieth century', which he argues have had their 'attitudes […] perpetuated and institutionalized within the traditional establishment' at the behest of their 'creative spirit' in order 'to provide a set of stereotyped responses which continue to hamper the emergence of new cultural forms.' McHale thereafter contrasts the Visual Arts with this development, stating that they, more than anything else, 'have sensitized the contemporary vision to the metamorphosis of cultural values' while, in turn, 'provid[ing] a useable mythology of the machine and insight into its creative possibilities', antedating Ballard's above remarks. See: McHale, pp. 37-8.

[35] Ibid. Ballard makes this particular point about the space race. However, he also relates it to science and technology more broadly throughout his interview.

[36] It's worth noting that this quality of *Crash* has been contested. In a 1974 interview with Robert Louit, Ballard contrasts his approach to *Crash* with the form of the classical novel and emphasises its collage-like qualities. See: Robert Louit, 'Crash & Learn (1974)', in *Extreme Metaphors: Selected Interviews with J.G. Ballard, 1967-2008*, ed. by Simon Sellars, and Daniel Finbarr John O'Hara (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), pp. 72–77. Thereafter, Florian Cord has since used this point to justify a reading of *Crash* through the lens of feminist, sexuality, gender, and queer theory, reading the subversion of normative forms gender and sexuality as central conceits of the novel in a manner that contrasts with Luckhurst's view that it is linear, and therefore largely phallic, text. See: Florian Cord, *J.G. Ballard's Politics: Late Capitalism, Power, and the Pataphysics of Resistance*, ANGLIA Book Series, volume 54 (Berlin ; Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), p. 55.

[37] Roger Luckhurst, *'The Angle Between Two Walls': The Fiction of J.G. Ballard* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), p. 123.

therefore a collusion with a form of imaginative stasis.[38] Yet, even despite this, *Crash* also hints at another possibility. Alongside its monologism, the narrative form of the novel also pertains to what Luckhurst refers to as the 'transform[ation of] a marginal generic practice [science fiction] into the modulus of contemporary cultural experience'.[39] In this sense, *Crash* completely reimagines the social novel as a form of science fiction, which in turn adheres to the central thesis of 'Fictions of Every Kind': that '[e]verything is becoming science fiction'.[40] As a result, the sharpness of *Crash* as a response to the consequences of then contemporary forms of accelerationism is heightened. The trade-off of this, however, is that part of the novelty that Ballard associates with the genre, particularly its capacity to imagine, and potentially drive, future change, is partially lost.

Ultimately, *The Atrocity Exhibition* and *Crash* provide a couple of points of insight into Ballard's approach to science fiction in 'Fictions of Every Kind'—even if their status as works of science fiction is hotly debated. On the one hand, it's clear that the author's interest in the genre stems from a desire to produce novel cultural responses to the technological and social changes taking place in his present moment. This is, in part, a continuation of the logic of the Independent Group, and thereafter Paolozzi, and can be seen as both an attempt to grapple with these changes and to further them in an accelerationist vein. On the other hand, Ballard's writing about science fiction at this time, and his own forms of literary experimentation in works like *The Atrocity Exhibition* and *Crash*, reveal the limits of the genre when it comes to influencing change as such, and thus highlight its imaginative inefficacies in the present when confronted by a landscape undergoing unprecedented, accelerated change. In each case, both ideas adhere to the author's ambivalent depictions of flight that I will continue to explore in the subsequent parts of this chapter. Just like science fiction is in 'Fictions of Every Kind', the dream of flight in Ballard's work is also tied to both the possibility to break with imaginative stasis, and therefore to advance change, while also—like accelerationist affirmations of acceleration—being emblematic of a condition of imaginative stasis to begin with.

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[38] Paolozzi also makes a similar move to Ballard, albeit at a slightly earlier time. Between 1970-71, the artist produces two suites of photorealistic monochrome single-image photogravures, *Conditional Probability Machine* (1970), and *Cloud Atomic Laboratory* (1971), both of which contrast with his previous multicoloured print works. *Conditional Probability Machine* also contains images of crash testing, which is a major theme of *Crash*.

[39] Luckhurst, p. 126.

[40] Ballard, 'Fictions of Every Kind', p. 237. I realise reading *Crash* as science fiction might be contentious; however, it is also one of the ways that Ballard referred to the novel. In a 1974 interview with Robert Louit, he explains that: 'I consider that I left the genre [of science fiction] completely with *The Atrocity Exhibition*, but I don't have any substitute terminology to offer you for what I actually write. *Crash!* [French title] is not a science fiction novel, but could nevertheless be read as one, because it contains elements of political and 'sociological' thought which one finds in certain works of the genre.' See: Louit, p. 73.

Flight from the Standpoint of the Crash Victim

Crash follows the narrative perspective of James (Jim) Ballard as he recounts the story of the death of his close friend Dr Robert Vaughan. The novel opens with Vaughan's death and with Jim revealing that the failed TV scientist desired to crash his car into the film actress Elizabeth Taylor. This leads Jim to reflect on the series of events that have taken place up until this point, including his own crash in which he killed the husband of Helen Remington, a woman with whom he later has an affair. Over the course of the narrative, a reader learns of how Jim and his wife Catherine first became acquainted with Vaughan, and why his obsessions with car crashes and wounds make him an uneasy but enticing character for both characters. Vaughan is someone whom Jim is fearful of, intrigued by, and then eventually has sex with. The equivocal status of Vaughan, despite his sinister obsessions, is also reflected by his relationship to his entourage, Colin and Vera Seagrave, Gabrielle, and Remington, all of whom become increasingly preoccupied with car crashes and the wounds that result, identifying and thereafter exploring the new sexual possibilities they believe crashes give rise to by simulating their own.

Flight might seem like a peripheral theme of *Crash*, given how much emphasis the text places on cars and crashes. Yet, it is ever-present throughout the novel. Flight is depicted in those moments where the narrator, Jim, looks skywards at the aeroplanes frequently flying above the city. Flight is also ultimately what kills Helen Remington's husband, who during his head-on collision with Jim is described dissonantly as being 'propelled through his windshield like a mattress from the barrel of a circus cannon'.[41] Jim's wife, Catherine, also takes flying lessons, moments of the novel where she is free to explore her sexual desires outside of the otherwise restrictive bounds of her marriage.[42] Vaughan's final crash in the novel also depends upon a momentary flight, the errancy of which leads him to miss his target, the film actress Elizabeth Taylor. Finally, the end of the first chapter of the novel—in effect the final moment of the narrative—sees the narrator drive 'back towards the airport', that great monument of flight that recurs as one of the many spaces in the novel where characters are seemingly free to explore their deviancies while not being subject to that ever-watching eye of neighbourly social propriety.[43]

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[41] J. G Ballard, 'Crash', in *Crash: The Collector's Edition*, ed. by Chris Beckett (UK: 4th Estate, 2014), pp. 1–266, pp. 15-16.

[42] David Cronenberg's 1996 film adaptation of the novel notably starts in an aircraft hangar, a space which David Pascoe—an expert on the representation of the aircraft—notes is frequently depicted as 'a place in which dreams and fantasies can be modelled and enacted, safely and irresponsibly', see: David Pascoe, *Aircraft*, Objekt Series, 1. publ (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), p. 171.

[43] Ballard, *Crash*, p. 12.

In fact, flight is such a central theme of *Crash* that the critic David Pringle includes the novel alongside other prominent textual examples of the author's explorations of images of flight, including, 'The Concentration City' (1957), 'The Terminal Beach' (1964), 'Storm-Bird Storm-Dreamer' (1966), 'You and Me and the Continuum' (1966), 'The Cloud Sculptors of Coral D' (1967), 'The Death Module' (1967), 'My Dreams of Flying to Wake Island' (1974), 'The Air Disaster' (1975), 'Low-Flying Aircraft' (1975), 'The Ultimate City' (1976), and 'Zodiac 2000' (1978). Yet, despite the clear centrality of flight as a theme of *Crash*, its broader meaning in the novel is often largely ignored. In this part of the chapter, I will build on Pringle's identification of flight as a significant theme of *Crash* by exploring how it is used to dramatize a central dilemma of the novel: the relationship between freedom and control, expressed through the contrasting tendencies of speed and stasis.

Nowhere is this tension between speed and stasis more evident than in a much-quoted section of chapter seventeen, which opens in an 'immense traffic jam' where Jim suggests that 'the enormous energy of the twentieth century, enough to drive the planet into a new orbit around a happier star, was being expanded to maintain this immense motionless pause.'[44] In this section of the narrative, the automobile, a vehicle associated with speed, is using its power of movement to sustain a paradoxical state of total stasis. Noting that this moment of the novel enacts its broader logic, Enda Duffy highlights how this event, and the automotive accident itself, 'marks a stop in the ceaseless flow of speed that is [otherwise] the chief pleasure to be enjoyed in coming to terms with the featureless […] world displayed in this text.'[45] In this sense, *Crash* is an exploration of a point at which speed—the only game in town—has given way to stasis, a phenomenon that echoes the 'frenzied stasis' that the sociologist Hartmut Rosa sees as arising from acceleration, and that I previously explored in relation to accelerationism in Chapter One.[46] What's more, throughout Ballard's novel, his characters follow the path of many contemporary accelerationists, at once demonstrating an awareness of the 'frenzied stasis' acceleration gives rise to, while being otherwise unwavering in their advocacy of acceleration as a means for overcoming it.

Throughout Ballard's novel, flight acts as a key metaphorical device for dramatizing this 'frenzied stasis'. On the one hand, flight acts as an impulse to freedom and escape from what is seemingly an otherwise entirely predetermined world—one in which 'the notion of accidentality',

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[44] Ibid., p. 169.

[45] Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 259.

[46] Florian Cord also notes this affinity of the text through reference to Paul Virilio's work, stating that 'Crash's images of 'autogeddon' and cosmic standstill – traffic turning into an 'immense motionless pause' or a 'paralysed hurricane' – bear a remarkable affinity with Virilio's 'post-industrial *eschatology*' and his notions of the 'integral accident' and 'polar inertia'.' See: Cord, p. 24.

the crash, is transformed 'into inevitability'—it having become a factor incorporated into the designs of the vehicles themselves.[47] On the other, flight is simply another possibility already foreclosed by this world's design, as much a fixture of city planning as the roads themselves. This contrasting register of flight is evident in one of Jim's brief mental flights when Vaughan is soliciting sex:

> They were arguing in an abstract way about time and price. Trying to ignore their voices, and the massed traffic moving below the supermarkets, I watched the aircraft taking off from London Airport across the western perimeter fence, constellations of green and red lights that seemed to be shifting about large pieces of sky.[48]

Here, the object Jim follows, the aircraft, symbolizes his attempt at mental reprieve from the situation of 'time and price' capital exchange he finds himself in. However, instead of the aircraft transcending into some glorious heaven or wondrous sky, it appears to Jim as though it is 'shifting about large pieces of sky'. This image suggests that the aircraft operates as though it is a smaller mechanism in an engineered stratosphere, incorporating the constellations as component pieces of the city's design, like the 'green and red lights' of the traffic system below. This further allusion to traffic systems is an example of what the critic Florian Cord has described as the novel's landscape having been given over to 'the cybernetic dream of a technologically and fully ordered and regulated system', a self-stabilising dynamic system predicated on communication and alluded to by the novel's further saturation with references to signals, code, and semaphores.[49]

Further evidence of a concern with planning, predetermination, and its connection to a 'technologically and fully ordered system' is also evident after Jim's crash, when, upon visiting a shopping centre, he views a traffic jam on the motorway system of the surrounding landscape from the balcony of an overlooking car park. In this further moment of stasis, the narrator claims to have 'realized that the entire zone which defined the landscape of my life was now bounded by a continuous artificial horizon', the landscape now appearing to be seemingly enclosed, 'bounded', by an 'artificial' world of motorways, access roads, and interchanges.[50] The word 'artificial' makes this whole section of the text read as a clear allusion to the highly planned and technologized city. However, it also has a further connotation that indicates the arbitrary nature of the boundary and the stasis the narrator sees before him. This is stressed in the following paragraph which ends this section of the text, in which the narrator explains that:

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[47] Duffy, p. 254.
[48] Ballard, *Crash*, p. 155.
[49] Cord, p. 23.
[50] Ballard, *Crash*, p. 49.

> [t]he wounds on my knees and chest were beacons tuned to a series of beckoning transmitters, carrying the signals, unknown to myself, which would unlock this immense stasis and free these drivers for the real destinations set for their vehicles, the paradises of the electric highway.[51]

Here, Jim's reflection on his wounds 'unlock[ing]' and 'free[ing]' the other drivers suggests that they harbour a liberatory possibility, marking this as an instance of the text where Jim's crash has, as Andrzej Gąsiorek notes, 'jolted [him] out of a kind of dreamless sleep and [he] begins to see his environment as though for the first time'.[52] Yet, this is an uneasy form of awakening. While the wounds prompt in Jim a greater awareness of the artificiality of the landscape he inhabits, they also further integrate him within it, being additional parts of the vast array of 'beacons', 'beckoning transmitters', and 'signals' that are constitutive of its communicative fabric. In this sense, they are symbolic of the ambiguous nature of his awakening, which sees him become increasingly aware of the 'artificial' logics of the world he inhabits, while, in turn, envisaging that the only possible form of escape from these logics is to go through with them, a moment that presciently pre-empts the accelerationist's tendency to double down on acceleration.

Jim's ambivalence towards the artificiality of the world he inhabits is also palpable in an absence of flight in this moment of the text. Prior to reflecting on his wounds, the narrator explains that '[b]y a rare freak of flight control no aircraft were landing or taking off from the airport runways [… while t]he traffic along the motorway was stationary in a southward queue.'[53] Like the earlier example, of the 'aircraft taking off from London Airport', in this passage flight is linked to Jim's awareness of enclosure in the novel. However, unlike the earlier example, where flight was symbolic of a kind of self-stabilising dynamic system by being integrated into the designs of the city, its absence implies a condition of total stasis. Because of this, flight is deeply connected to the narrator's otherwise equivocal approach to the 'artificial' landscape that surrounds him, with its presence correlating to the world's constrictive artificiality and its highly controlled nature, while its absence marks an absence of possibility, and therefore a form of stasis that the narrator wishes to overcome. In this sense, the image of flight is wholly self-contradicting: it is a simultaneously an allusion to both Jim's desire for liberation from a highly planned and controlled artificial environment, and to his desire for a more complete immersion in this environment.

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[51] Ibid., pp. 49-50.
[52] Andrzej Gąsiorek, *J.G. Ballard*, Contemporary British Novelists (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press; distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave, 2005), p. 86. This is also an example Butchard's idea of the crash as a moment of exit from '"settled" existence' mentioned above.
[53] Ballard, *Crash*, p. 49.

This tension between flight as a means of both escape from a static world and further immersion in it, is reflected in the consummating moment of *Crash*, the final accident of Vaughan, the novel's antagonist. In the novel, this occurs after Vaughan botches his attempt to crash into and kill the actress Elizabeth Taylor, which it is suggested would act as the fulfilment of his ultimate sexual fantasy, while at the same time allowing this failed TV computer-scientist to achieve celebrity status. In pursuit of this aim throughout the novel, Vaughan makes use of an extensive array of technological media: high-tech recording equipment to restage and study slow-motion automobile crashes, questionnaires to determine the perfect form of the crash, as well as a large amount of photography to understand the exact postures and points of impact that crashes cause. In the process, his own body even becomes a technology, the character frequently employing disguises to be able to take opportunistic photographs of crash victims, or to steal images from hospitals. Likewise, the bodies of others also become tools to him; Seagrave, a member of Vaughan's entourage who is introduced at a demolition derby is, for example, used by Vaughan to stage crashes throughout the novel, oftentimes dressed as Taylor. This obsessive use of technology, and people as things, is emblematic of Vaughan's total immersion in the technologies and dehumanizing ideologies that produce this highly 'artificial' landscape to begin with, the character paradoxically perceiving them as a means of escape from it.

The consequences of Vaughan's worldview ultimately play out in the bathetic conclusion of the novel, which the reader is already aware of in its opening three sentences:

> Vaughan died yesterday in his last car-crash. During our friendship he had rehearsed his death in many crashes, but this was his only true accident. Driven on a collision course towards the limousine of the film actress, his car jumped the rails of the London Airport flyover and plunged through the roof of a bus of airline passengers.[54]

Instead of crashing into Taylor, Vaughan collides with a bus of otherwise anonymous airline passengers, and act that kills both him and the passengers. This collision illustrates his failure to achieve his goal of crashing into the actress, and moreover the failure of his final flight—he and the airline passengers remaining grounded. In his reading of this event, Scott Durham notes that it 'underscores the unhappy consciousness of this consumer who, in aiming to derealize his body in the mythic space of the spectacle, only succeeds in re-joining the other members of his audience.'[55]

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[54] Ibid., p. 1.

[55] Scott Durham, 'The Technology of Death and Its Limits: The Problem of the Simulation Model', in *Rethinking Technologies*, ed. by Verana Andermatt Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), pp. 156–70, p. 164.

Here, Durham suggests that the crash is employed by Ballard to subvert Vaughan's desire for transcendence to the form of celebrity status, revealing it to be concomitant with the spectacular logic of the faceless consumer society from which he was otherwise trying to escape.[56]

However, deeper immersion is not the only conclusion that can be drawn from this flight-based event. Alongside subverting Vaughan's aimed-for celebrity, the crash, which the antagonist has spent the entirety of the novel planning in meticulous detail, ultimately ends in errancy: it is 'his only true accident.' Durham argues this contests 'the triumph of the operational universe' the novel takes place in, because the crash itself 'appears as what is at the limit of that universe, as what is still capable of producing an effect of chance, even if this effect results increasingly from elaborate preparations.'[57] In this vein, the errancy of flight that led to the crash serves as the antagonist's successful escape from a black iron prison of control, predetermination, and, crucially for my argument about accelerationism, stasis.

A similar contradiction between immersion and escape in forms of flight also underpins the closing moments of *Crash*, which describes traces of Vaughan's semen ascending to the sky and being distributed across the novel's cityscape: '[t]he aircraft rise from the runways of the airport, carrying the remnants of Vaughan's semen to the instrument panels and radiator grilles of a thousand crashing cars, the leg stances of a million passengers.'[58] Here, Vaughan's fluid remnants enter a state of poetic flight with the aircraft that Ballard draws continuous attention to throughout his narrative. In the act of doing so, these remains have arguably seen Vaughan achieve the state of transcendence he so desired in the novel, attaining the cult-like significance of the celebrity icon—as is expressed by Jim's final thoughts that 'these faint points of liquid' represented 'the first constellation in the new zodiac of our [his and Catherine's] minds.'[59] However, this idea of dissemination also represents Vaughan's more complete immersion in the technologized landscape. This is because Vaughan's semen unites with the flux of signs underpinning the road and traffic systems Ballard also connected to flight earlier in the narrative. Thus, the metaphor remains

[56] Spectacle here is a Situationist terminology which refers to a kind of false consciousness driven by commodity culture, whereby the activity of everyday life is turned into a form of representation, and thus denuded of its radical quality.
[57] Durham, p. 166.
[58] Ballard, *Crash*, p. 266. This closing moment of *Crash* echoes the description of dead astronauts at the end of 'Notes Towards a Mental Breakdown' (1967) suggesting a link between the two stories: 'The Serial Angels. Undisturbed now, the vaporizing figures of the dead astronauts diffused across the launching grounds, recreated in the leg stances of a hundred starlets, in a thousand bent auto fenders, in the million installment [sic.] deaths of the serial magazines.' See: J. G. Ballard, 'Notes Towards a Mental Breakdown', in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, ed. by V. Vale and Andrea Juno, Rev., expanded, annotated, illustrated ed (San Francisco, CA: RE/Search Publications, 1990), pp. 43–49, p. 49.
[59] Ballard, *Crash*, p. 265.

equivocal, being at once a symbol of escape and immersion, the perfect analogue to a state of acceleration-induced 'frenzied stasis' whereby '*nothing remains the way it is* while at the same time *nothing essential changes*' (italics in source).[60]

Vaughan's connections to flight in both the opening and closing sections of the novel are relevant to accelerationism's status as a both subversive and acquiescent political gesture, something that I have continued to emphasise throughout this thesis. Vaughan's relevance here stems from the fact that his goal and the ways he goes about pursuing it—the causes of his flight—are undoubtedly discomforting and deeply unethical. This instils in *Crash* a sense of moral ambiguity that has been long stressed, both by the author and critics. In what is perhaps one of the most famous interpretations of the novel, in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) Jean Baudrillard claimed that in *Crash* '[n]owhere does […] the moral gaze surface—the critical judgement that is still part of the functionality of the old world.'[61] Baudrillard makes this statement despite Ballard's introduction to the 1974 French edition of *Crash* describing the work as 'a warning against the brutal, erotic and overlit realm that beckons more and more persuasively to us from the margins of the technological landscape.'[62] In this introduction, Ballard reinforced the moral framework of the novel's narrative. Yet, even at the time, the author was unconvinced by his own assertion, contradicting this in the introduction with the view that the writer of his contemporary moment 'has no moral stance'—a point that hearkens back to his views on the social novel and science fiction expressed in both 'Fictions of Every Kind', and his interview with Paolozzi explored above.[63] Moreover, Ballard himself goes back and forth on the idea of *Crash* as a moral text. In a 1984 interview with Thomas Frick, for instance, Ballard agrees with earlier claims he made about the novel as a 'corrupting book', noting that he's 'long since moved on to more serene meadows.'[64] Later, in a 1994 interview with Will Self, however, Ballard once again reverses this position, suggesting he always regretted referring to *Crash* as 'a moral indictment of the sinister marriage between sex and technology […]. *Crash* is not a

[60] Rosa, p. 283.
[61] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, Mi: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 119.
[62] J. G Ballard, 'J.G. Ballard: Introduction to the French Edition of *Crash* (1974)', in *Crash: The Collector's Edition*, ed. by Chris Beckett (UK: 4th Estate, 2014), pp. 359–65, p. 365.
[63] Ibid., p. 364.
[64] Thomas Frick, 'The Art of Fiction (1984)', in *Extreme Metaphors: Selected Interviews with J.G. Ballard, 1967-2008*, ed. by Simon Sellars, and Daniel Finbarr John O'Hara (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), pp. 181–97, p. 185.

cautionary tale.'[65] This statement represents a significant alteration to his 1974 view, yet it still does not stretch quite as far as Baudrillard in denying the presence of a moral gaze in its entirety.[66]

The proximity of Vaughan to the theme of flight, and his general immorality, make him emblematic of how moral contradictions coincide with the contradictions of flight throughout *Crash*. Vaughan's violent and murderous intent render his motives and concluding flight suspect and, in turn, justify moral criticisms of both his actions and the novel more generally. Examples of such forms of criticism include two essays, one by N. Katherine Hayles and the other by Vivian Sobchack. Both Hayles and Sobchack have used Vaughan to argue against Baudrillard's reading of *Crash*. Sobchack, for instance, claims in 'Baudrillard's Obscenity' (1991) that '*Crash* is rigorously about the human body abstracted, objectified, and literalized as techno-body—and Ballard's vision sees this techno-body as driving us, quite literally, to a dead end.'[67] Sobchack reads Vaughan's role in the novel as a moral warning against 'objectify[ing] ourselves to death', and suggests that Ballard's novel proves the need to keep a 'subjective kind of bodily sense in mind as we negotiate our technoculture', a view that was, at the time, a necessary rebuttal to Extropian elements of the 1990s cyberculture.[68]

Like Sobchack, Hayles also makes an argument against Baudrillard's interpretation, albeit through very different means. She reads Ballard's novel as being premised against ideas of technological transcendence, particularly simulation and the idea that it might lead to an escape from material reality. For her, flight becomes a key signifier that represents a misguided 'drive to transcend physical limitations', which she argues culminates with 'a flight to death' in Vaughan's concluding accident.[69] Hayles thus reads death as the reality of attempts of transcendence, with Vaughan's death at the end of the novel representing the limit of flight, and therefore a failure of transcendence as such.

Both Sobchack's and Hayles's arguments have merit, being necessary rebuttals to prevalent ideas of technological disembodiment in their respective contexts. They also provide criticisms of the discernible ambivalence Ballard's work has towards acceleration. However, their dependency on

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[65] J. G Ballard and Self, 'J.G. Ballard in Conversation with Will Self (1994, Extract)', in *Crash: The Collector's Edition*, ed. by Chris Beckett (UK: 4th Estate, 2014), pp. 367-68, p. 367.

[66] Baudrillard's perspective has stimulated much critical debate about the presence of morality in the novel, with his views being challenged by Luckhurst in *The Angle Between Two Walls*, Dominic Pettman in *After the Orgy: Toward a Politics of Exhaustion* (2002), and Jeanette Baxter in *J.G Ballard's Surrealist Imagination* (2009). Recently, Florian Cord has also made a similar argument to the one found in Luckhurst's and Baxter's works; although, he also responds to them by also suggesting that he does not think Baudrillard's 'analysis can simply be *refuted*' (italics in source). See: Cord, p. 18.

[67] Vivian Sobchack, 'Baudrillard's Obscenity', *Science Fiction Studies*, 18.3 (1991), 327–29, p. 328.

[68] Ibid., p. 329.

[69] N. Katherine Hayles, 'The Borders of Madness', *Science Fiction Studies*, 18.3 (1991), 321–23, p. 323.

rebuffing Baudrillard through moral readings of Vaughan's role in the novel are suspect. Hayles's references to flight are the clearest illustrations of this problem, insofar as she sidesteps both the ambivalence of *Crash*'s characters towards Vaughan, and the fact that Vaughan's culminating 'flight to death' inspires, rather than deters, Jim: '[a]lready I knew that I was designing the elements of my own car-crash.'[70] Of course, in some ways Jim's equivocal response to Vaughan can be read in support of Hayles's argument, as a kind of Stockholm syndrome that makes Jim unable to move on from Vaughan's crash, suggesting melancholy. Yet, Jim's tone is dissonant from a typical melancholic response, finding Vaughan's crash enlightening, and in no way a cause of deep sadness. Because of this, a much more accurate reading of *Crash* would reject the idea that the novel takes a totally moral stance on transcendence at all. Instead, although certainly ironized, transcendence is framed throughout the text as the only remaining answer to the stifling sense of entrapment the characters face throughout. Thus, characters like Jim suggest, contra Hayles, that 'even if there is only one high that can last forever—the one that ends in death' this shouldn't mean never getting high to begin with, even if it is a risky business.[71]

This kind of interpretation of *Crash* is in fact reflected by Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) member Stephen Metcalf in his essay 'Autogeddon' (1998). Like Sobchack and Hayles, Metcalf's essay is concerned with the final crash event in the novel. Only Metcalf does not try to produce a moral reading of Ballard's text, instead preferring to see the crash as 'a fertilizing, productive event' that imagines its subject 'as diffused across a virtual machine—consisting […] of sexualization of (and, hence, identification with) the geometric affinity between the curvatures of bodies in sexual collision'.[72] In other words, transcendence is framed positively by Metcalf in his reading, while the human subject is seen as co-extensive with the transience of the consumer product. As I will make evident, this line of argument is true to both CCRU and accelerationist form, Metcalf sharing the Unit's interest in overcoming the believed limits to human subjectivity and political possibility through an embrace of the aleatory potentials of technological forms of acceleration. This leads Metcalf to perceive Vaughan's flight as the point in the novel where 'the human subject is sucked into a technological slipstream and transformed', not into something better or newer necessarily, but into something vastly imaginatively different to what it was thought to be

[70] Ballard, *Crash*, p. 265.
[71] Hayles, p. 323.
[72] Stephen Metcalf, 'Autogeddon', in *Virtual Futures: Cyberotics, Technology and Post-Human Pragmatism*, ed. by Joan Broadhurst Dixon and Eric J. Cassidy (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 145–52, p. 148.

before.[73] Foreclosure thus gives way to momentary flight, and in the process presents an imaginative possibility (or imaginative flight) unthinkable in an otherwise static world.

However, contra Metcalf, Vaughan's final flight and crash does, in fact, still end in the character's death, chafing with his optimistic reading. In this sense, Hayles's criticism holds water, death reflecting a terminal point whereby both movement and flight give rise to their own impossibility. Ultimately, then, this section of *Crash* demonstrates a problem that persists throughout the entirety of the text: the simultaneous connection of flight to forms of escape and entrapment, freedom and control, and speed and stasis. Importantly, these registers are always intermixed through Ballard's representations of flight throughout the narrative, something that hints at their paradoxical simultaneity. A way of explaining this simultaneity is Rosa's theory of 'frenzied stasis', the idea that accelerated change carries its own internal logic of stasis. Yet, while Ballard's novel certainly demonstrates an awareness of this phenomenon, it also refuses to make a clear argument against acceleration. Instead, flight and its connection to the antagonistic character, Vaughan highlights the equivocal relationship *Crash* has to acceleration, prompting interpretations of the text that align him with both the dangers and newfound possibilities errant forms of flight give rise to.

Yet, this ambivalence is not only connected to the errancy of flight. It's also evident as a feature of Ballard's novel at moments when the possibility of flight is seemingly totally circumscribed. The final example of this that I want to examine in Ballard's text is a particularly powerful image of flight having succumbed to stasis: a World War II fighter aircraft housed in a museum.[74] As Jim sits in and reflects on the 'deformed cabin' of his crashed car at the Northolt Police Pound in chapter eleven, he remembers 'visiting the Imperial War Museum with a close friend, and the pathos that surrounded the cockpit segment of a World War II Japanese Zero fighter aircraft.'[75] The warped 'instrument panel' and the cracked 'clock and speedometer dials' remind him of the 'clutter of electrical wiring and torn canvas webbing on the floor' of the aircraft, which he believed

[73] Metcalf, p. 151.

[74] This moment of the narrative is also a reference to Ballard's visit to the Imperial War Museum with Paolozzi in 1971, which I discussed in the introduction of this thesis (0.2).

[75] Ballard, *Crash*, p. 80. Throughout *Crash* Ballard makes frequent and consistent associations between cars and plane cockpits, probably in reference to the researcher Dr John Swearingen, whose scientific report 'Tolerances of the Human Face to Crash Impact' (1965) inspired the title of Ballard's short story 'Tolerances of the Human Face' (chapter 8 of *The Atrocity Exhibition*). As Chris Beckett explains, 'Swearingen spent three years collecting dashboards impacted by human collision, in many cases tracing the medical records of the crash victims. He then replicated exactly the indentations of the crash-damaged dashboards in undamaged dashboards, using a catapult, crash dummies and a supply of fresh cadaver heads.' Beckett also notes that '[t]he primary focus of Swearingen's research at the [Federal] aviation centre in Oklahoma was 'cockpit delethalisation', hence the reference. See: Chris Beckett, 'Jim's Desk', in *Crash: The Collector's Edition* (UK: 4th Estate, 2014), pp. 267–300, p. 274.

'expressed all the isolations of war.'[76] In this moment, the aircraft evokes the abstract violence of alienation, something that is also emphasised in the 'failure of the technical relationship between [Jim's] own body […] and the engineering structure which supported it' (both the car, but also the wider technologized environment of the novel).[77] Yet, just like Vaughan's remnants, this car and aircraft also present another possibility. Even though the plane remains totally embedded in the museum display, and presumably unable to fly, Jim explains that '[t]he blurring Perspex of the [aircraft] cockpit canopy contained a small segment of the Pacific sky, the roar of aircraft warming up on a carrier deck thirty years before.'[78] This nostalgic trace of flight implies the ability of the object to transgress its presently static state. This is thereafter doubled in Jim's reflections on the automobile, which he envisages as 'small museum of excitement and possibility', its 'crushed cabin' being 'the perfect module for all the quickening futures of [his] life.'[79]

This moment of *Crash* is a perfect example of the thematic ambivalence of flight throughout the novel. In this instance, an absence of flight leads Jim to affirm it, which, in turn, acts as a pretext for him embracing the new 'quickening' or accelerating future possibilities he believes the car crash gives rise to. In this vein, an embrace of flight is collapsed into an embrace of acceleration, with both arising from a nostalgia for flight. Significantly, such nostalgia for flight in the narrative evacuates the aircraft of its historical connection to violence, something that, in turn, is also true of Jim's embrace of the 'quickening futures' presented by the 'crushed cabin' of his car. This dual quality of a nostalgic understanding of flight—as something that is both desired for the purposes of overcoming stasis, and as eliding the violence of its origin—make this section of Ballard's narrative extremely relevant to criticisms of accelerationism. Benjamin Noys, for instance, notes how a key irony of accelerationism is that it nostalgically desires to fill 'an absent future with past forms of acceleration.'[80] The consequence of this is that it leads accelerationists to 'bypass the problem of consciousness, awareness, and struggle in a logic of immersion', akin to Jim's captivation with the wrecked interior of his car, a byproduct of a now elided, acceleration-induced violence.[81] Yet, where Noys sees this nostalgia as detrimental to forms of political struggle, I think Ballard is far more ambivalent about it. In fact, such nostalgia is, in many ways, a necessary element of the struggle that is Jim's accident recovery throughout *Crash*, which inevitably involves the character reconciling with his immersion in the otherwise static world he inhabits, even if he what he really desires is to escape from it.

[76] Ballard, *Crash*, p. 80.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., pp. 80-81
[79] Ibid., p. 81.
[80] Noys, *Malign Velocities*, p. 97.
[81] Ibid., p. 98.

This theme of nostalgia, and its relationship to a desire to overcome stasis is made even more explicit in another of Ballard's short stories that I'll explore in the following section of this chapter, 'Memories of the Space Age'. In this short story, the turn to a technologically induced acceleration is cast by Ballard as a form of nostalgia incapable of realising emancipation from a stasis that permeates the world of the narrative. In this sense, Ballard's narrative demonstrates an increasing awareness of acceleration as a cause of stasis. However, much like the accelerationists explored in the opening chapter of this thesis, 'Memories…' also suggests that a return to seemingly absent forms of acceleration might also provide a powerful means for highlighting the 'structuring role' such an absence plays in the present, revealing and responding to a stasis that otherwise may not be generally perceived as such.[82]

Memories of the Space Age

Largely told from a third-person perspective, with a brief intermezzo-like first-person section that occurs on a series of found tapes—cassette fictions of the near past—'Memories of the Space Age' follows the protagonist Mallory. For reasons initially unknown, he and his wife Anna have returned to the space coast in Florida, a deserted state. Over the course of the narrative, it is revealed that an ex-astronaut, Hinton, has been responsible for the murder of a fellow astronaut, Alan Shepley, in space—an 'evolutionary crime' that has caused a space sickness that is implied to be most intensively concentrated around Cape Canaveral.[83] This illness affects the subjective perception of time in infected individuals, making it move 'at an erratic pace, at moments backing up and almost coming to a halt', 'like a film reel running through a faulty projector.'[84] Every major character within the short story has this illness, and the Kennedy Space Centre is its ground zero, the first major infection site. An example of a narrative exploring the end of time, the implication of this trope in 'Memories of the Space Age' is the end of conventional space flight, a quality that has similarities with other stories of Ballard's concerned with astronauts and space, like 'The Cage of Sand' (1962), 'A Question of Re-Entry' (1963), 'The Dead Astronaut' (1968), 'Notes Towards a Mental Breakdown' (1967), and later on 'News From the Sun' (1981), and 'Myths of the Near Future' (1982).[85]

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[82] Katy Shaw, *Hauntology: The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018) <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=5355964> [accessed 21 January 2022], p. 7.
[83] J. G Ballard, 'Memories of the Space Age', in *The Complete Short Stories. Volume II*, Kindle Edition (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), pp. 569–600, p. 585.
[84] Ibid., p. 573.
[85] For a comparative account of the thematic links of these stories to 'Memories of the Space Age', see: Melanie Rosen Brown, 'Dead Astronauts, Cyborgs, and the Cape Canaveral Fiction of J.G. Ballard',

The similarity of 'Memories…' to these earlier stories means that, much like them, it echoes Warstat's view about 'The Dead Astronaut', exploring what 'futurological speculation […] means in an historical era where there seems to be no future'.[86] However, compared to Ballard's 1968 short story, this 'no future' element of the text has much greater historical precedent, Ballard writing 'Memories…' in the heyday of the Apollo missions, the as yet final time a human being was sent beyond low-Earth orbit (1972).[87] This makes 'Memories…' and the other eighties short stories much more reflective of an already foreclosed future than their sixties counterparts, which, in turn, imbues these earlier works with a sense of prophesy. The same was also true of comments Ballard made in a 1970 interview with Lynn Barber. In this interview, the author audaciously insisted that the moon landings were 'probably the only important thing that has happened in the twentieth century', and yet 'the effect [they had] on people's imaginations was absolutely nil.'[88] At the time, Ballard put this down to 'the discovery of inner space in terms of sex, drugs, meditation, mysticism', things that aligned with the American Counterculture of the period, and thereafter the acceleration of the mass media.[89] Like Benedict Singleton in Chapter One, Ballard pre-empts the eclipse of spaceflight by a vast entertainment complex, with 'Memories...' providing a tantalizing pre-accelerationist extrapolation of this otherwise accelerationist idea.

Ballard's short story hinges on emphasizing an absence of spaceflight to reveal its 'structuring role' in the present.[90] Throughout 'Memories…' however, this revelation never amounts to an outright demand for a return of spaceflight. Instead, this is explored in the narrative as one possible manifestation of a nostalgia for flight, with flight being treated with ambivalence by Ballard, much as it is in *Crash*. In my view, this nostalgia for flight throughout 'Memories…' provides a critical lens for evaluating accelerationist affirmations of acceleration, while also being an embrace of a certain kind of accelerationist logic. It acts as a criticism of accelerationism because it reveals the inherently nostalgic nature of the accelerationist position, and the desire to turn to past forms of

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Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture, 4.3 (2004) [Web Archive] <https://web.archive.org/web/20160106044223/http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/043/brown.htm> [accessed 19 October 2021].

[86] Warstat, p. 58.

[87] This said, Ballard's short story does respond to more contemporary developments in spaceflight technology, notably the Space Shuttle, situating it within a context where technological change was still very much a precedent, even if it meant the foreclosure of the earlier moon missions. In my view, the interplay between this new era of spaceflight and the foreclosure of the older era is implied by the name of the story's protagonist, Mallory, a reference to the mountaineer and adventurer George Mallory, a figure famously referenced by JFK in his 1962 'We Choose to go to the Moon' speech.

[88] '1970: Lynn Barber. Sci-Fi Seer', in *Extreme Metaphors: Selected Interviews with J.G. Ballard, 1967-2008*, ed. by Simon Sellars and Daniel Finbarr John O'Hara, 2014, pp. 22–36, p. 23.

[89] '1970: Lynn Barber. Sci-Fi Seer', p. 25.

[90] Shaw, p. 7.

acceleration to answer an 'absent future', as criticised by Noys.[91] However it also showcases an accelerationism through Ballard's turn to inner space, framing nostalgia for flight as a nostalgia for a more radical time in order to express an impulse towards the future—even if this impulse might be misjudged or unproductive.

Depictions of flight in 'Memories…' are a lot like those in *Crash*, with the short story also treating it as a potential means for emancipation from stasis, and as something deeply entangled with it. However, 'Memories…' consists of a much more diverse typology of flight than the earlier novel. In *Crash*, flight is only ever alluded to and achieved through machine-powered means, although this is often linked to a more poetic sense of transcendence, as exemplified by my exploration of the passage about the dissemination of Vaughan's remnants above. By contrast, in 'Memories…', flight is explored in both natural and human-made senses. Its natural senses are evident through the story's prolific references to birds and the poetic state of flight Hinton and Anne enter later in the narrative. Human-made flight, by contrast, is explored in three different senses. The first is through human-powered aircraft like the glider flown by Gale Shepley (or Nightingale). The second, through machine-powered flight, which is the form of flight preferred by the Vaughan-like character in the story, Hinton. Finally, third is spaceflight, which acts as the ultimate form of machine-powered flight throughout 'Memories...', while being both the cause of the space-sickness and, for Mallory, a possible answer to the sickness itself.

Throughout 'Memories…' these forms of flight are connected to a nostalgia. First, the presence of human-powered flight in the narrative betrays 'an escape into nostalgia'.[92] This is because, as David Pascoe explains in reference to the myth of Daedalus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, '[h]uman powered-flight has its origins in a myth about wanting to return home over the water'.[93] In the case of Gale Shepley, this is expressed by her returning to Cape Canaveral to wait for her father to return from space, an echo of the plot of 'The Dead Astronaut' which similarly sees its protagonists wait for the return of an astronaut who also died in space. This nostalgic quality of human-powered flight is thereafter recapitulated by Hinton, who embraces machine-powered flight in 'Memories…'. Throughout the narrative, Hinton pilots antique machine-powered aircraft,

[91] Noys, p. 97.
[92] David Pascoe, p. 30.
[93] Ibid. Although Hinton's final state of flight is not human-powered per se, its affinity to these narratives, as well as Hinton's escape from Alcatraz to his "home" at Cape Canaveral suggest a similar nostalgia at work. Human-powered flight and nostalgia become foci of several of Ballard's fictions in the late 1970s, particularly 'The Ultimate City' (1976), in which Holloway crashes a human powered glider into an abandoned 20th century city, and *Hello America* (1981), which is replete with references to the Gossamer Albatross, a human powered aircraft built in 1979. From about the late-1970s until the early-1980s there were a plethora of experiments in human-powered flight, suggesting that Ballard's writing around this time also responded to this trend.

regressing to older and older models as the story develops. This is rationalized by the narrator as an 'escape from winged aviation into absolute flight, poetical rather than aeronautical structures', something which culminates in Hinton's and Anne's final act of levitation in the penultimate chapter of the story.[94] The nostalgic quality of Hinton's final act of levitation is implied by its ironic quality as a form of flight in the story. This irony lies in the fact that, even though Hinton sees levitation as a form of permanent flight made possible through the temporal effect of the space sickness, the sickness itself marks the end of kinetic possibility, and therefore the movement that typifies flight: '[i]t was curious that images of heaven or paradise always presented a static world, not the kinetic eternity one would expect […]. It was a strange paradox that given eternity, an infinity of time, they chose to eliminate the very element offered in abundance'.[95] In this vein, Hinton pursues flight even though it is completely closed off to him, opting for levitation even though his mechanically powered flight demonstrates that '"[h]e needs speed"', as Gale Shepley puts it.[96] By doing this, Hinton resembles Simon Magus, the gnostic priest whom Mallory owns 'a psychoanalytic study of' in the narrative, and who died by attempting to demonstrate his ability to fly.[97]

The final form of flight, spaceflight, is also connected to nostalgia. Throughout the narrative, it is implied that one of the desired outcomes of returning to the Florida space coast for Mallory is re-booting spaceflight. In the very first chapter of the story, Mallory suggests that one of the answers to the space sickness might be '"set[ting] out into space again"', which suggests this is a motive underpinning his return to Cape Canaveral.[98] This desire is also evident at other points of the narrative. For instance, when Hinton's machine-powered aircraft wakes Mallory in the opening of the story, the narrator explains that:

> The plane flew back and forth above the forest canopy, its engine calling across the immense deserted decks, as if this ghost of the pioneer days of aviation could summon the sleeping giants of the Apollo programme from their graves beneath the cracked concrete.[99]

Likewise, later in the short story, after Hinton has taken Anne to the space centre, the narrator asks, and then promptly answers the following question:

[94] Ballard, 'Memories of the Space Age', p. 594.
[95] Ibid., p. 572.
[96] Ibid., p. 582.
[97] Ibid., p. 573. Mallory also connects Hinton's flight to shamanism much later in the narrative, see: Ballard, 'Memories of the Space Age', p. 594.
[98] Ibid., p. 571.
[99] Ibid., p. 569.

> Had Hinton refuelled the Shuttle's engines and prepared the craft for lift-off? He would take Anne with him, and cast them both loose into space as he had done with Shepley, joining the dead astronaut in his orbital bier.[100]

Given the implied impossibility of spaceflight in the narrative, due to it being a cause of the space sickness in the first place that thereafter led to its wholesale cancellation, these moments of 'Memories…' are wholly nostalgic. They are also reflective of desires that come closest to those of the left- and right-accelerationists in chapter one, both of whom rally in favour of spaceflight despite its foreclosure by a 'surfeit of significance' in the case of Singleton, or "moral pieties" and state-led conspiracy in the case of Nick Land.[101]

Ballard's framing of all three forms of flight as nostalgic in 'Memories…'—especially spaceflight—is, in many ways, directly at odds with forms of accelerationism. This is because it demarcates these forms of flight as impossibilities, suggesting that they constitute failed responses to the conditions from which they symbolise the desire to escape. One way of reading this is as a rejection of ideas of transcendence—a point of commonality between 'Memories…' and *Crash*. Umberto Rossi provides an example of this type of interpretation in 'A Little Something About Dead Astronauts' (2009). Reading 'Memories…' alongside Ballard's other space stories, Rossi argues that these works all evidence 'an abiding tension […] between high-tech modernity and pre-modern spirituality.'[102] From this he draws two key insights, namely: 1) that within these stories 'the heavens […] are a place of powerful sacred meaning for our not yet fully evolved unconscious' and 2) that 'violating the heavens with a technology inseparably entwined with violence and death, with our deepest destructive drives makes the space-program a multi-layered, contradictory, and ultimately dangerous assemblage'.[103] In such a reading, space represents a limit point to human understanding, something sacred that will punish those who attempt to transgress its bounds through flight. In 'Memories…', this quality of the text is implied in several ways. It's palpable in Hinton's 'evolutionary crime', and how both NASA and Mallory ultimately facilitated it, the murder of Shepley in space, and the ensuing sickness that followed.[104] It's also evident in the descriptions of the technology of spaceflight itself, the Space Shuttle being a catalyst for inertia, a 'reductive machine, a Juggernaut

[100] Ibid., p. 598.
[101] Benedict Singleton, 'Maximum Jailbreak', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 489–507, p. 493.
[102] Umberto Rossi, 'A Little Something about Dead Astronauts', *Science Fiction Studies*, 36.1 (2009), 101–20, p. 102.
[103] Ibid., p. 115.
[104] Ballard, 'Memories of the Space Age', p. 585.

that could be pushed by its worshippers across the planet, devouring the years and hours and seconds.'[105]

Yet, Rossi's criticism of 'Memories…' does not leave much room to consider the ambiguous nature of the characters' respective responses to both space sickness and flight. In this way, Rossi's view is reminiscent of the moral readings of *Crash* by Sobchack and Hayles, which I previously suggested were justified oppositions to transgression and transcendence, but only because they sidestepped the complex relationships each of the novel's characters had to its principle transgressive character, Vaughan. In 'Memories…', a similar problem exists: each of the characters return to the Space Coast despite the space sickness. Likewise, they all demonstrate a predilection towards flight even though this sickness has rendered it nostalgic. Because of this, their nostalgia is presented by Ballard as an impulse towards a sort of transcendence, even if this impulse is misjudged, and they can never actually achieve the transcendence they desire.

This impulse is evident in 'Memories...' when each of the characters turn to their various forms of flight in response to the terminal stasis presented by the sickness. In their embraces of the sickness, they manage to make the stasis it produces work for them, achieving a kind of transcendence even though an absence of flight seemingly makes it an impossibility. Hinton's and Anne's concluding levitation is a great example of this. By entering a state of total levitation, both characters ultimately accept the futility of their desire to fly. Yet, in the process, they still enter a state of transcendence, both characters 'stepp[ing] forward into the light.'[106]

It's only when read in conjunction with spaceflight and Mallory's perspective, however, that the accelerationist as opposed to the purely spiritual credentials of this impulse can be fully appreciated. This is because, in Rossi's view, 'Memories…' and Ballard's other space stories don't just frame 'the heavens' as some kind of transcendent realm, 'a place of powerful sacred meaning', they also consider the dangers of using a technology of 'violence and death' to violate these heavens.[107] Speaking to the spaceflight technology with which Mallory is, in part, enamoured, Rossi's point here fails to account for why Mallory retains a fascination with this technology despite the clearly harmful consequences it has had in the story. Here, I think it's instructive to see Mallory's interests in these technologies as being much like Jim's fascinations with the World War II Japanese Zero fighter aircraft and the interior of his dilapidated car in *Crash*: as means of reconciling with their dilapidation to resuscitate a sense of the future. In this vein, he is only nostalgic for these technologies because

[105] Ibid., p. 590.
[106] Ibid., p. 599.
[107] Rossi, p. 115.

they reflect a moment before his world had been afflicted by the stasis of the space sickness, even if, as dangerous and violent technologies, they were its principal causes.

This nostalgia for spaceflight provides no clear resolution to the statis caused by the space sickness, just as Jim's embrace of flight provided no resolution to the stasis he experienced. However, it does draw attention to its status as a dilemma, '"dramatiz[ing the] incapacity to imagine the future"', to quote Fredric Jameson.[108] Yet, despite the seeming futility of the characters' responses to the statis the sickness produces, I also think that Ballard's narrative aims to go beyond mere dramatization—even if it ultimately fails to do so in any practicable sense. The way that Ballard does this in 'Memories…', is by collapsing high-tech modernity and spirituality into one another, and in doing so, overcoming the distinction partly upheld by critics like Rossi between the two. Such a collapse is palpable in Ballard's trademark exploration of inner and outer space.

Ballard defined the distinction between these two forms of space in his 1962 essay 'Which Way to Inner Space?' In his view, inner space represented 'more psycho-literary ideas, more […] synthetic psychologies and space times, [and] more of the sombre half-worlds one glimpses in the paintings of schizophrenics'.[109] In other words, the 'sex, drugs, meditation, mysticism' culture that he claimed killed initial interest in the moon landings in the Lynn Barber interview.[110] In contrast, Ballard viewed outer space as being related to things like 'interstellar travel, extraterrestrial life forms, [and] galactic wars'—all of which are more typical tropes of science fiction.[111] Spaceflight itself could be added to this list, a sort of exploration of outer space that was occurring outside of fiction.

In 'Memories…', both forms of space are present in Ballard's representations of flight. Outer space is connected to spaceflight and its slower, machine-powered equivalents, while fight's more natural and poetic forms represent inner space.[112] A large part of the narrative of 'Memories…',

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[108] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), p. 288.

[109] J. G Ballard, 'Which Way to Inner Space?', in *A User's Guide to the Millennium*, ebook Edition (London: HarperCollins, 2017), loc. 3008-3029.

[110] '1970: Lynn Barber. Sci-Fi Seer', p. 25

[111] Ibid. Ballard formulates his ideas of a distinction between outer and inner space in response to common tropes of science fiction. However, this distinction is also applicable outer environments and inner responses to these environments, something that Ballard also concerns himself with, as I have already shown in *Crash*.

[112] Here, I draw on the distinction made between the two forms of flight by Gregory Stephenson in his reading of 'The Object of the Attack' (1984) in *Out of the Night and Into the Dream* (1991). This book provides the most complete overview of flight in Ballard's short fiction alongside Pringle's, and in it Stephenson explains through the characters in Ballard's 1984 short story that 'Stamford is associated with the military-technological extensions of flight, with the exploitation of outer space; whereas Young is identified with the aeronautics of man-powered or wind-powered aircraft that is to say pure flight, and the exploration of inner space.' Gregory Stephenson, *Out of the Night and into the Dream: A Thematic Study of the Fiction of J.G. Ballard*, Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, no. 47 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), p. 101.

however, also consists of exploding the clarity of the distinction between these forms of flight. To take the example of Hinton once again, he moves from mechanically powered flight more typical of outer space, to a poetic form of flight in-keeping with inner space. Likewise, Mallory desires spaceflight (outer space) as an answer to the space sickness that is entirely localised in each of the characters' heads, their inner space. With this established, 'Memories…' centres around the idea that a turn to inner space might provide a means for overcoming a stasis connected to outer space, and vice versa, with an absence of spaceflight enacting the stasis tied to outer space, while also being the very form of outer space Mallory turns to in order overcome his experience of mental paralysis in inner space.

For Ballard, a collapse of the distinction between inner and outer space was far more important than acting as a mere literary device. In fact, in his non-fiction he occasionally asserts its necessity for re-invigorating actual spaceflight. An example of this is evident in his critical review of Adrian Berry's *The Next Ten Thousand Years* in 'Spaced Out' (1974). In this review, Ballard is deeply critical of Berry's affinity towards forecasting grandiose futures in space, and argues that 'for the foreseeable future at any rate, space travel makes sense only in terms of those extravagant and overblown ideas, devoid of any human dimension.'[113] After making this remark, however, Ballard then argues that '[t]rying to think more realistically about space, with its utter nothingness, we become a little like laboratory volunteers floating in sensory-deprivation tanks, deranged when the only perceptible external reality becomes the interior of our own head.'[114] While certainly a rejection of the palpable links Berry's grand ideas have to outer space in Golden-Age science fiction, Ballard still shows an acceptance of the possibility of outer space flight. In fact, in this review, he posits that inner space might serve as a possible catalyst for outer space flight, serving as a necessary part of its development. In this sense, inner space is an imaginative leap for overcoming what is, for Ballard, currently a foreclosed possibility, a mechanism for surpassing the stasis that might be associated with space flight itself and, in this sense, a way of moving beyond, and not just realising, the sacred nature of the heavens.

This perspective on a collapse of inner and outer space is, in my view, what constitutes Ballard's very own form of accelerationism. He is prepared to accept the accelerationist desire for spaceflight, evident in Singleton's and Land's essays explored in Chapter One, only insofar as it is matched by a compensatory move inward. In this vein, Ballard is not only concerned with depicting

[113] J.G. Ballard, 'Spaced Out', in *A User's Guide to the Millennium*, Ebook Edition (London: HarperCollins, 2017), loc. 2615.
[114] Ibid., loc. 2620.

'no future' or an 'absent future', nor only filling it with 'with past forms of acceleration.'[115] Instead, his work reflects on the ways that acceleration has altered inner space, and how, in turn, such perceptions might be everted to make sense of the future of the outer environment. One major outcome of this in Ballard's work is a perceptible awareness of 'frenzied statis'. This is a condition of stasis that acceleration itself is capable of giving rise to, and something that is evident in 'Memories…' through how the space centre produces a seemingly homogenized urban environment: 'identical liquor stores, car parks and shopping malls formed the building blocks of a strand of urban DNA generated by the nucleus of the space centre.'[116] And yet, even with this identification, Ballard does not so easily give up on the idea that the answer to such forms of stasis might lie in its now absent locus: acceleration itself.

This much is evident in a brief moment of 'Memories…' when Mallory catches the radio frequency of the world beyond the Florida coast:

> Mallory listened to the police radio, the tuneless static that reflected the huge void that lay over Florida. By contrast the air-traffic frequencies were a babel of intercom chatter, both from big jets landing at Mobile, Atlanta and Savannah, and from military craft overflying the Bahamas. All gave Florida a wide berth. To the north of the 31st parallel life in the United States went on as before, but south of that unfenced and rarely patrolled frontier was an immense silence of deserted marinas and shopping malls, abandoned citrus farms and retirement estates, silent ghettoes and airports.[117]

Although this passage implies a dynamic world beyond the 'immense silence' of the deserted Florida enclave where time is beginning to stand still, elsewhere in the short story it is explained that Mallory and Anne had seen 'the same shopping malls, bars and motels, the same stores and used-car lots […] in their journey across the continent'.[118] In this sense, the Florida coast is an inner microcosm of the outer world, a further example of the stasis coextensive with the 'suburbanization of the soul [that] has overrun our plant like the plague' as Ballard would come to write in his later story *Super-Cannes*.[119] Mallory's return to Cape Canaveral therefore acts as a turn inwards, an immersion in an absence of acceleration, in order to both highlight and overcome the 'structuring role' that an absence of acceleration is having on the outer world. [120]

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[115] Warstat, p 58 ; Noys, *Malign Velocities*, p. 97.
[116] Ballard, 'Memories of the Space Age', p. 596.
[117] Ibid., p. 575.
[118] Ibid., p. 596.
[119] J. G. Ballard, *Super-Cannes* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), p. 263.
[120] Shaw, p. 7.

Dangerous Bends Ahead? Speed Up!

Across 'Fictions of Every Kind', *Crash*, and 'Memories of the Space Age', Ballard explores forms of flight and their foreclosure. In 'Fictions of every Kind', Ballard relates flight to science fiction's relationship to the social novel, with Ballard seeing the former as more at ease with the accelerated technological changes altering the latter. What's most compelling about Ballard's reflections on forms of flight across this work is their irresolution, demonstrating its inability to totally overcome and break with such forms of stasis. This is evident through how, after declaring the potential of science fiction in 'Fictions of Every Kind', Ballard writes a work like *Crash*, a novel with a greater affinity to older forms of 'narrative fiction' than its precursor, *The Atrocity Exhibition*.[121] Thereafter, in *Crash* Ballard explores flight as paradoxically illustrative of both an escape from technologized planning and control and a source of greater immersion in its totalizing grasp. This is then followed in 'Memories of the Space Age', by an examination of flight's complete foreclosure by stasis and the relationship that a nostalgia for flight has to this stasis.

These qualities of Ballard's work resonate with the relationship between accelerationism and acceleration, with accelerationists advocating for the latter for the purposes of overcoming stasis, while, in turn, acceleration acts as a cause of 'frenzied stasis' that troubles the accelerationist project. I don't think Ballard's narratives resolve the issues of accelerationism. In fact, as I have demonstrated above, the ambivalent qualities of his texts often lead to readings that are at odds with them. However, there are revealing points of resonance. Ballard rarely uses identifications of stasis to completely discredit pursuits of acceleration, and his highly equivocal position in relation to characters like Vaughan and Hinton only exacerbates this. These qualities of his texts are likely those that have seen him become such an influential figure for accelerationism. Yet, there is certainly a critical distance from accelerationism in Ballard's works. This distance is useful, I think, for putting Ballard at odds with the pronouncements of his precursors in the Independent Group, who had a more clearly affirmative approach to acceleration in the fifties, and clearer visions of what the future would look like thereafter. It also, as I shall demonstrate, separates Ballard from the accelerationist currents of the nineties, both in terms of the far more optimistic accounts of acceleration in the cyberculture, and their reverse currents in the CCRU.

In the next chapter, I shift focus from Ballard's fascination with outward flight and technologies of aviation to explore even more inward-looking digital ones. As I have shown in this chapter, Ballard's work questions whether the imaginative break accelerationism offers provides

[121] Ballard, 'Fictions of Every Kind', p. 237.

enough force to separate with the bleak conditions it forecasts, or instead merely hastens their folding into the present, making escape (or flight) seemingly more impossible and regression more probable. To rephrase Ballard, if there are indeed more 'dangerous bends ahead', is it better to slow down and hopefully forestall their arrival, or is the unthinkably riskier move—rounding the corner a bit quicker—a better solution? In the face of dangerous bends, can it ever be better to speed up, as an accelerationist would argue?[122]

[122] Jeanette Baxter, 'Reading the Signs (2004)', in *Extreme Metaphors: Selected Interviews with J.G. Ballard, 1967-2008*, ed. by Simon Sellars, and Daniel Finbarr John O'Hara (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), pp. 407–14, p. 412.

Chapter 5

Machine Tickling Aphids: The Cybernetic Culture Research Unit and Dread Futurism

> Hello, Darkness!

In March 1994, the cultural theorist Mark Fisher published an article in the *New Statesman* titled 'Hello Darkness, Our New Friend'. Titled after the track 'Hello Darkness' (1993) by Bay B Kane (Mel Tanur), the article explored a new sound that emerged out of the nineties rave scene in the previous winter, a subgenre of hardcore known as darkside. For Fisher, darkside had displaced the blissed-out communalism of earlier rave in favour of a paranoia whose 'implied world' was 'hi-tech Hobbesian'.[1] It was 'a music not of ecstasy, but of dread' that 'borrow[ed] its ontology from horror and science fiction', only to push these things through its titles and high-speed sampling to consider transgressive themes like 'casual homicide, ultraviolence, [and] survivalist individualism'.[2] Because of this, Fisher believed darkside responded to a pervasively cruel English cultural climate, one then filled by 'what feels like an unprecedented level of crime […] petty thefts […] muggings […] the steady increasing drizzle of drug deaths', and continued debate about the cause of the atrocities that were the violent murders of Suzanne Capper and James Bulger.[3]

Fisher framed darkside as an English working-class social realism, 'an aggressive, proletarian collage of hyperactive beats, spooky samples, and ominous electronics'.[4] The ambivalent sampling of horror was an attempt to represent how '[t]he fabric of public life' was 'disfigured', with darkside's 'form dramatiz[ing] the fragmenting social scene.'[5] In this sense, darkside was a response to a perceived cultural degeneration that was itself produced out of the hypothetical remnants of a decay, 'music made by and of what the dominant culture considers detritus'.[6] Through this gesture, Fisher believed the form was successful at undercutting the narratives produced by popular media demopaths, or 'moral hucksters hawking a tawdry agenda'.[7] Instead, it recast the fears associated

[1] Mark Fisher, 'Hello Darkness, Our New Friend', *New Statesman & Society*, 11 March 1994, pp. 32–33, p. 32.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid. Demopaths is a term used by Iain Hamilton Grant in 'LA 2019: Demopathy and Xenogenesis' (1996) and refers to people whose politics involves making unsubstantiated moral/emotional pleas to the *demos* or

with this moment of decay as the projection(s) of a 'middle-class media', and attempts to gain political, social, and cultural status through insincere moral posturing. This was highlighted at the time by the moral panics over 'video nasties' and rave culture, which led to the subsequent tightening of the Video Recordings Act, and the passing of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994, which effectively criminalised outdoor raves.[8] To appropriate an equally timely phrase coined by J.G. Ballard, darkside was, for Fisher, an attempt to rub a certain middle-class moralist face in its own vomit, and then to force it to look in the mirror, confronting it with the 'detritus' of its own making to challenge its assumptions of moral superiority.[9]

Interpreting darkside as a social realism is only one side of the story, however. Fisher also refers to the genre as 'social prophecy', with 'an almost religious sensibility'.[10] This is a sentiment that echoes other accounts of earlier forms of rave music, such as Jeremy Deller's view that the mid-1980s Chicago club scene was 'like the beginnings of a new religion.'[11] As the name suggests, darkside was expressive of a much darker, more sacrilegious sensibility than rave, one that, 'like dub reggae' before it, sought to displace 'dread into celebration'.[12] According to Fisher, this came from an understanding that, 'like ecstasy, dread arises from a sense that former certainties are mutable.'[13] Here, Fisher's association furnishes darkside with an impression of positive apocalypticism. It is a 'dread futurism' that 'invites us to recognise the way that things are mutating', and, more crucially, that '[o]ur horror might only be the death throes of the old order.'[14] Darkside's doubling down on the horrors of the present were cast by Fisher as both a means of social commentary, and for escaping it. They offered a way of highlighting the horrors of the present, and acted as a reminder that these horrors were indications of the possibility of political and social change to come.

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common people of the state. See: Iain Hamilton Grant, 'LA 2019: Demopathy and Xenogenesis', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 275–302.

[8] Julian Petley, '"Are We Insane?" The "Video Nasty" Moral Panic', *Recherches Sociologiques et Anthropologiques*, 43.1 (2012), 35–57 <https://doi.org/10.4000/rsa.839>.

[9] This quote by Ballard is sampled on the 1994 Manic Street Preachers album *The Holy Bible* on the track 'Mausoleum'. See: Manic Street Preachers, *Mausoleum* (Spotify: Epic, 1994) <https://open.spotify.com/track/06NKSnEMiEJ9NSGRq54JfE> [accessed 17 November 2023]. As with the darkside and isolationist music explored by Fisher, this record also hearkens back to what Fisher calls the 'apocalyptic pop' of the 1970s and '80s (namely, Killing Joke's 'Requiem', Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures* and the Jam's 'Funeral Pyre'). See: Fisher, 'Hello Darkness', p. 33.

[10] Fisher, 'Hello Darkness', p. 32.

[11] *Everybody In The Place: An Incomplete History Of Britain 1984-1992*, dir. by Jeremy Deller, 2019, Youtube, VINYLOVED <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jqc_1NVHE-0> [accessed 29 January 2023].

[12] Fisher, 'Hello Darkness', p. 32.

[13] Ibid., p. 33.

[14] Ibid.

The heretical quality of darkside that Fisher identified in his *New Statesman* article, was also affirmed by another, slightly later, work that followed four teenage boys coming-of-age in the jungle scene that arose parallel to darkside: *Junglist* (1995, 2021).[15] Written by Two Fingas & James T. Kirk (pseudonyms for Andrew Green and Eddie Otchere), *Junglist* is described by Sukhdev Sandhu as a 'youthsploitation' novel produced for the pulpy Do-It-Yourself (DIY) underground that surrounded jungle music.[16] The book was published by Backstreets, an imprint of Boxtree, by Jake Lingwood, 'a 20-something editor with a passion for mod' who saw 'forms such as jungle […] as the latest expression of a mod aesthetic'.[17] Much like the outputs of the Independent Group I explored in Chapter Two, the work shares an affinity with earlier forms of modernism. It reads as a stream-of-consciousness narrative set over a weekend in which the perspectives of each of the four characters blend and become difficult to tell apart. Yet, the work's markedly underground and subcultural interests also strafe the designation of 'literary fiction' now more commonly attributed to modernist works—'literary fiction' being a term the author Green reportedly despises today.[18]

Fisher's perception of darkside as an affirmation of horror is captured in one of the concluding moments of *Junglist*. In a particularly existential scene set in Peckham's Lazerdrome, one of the character's thoughts about jungle's sampladelic quality launches into a prophetic speculation about his presence within history:

> Guerrilla dance, guerrilla musicality, coming from anywhere, taking what is needed, taking what is required. No waiting for copyright clearance, none of this bullshit displaying respect for a tune. Out to show that if someone comes up with the original tune, you can go one better by reinventing it, redesigning it. Just jumping out there to create a new version, upgrading it. Making it better. This is the end of the twentieth century, the edge of infinity. Twenty-first century just around the corner. Sample here, timestretch there, loop a beat, change the pitch on that guitar riff. Taking technology to its logical apogee. Music manipulated and redefined. Subversive in the extreme.
>
> This is my time, my age, circling within the hearts of darkness, waiting for the millennium to overtake me. Waiting for the madness to erupt again, for the fundamentalists to start us

[15] The boundaries between the genres of darkside and jungle were, at this time, porous, with records having vastly differing genre identities for different people. To my understanding, darkside was something of a bridge between breakbeat hardcore and jungle music, with both darkside and jungle promoting a darker sound in reaction to the positivity of happy hardcore and earlier forms of rave music. A good example of this porosity between jungle and darkside is the record 'Burial' by Leviticus (1994), which is referenced throughout *Junglist*. This connection between darkside and jungle is also implied by Caspar Melville in *It's a London Thing* (2019) who discusses the darker sound of darkside as though it is a parallel development of jungle. See: Caspar Melville, *It's a London Thing: How Rare Groove, Acid House and Jungle Remapped the City* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 201-202.

[16] Sukhdev Sandhu, 'Introduction: The Intense Now', in *Junglist* (London: Repeater Books, 2021), pp. 1–6, p. 4.

[17] Sukhdev Sandhu, 'The Strange Case of Rave-Culture Pulp-Fiction', *Frieze*, 20 June 2013 <https://www.frieze.com/article/music-26> [accessed 5 December 2022].

[18] Sandhu, 'The Intense Now', p. 3.

> down the road to destruction with their no-compromise rantings. Just waiting. Knowing that I will be in the firing line. That I'm going to be one of those shot to pieces. The young always get it in the head. Why should my generation be any different?
>
> But that's all in the future. Right now, right here. I'm dancing, running on the spot, my lighter raised to the ceiling, letting it all hang out. I fear no man, beast or god, for the music surrounds me, makes me strong. Feel the blood thunder in my veins as I reach explosion point, the MC screaming for the rewind, our voices lifted in unison with him. Of the same mind, linked, joined at the heart by the music. Jungle.[19]

Here, Fisher's interpretation of darkside's 'dread futurism' is evoked by the narrator's speculation on the new millennium. The narrator, who is intentionally ambiguous at this stage in the novel, has uncompromisingly individualist perspective, '**I** fear no man', 'the music surrounds **me**, makes **me** strong' (own emphasis), and yet, this perspective is paradoxically sourced from a massified collective, or hive mind, parroting a leader: 'our voices lifted in unison with him […] [o]f the same mind'. Their speculations are of the 'no future' variety, and demonstrative of dread through an awareness that 'fundamentalists' are waiting to 'start us down the road to destruction with their no-compromise rantings'.[20] Briefly exiting the safety of the plural pronoun, the individual then affirms 'I'm going to be one of those shot to pieces'. A tragically horrific prospect, but one seemingly embraced as an inevitability: '[w]hy should my generation be any different? / […T]hat's all in the future.'

This narrative moment of *Junglist* resonates with the stakes Fisher identifies in darkside music: it highlights the genre's potency as a social realism insofar as it 'dramatizes' a 'fragmenting social scene', while at the same time revealing its quality as a form of prophecy by pre-empting the terror attacks of the turn of the century, and divisive populist politics. It's the narrator's gesture of doubling down on the music despite such forms of prophecy that truly completes any comparison to Fisher's article, however. Such doubling down highlights how the narrator's 'dread futurism' is both sourced from and resolved by the music and, because of this, reveals how forms of dread can become an ecstasy by presenting the possibility of change in the present. This is evident in the flickers of radicality given to community—their 'guerrilla dance, guerrilla musicality'—as the narrator performs the role of a guerrilla combatant by vacillating between collective and individual. This is

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[19] Two Fingas and James T. Kirk, *Junglist* (London: Repeater Books, 2021), p. 155.

[20] 'No Future' is a phrase that comes from the Sex Pistols' song 'God Save the Queen' (1977), that has a long history of resonance with (typically) left-leaning forms of political and cultural expressions of negativity. This is partly due to the profound cultural impact that the Sex Pistols had on music and cultural outputs in the 1970s, reinvigorating a popular permissibility that re-opened the doors to experimental subcultures that had become increasingly commercialised in the late-'60s, e.g., mods. However, it is also more explicitly connected to left-political currents through the ties that promoters of the Sex Pistols, like Anthony Wilson, had to earlier forms of radical political expression, such as Situationism and Autonomism. This latter point is particularly valuable to Plant, who's first monograph, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (1992) partly explores the connections between Situationism and punk.

also much more subtly evoked through reference to the musical genre's appropriative applications of technologies. There is, in their employment, no longer the 'logical apogee' of a functionalist or utilitarian utopia, possibilities conceived of at the time by some more positive strands of what is now referred to as the cyberculture. Instead, all that remains is an act of continuous appropriation, manipulation, and redefinition that aims to be '[s]ubversive in the extreme'.

Fisher and *Junglist* both set the tone for this chapter. The 'dread futurism' they both identify and explore influenced the works and outputs of a 1990s collective called the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (hereafter 'CCRU' or 'the Unit'). The CCRU were a group of theorists and philosophers-cum-artists and writers initially based at the University of Warwick.[21] They were at their most active between 1995 and 2003, before disbanding, only for some members to partially reconvene on a blog called *Hyperstition* between 2004 and 2007.[22] In this chapter, I explore the CCRU through two key texts from its zine series *Abstract Culture* (1997-1999) (5.1): 'Meltdown' (1994), by Nick Land, and 'Swarmachines' (1996) by the CCRU.[23] Taking these texts as formative outputs for the CCRU, I argue that they exhibit the qualities of 'dread futurism' Fisher associates with darkside, while also exploring the relationship this kind of futurism has to accelerationism.

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[21] The historiography of the CCRU is complex, with a membership that fluctuated and changed over time, this was contingent on when individuals started and finished at the University of Warwick, and on who followed when they moved their activity to Leamington Spa after 1996. Much like the Independent Group in Chapter Two, it's nearly impossible to determine every member of the Unit over its lifespan. However, there is a clear group of people most closely associated with it. These are: Sadie Plant, Nick Land, Iain Hamilton Grant, Mark Fisher, Robin Mackay, Steve Goodman, Luciana Parisi, Anna Greenspan, and Suzanne Livingston. Other individuals have also been closely associated with the Unit, either because of their contributions to the *Abstract Culture* zine series, or because of other means of involvement. Among these are Kodwo Eshun, Steve Metcalf, and Angus Carlyle. It's also worth noting that in its earliest days the CCRU was effectively the synthesis of two groups, one that was based at the University of Warwick, the other at the University of Birmingham called Switch, who followed Sadie Plant from Birmingham, and whose members also contributed to the Virtual Futures conferences between 1994 and 1996.

[22] Just like the membership, the CCRU's timeline is also complex. This is partly by design, as part of the Unit's identity is based on subverting linear time. On the CCRU's website, CCRU.net, the Unit claims to have 'retrochronically trigger[ed] itself from October 1995, using a UK University as a temporary habitat', suggesting that it initially formed in 1995. CCRU, 'Communique One: Message to Simon Reynolds: 1998', *CCRU.Net*, 1998 <http://ccru.net/id(entity)/communiqueone.htm> [accessed 10 March 2023]. However, the group did not have an "official" identity until after Sadie Plant quit her post at the University of Warwick in March 1997, and Nick Land did the same shortly thereafter in October of the same year, which is when the Unit decamped to Leamington Spa. According to the title of their published work *CCRU Writings 1997-2003* (2017), the Unit were active until 2003. However, this may also be incorrect as many members had by this point moved on from the Unit, while Land and Greenspan moved to Taiwan in 2002. Some members including Land, Mackay, Fisher, and Greenspan would thereafter be involved with the *Hyperstition Blog* between 2004 and 2007. In 2007, the CCRU also collaborated with 0rphan Drift (Delphi Carstens & Mer Roberts) on a project called *Liquid Lattice*. See: 0rphan Drift, 'Liquid Lattice', *0rphan Drift Archive* <https://www.orphandriftarchive.com/neo-future/liquid-lattice/> [accessed 22 September 2023].

[23] Figure 5.1: Cover of *Abstract Culture: Digital Hyperstition* (UK: CCRU, 1999).

In the first phase of my argument, I identify Land's 'Meltdown' as an accelerationist response to hegemonic forms of culture, as I also did with my exploration of the Independent Group (IG) in Chapter Two. Only this cultural hegemony has split between a cultural conservatism similar to that the IG railed against in the fifties—which I see as related to the legal responses to rave and video nasties above—and a technological optimism co-extensive with largely American strands of an optimistic nineties cyberculture.[24] I highlight how, in 'Meltdown', Land counters both of these currents with a cyber-pessimism that, in turn, proves profoundly prophetic through its identification of a separation of acceleration from progress.[25] As I have done across earlier chapters, however, I also consider the uneasy quality of Land's accelerationist response to this separation. I do this by exploring how his advocacy for this separation sees him elide political subjectivities and forms of struggle, while emphasising the myriad problems of his references to feminine figures, women, and "the other" in his work. In the final phase of the chapter, I then compare 'Meltdown' to the CCRU's collectively authored work 'Swarmachines'. In this part of the chapter, I examine the similarities between 'Meltdown' and 'Swarmachines', particularly their shared explorations of the accelerated technological and cultural moment of the nineties. However, I argue that, unlike Land in 'Meltdown', the CCRU offer a more nuanced approach to political subjectivity through more self-evident concern for forms of collectivity, a greater regard for radical cultural history through references to Situationism and punk, and clearer self-identification with the 'guerrilla musicality' of jungle.[26] I argue that although this does not totally reverse many of the problems I identify with Land's earlier text, it demonstrates a greater concern with how his earlier 'dread futurism' relates to forms of left political praxis.

As I have already evidenced in the thesis introduction, there have been several past attempts to characterise the CCRU's work as accelerationist. In his book *Malign Velocities*, Benjamin Noys

[24] Henceforth, any reference to the cyberculture refers to an optimistic, utopian element characteristic of the San Francisco Bay Area rave scene in the early '90s, which receives considerable analysis in Douglas Rushkoff's *Cyberia* (1994), but that is also connected with the '60s counterculture in Mark Dery's *Escape Velocity* (1996), and thereafter more extensively in Fred Turner's *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (2006).

[25] I refer to Land's work as a kind of pessimism in acknowledgement of how he differentiates speculative and pessimistic thought in his monograph *The Thirst for Annihilation* (1992). In this book, Land aligns speculative thought with a 'logic of social progress', something that he attributes to Hegelian philosophy. By contrast, he refers to pessimism as an 'affect process of unconditional revolt' that repudiates the idea that Western 'history has been in any way beneficial'. This is a philosophical position that he identifies with Schopenhauer and thereafter, Nietzsche. In his early work, Land follows the latter philosophical lineage over the former, seeing pessimism as a 'model of revolution' that identifies the violent logics underpinning the Western ideal of progress (racism, misogyny, etc.), while also being predicated on the will to 'escape' from progress altogether. See: Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism: An Essay in Atheistic Religion* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 10-14.

[26] Fingas and Kirk, p. 155.

argues that the outputs of Land and the CCRU characterise a historical instance of accelerationism, a 'cyber-accelerationism', that corresponds with a moment when acceleration has passed 'from the car, the quintessential technology of mass speed and modernity, to the computer.'[27] The CCRU are also cast as precursors to accelerationism in *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* (2014), which includes two texts attributed to the CCRU, 'Swarmachines' and 'Cybernetic Culture' (1996), and three texts that preceded but that were influential on the Unit's development: Nick Land's 'Circuitries' (1992), Land's and Sadie Plant's 'Cyberpositive' (1994), and Iain Hamilton Grant's 'LA 2019: Demopathy and Xenogenesis' (1996). These texts are described by the editors of *The Accelerationist Reader* as 'a deliberate culmination of the most 'evil' tendencies of accelerationism.'[28]

In *The Reader*, two further texts also reflect on Land's pre-CCRU outputs as important precursors to accelerationism: Mark Fisher's 'Terminator vs Avatar' (2010, 2012), and Nick Srnicek's and Alex Williams's '#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics' (2013). In the former, Fisher emphasises Land's connection to Jean-François Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* (1974), while also briefly stressing, but never fully extrapolating, the relationship between Land's work and jungle subculture.[29] In the latter, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams focus on how Land 'acutely' captures neoliberal capitalism's 'ideological self-presentation' as 'one of liberating the forces of creative destruction, setting free ever-accelerating technological and social innovations', while criticising his pro-capitalist predilections.[30] In this chapter, I expand on Fisher's and Srnicek's and Williams's interpretations of Land by placing greater emphasis on his cultural contexts. I then decentre Land in my reading of the CCRU, preferring to analyse the links between accelerationism and a CCRU text. By doing this, I begin to contest the notion that the CCRU were simply a convenient vessel for Land's ideas, while also identifying the Unit's emphasis on contested collective practice as an instrumental part of accelerationism's later conceptualisation.[31]

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[27] Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism & Capitalism* (Winchester, UK Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2014), p. 59, p. 49.
[28] Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, 'Introduction', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 1–46, p. 22.
[29] Mark Fisher, 'Terminator vs Avatar', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 335–46, p. 340.
[30] Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, '#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 347–62, p. 351.
[31] Examples of works that centre Land in their critical examinations of the CCRU and its practices include Benjamin Noys in *Malign Velocities*, and Christopher Haworth in 'Post-punk, Industrial Culture Zines, and the Information Dark Age' (2023). Noys's analysis and criticism of the relationship between the CCRU and accelerationism revolves around Land's work, with every reference to the CCRU also being an explicit reference to Land, while Christopher Haworth frequently refers to Land as the Unit's leader. In both cases, these accounts do not recognise the collectively authored nature of many of the CCRU's writings, and what Simon O'Sullivan

‘There’s a Void where there should be Ecstasy … Sure Feels Good to Me’: ‘Meltdown’ and the Dark Side of Progress[32]

Nick Land presented ‘Meltdown’ at the inaugural *Virtual Futures* conference, University of Warwick, 1994.[33] Part conference paper, part audio performance, ‘Meltdown’ is an extraordinarily rhetorical, non-linear narrative work that responds to what has since been characterised as an ‘*extremely* fast and *extremely* dense’ contemporary moment (italics in source).[34] In his synopsis of the conference, Charles J. Stivale saw ‘Meltdown’ as summarising the preceding discussions, while also splitting the audience at the time.[35] He reports that at *Virtual Futures*, big names in both the cyberculture and studies of it—like David Porush, Stelarc, Ivan Benjamin, Manuel de Landa, and Stephen Pohl—all took issue with the work. According to Stivale, Porush and Stelarc even both identified a pervasive sense of ‘technophobia’ and ‘apocalyp[ticism]’ in the text.[36] Against such observations, however, I want to provide a different perspective on these themes of the work that helps make sense of it in its larger cultural context. To do this, I’m going to read it as an echo of the ‘dread futurism’ Mark Fisher associated with darkside and suggest that it is a work that ‘invites’ its reader ‘to recognise the way that things are mutating’, and that their ‘horror might only be the death throes of the old order.’[37] I identify this ‘old order’ in ‘Meltdown’ as part of the ‘contested terrain’ of the nineties cyberculture Land was opposed to alongside older forms of cultural and political capital, both of which, true to accelerationist form, he undermines with reference to accelerated change.[38] Crucial to my argument

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refers to as its ‘complex and contradictory’ affective aspects, which were not simply products of consensus, but the consequences of what I prefer to see as antagonistic cooperation. See: Simon O’Sullivan, ‘The Missing Subject of Accelerationism’, *Mute*, 2014 <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/missing-subject-accelerationism> [accessed 23 January 2020].

[32] Hyper on Experience, Lords of the Null-Lines (Spotify: Moving Shadow, 1993) <https://open.spotify.com/track/61KOo49HLG1V6Xgzp1kxAM> [accessed: 17 November 2023].

[33] Land’s ‘Meltdown’ pre-exists the CCRU, having first been performed at the 1994 *Virtual Futures* conference. It was originally printed in the first issue of Robin Mackay’s cottage industry zine ****collapse* (1994) at the University of Warwick. However, it was thereafter republished by the CCRU as the opening text to the first issue (or swarm) of their *Abstract Culture* zine, which suggests its significance to the collective.

[34] R. U. Sirius, ‘A User’s Guide to Using This Guide’, in *Mondo 2000: A User’s Guide to the New Edge: Cyberpunk, Virtual Reality, Wetware, Designer Aphrodisiacs, Artificial Life, Techno-Erotik Paganism, and More*, ed. by Rudy Rucker, Queen Mu, and R. U. Sirius, 1. ed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), pp. 14–17, p. 14.

[35] Charles J. Stivale, ‘Spoon-Archives/Deleuze-Guattari.Archive/d-G_1994/deleuze_May.94, Message 31’, *Driftline - Spoon Collective Archive* <http://www.driftline.org/cgi-bin/archive/archive_msg.cgi?end=2001&file=spoon-archives%2Fdeleuze-guattari.archive%2Fd-g_1994%2Fdeleuze_May.94&msgnum=31&start=1731> [accessed 22 September 2023].

[36] Ibid.

[37] Fisher, ‘Hello Darkness’, p. 33.

[38] I take the phrase ‘contested terrain’ from David Tetzlaff’s writings about the Warez movement in 'Yo-Ho-Ho and a Server of Warez’ (2000). In this essay Tetzlaff identifies that, although ethically dubious, the Warez movement—an online group interested in pirating and collecting as much software as possible—were

is that Land's 'dread futurism' opts to affirm acceleration over progress—a quality of his work that contributes to its uneasy political status, but that also foreshadows the later separation of acceleration and progress identified by the likes of Hartmut Rosa.

'Meltdown' opens with the stock phrase '[t]he story goes like this', the work resembling a folk-tale, only for this premise to be humorously undercut by the inherent complexity of what follows:

> Earth is captured by a technocapital singularity as renaissance rationalization 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.[39]

Here a reader gets their first impression of the style of 'Meltdown', which frequently glosses contexts and histories in favour of narrating in a didactic mode—a quality of Land's work that the critic Holger Schulze sees as being akin to a cult leader's attempt to 'seamlessly brainwash you into some ideology at hand'.[40] The 'ideology at hand' in 'Meltdown' is a hyper-condensed, accelerated, history of the development of modernity, the beginning of which is evoked through reference to the Renaissance and the Age of Exploration. In this history, however, modernity is not a human by-product, and is instead conceived as a self-emergent process that has 'tak[en]-off' and that will continue to develop through 'auto-sophisticating machine runaway'. Here a reader is introduced to a key theme of Land's work I'll return to in a moment: the abstraction and elision of any subjective agency. The 'curve' of modernity's development is thereafter alluded to by Land slightly later in the text, in which years are listed as 'compression threshold[s]' that sequentially terminate just before the year 2012: '1500, 1756, 1884, 1948, 1980, 1996, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2011'.[41] This sequence being a reference to both accelerated growth and the 'technocapital singularity' mentioned above.[42]

Like many other sections of 'Meltdown', this sequence refers to other ideas that were present within the nineties cyberculture.[43] In this particular moment of the text, Land evokes Terence

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themselves indicative of the conflicted cultural terrain of a pre-privatized internet, and therefore the inherent contradictions underpinning early cyber-capitalism. David Tetzlaff, 'Yo-Ho-Ho and a Server of Warez', in *The World Wide Web and Contemporary Cultural Theory*, ed. by Andrew Herman and Thomas Swiss (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 99–126, p. 166.

[39] Nick Land, 'Meltdown', in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, ed. by Ray Brassier and Robin Mackay, 2nd ed (Falmouth : New York, NY: Urbanomic ; Sequence Press, 2012), pp. 441–59 p. 441.

[40] Holger Schulze, *Sonic Fiction*, The Study of Sound, 1. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p. 85.

[41] Land, 'Meltdown', p. 443.

[42] The mathematical definition of a singularity is a point at which a given mathematical object is no longer defined, as would be the case for 2012 when following the rules of this sequence.

[43] I give a further example of this below by contrasting 'Meltdown's' cyberpunk flavoured anti-government vision with the otherwise more optimistic vision(s) of internet freedom presented by John Perry Barlow and the

McKenna, a figure who was an icon of the West Coast house, rave, and drug culture in America at the time, as claimed by Douglas Rushkoff in *Cyberia* (1994). McKenna reportedly believed that 'history and time as we know it will end in the year 2012' due to a fractal equation called 'Time Wave Zero' he calculated from the *I Ching*.[44] This hypothetical end of 'human experience' would also supposedly 'feel like […] a DMT trip', leading humanity to enter into a hyperdimensional plane of existence of infinite complexity, without a comedown—a state of pure flight reminiscent of Hinton from Ballard's 'Memories of the Space Age' (1984) discussed in the previous chapter.[45] Although no less rapturous in its argument, 'Meltdown' offers a distinctly different conclusion. In the next paragraph of Land's work, the sequence is followed by the phrase '[n]othing human makes it out of the near future.'[46] In other words, something happens, just not for humanity; a conclusion that justifies Porush's and Stelarc's negative appraisals or 'apocalypse' and 'technophobia' in the text, while also revealing a key divergence from the more optimistic outlook of McKenna and his adherents in the cyberculture.

The different perceptions of rapture presented by McKenna and Land are reminiscent of the two opposing responses to technological acceleration I explored in Jake Chapman's *2+2=5* (2021) in Chapter One. McKenna's is akin to the [a]ncient optimists' that Chapman's narrator claims 'had anticipated the coming of a vast interconnected global network of electronic machines that would envelope the world with a skein of extremely helpful and soothing avatar algorithms.'[47] By contrast, Land is an example of the 'world-weary pessimists' who had

> forecast that this vast compliant electronic-machine-brain-thing would someday become bored of placating its dim-witted masters, and that frustration and impatience would cause it to complexify into something utterly sublime until it would eventually glide back up to the stars on magnificent laser beams, returning home to that place where abstract intelligence originates, abandoning the human race to the dumb gravity of dirt.[48]

In *2+2=5* Chapman presents these as polar tendencies, flattening them into a neat binary opposition. However, such a characterisation elides the wider cultural dynamics underpinning these respective

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Electronic Frontier Foundation. Another further example, however, are Land's references to extropianism in the text, which see him align the extropian aim to oppose entropy with "extropy" (or negentropy), with an anti-human modernity that uses 'entropy deviations' to 'camouflag[e] an invasion from the future, launched back out of terminated security against everything that inhibits the meltdown process.' Land, 'Meltdown', p. 445. For more on extopianism see: Ed Regis, 'Meet the Extropians', *Wired* <https://www.wired.com/1994/10/extropians/> [accessed 6 February 2023].

[44] Douglas Rushkoff, *Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Hyperspace*, 2nd ed (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2002), p. 69.

[45] Ibid., p. 70.

[46] Land, 'Meltdown', p. 443.

[47] Jake Chapman, *2+2=5.* (Falmouth: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2021), p. 112.

[48] Ibid., p. 112.

moments in their specific cultural contexts. McKenna, for instance, was symptomatic of the subculture of a US hegemon, while his optimism was becoming consonant with Richard Barbrook's and Andy Cameron's idea of the Californian Ideology: a 'new faith' that 'combine[d] the free-wheeling spirit of the hippies and the entrepreneurial potential of the new information technologies' into 'a digital utopia'.[49] Land, by contrast, related to a UK context in which the earlier house rave scene had mutated into breakbeat hardcore, and, in around 1992, into darkside, 'a music not of ecstasy, but of dread', as Fisher had it.[50] As much as these might be considered parallel tendencies, the two cultural forms were also competing. The blissed-out communalism represented by McKenna was inimical to UK darkside, which was much more niche, class conscious, and resembled a mutation of the house scene after it had been transplanted into an otherwise more peripheral context. Land's work, by extension, has exemplary resonance with the consequences of this shift.

In *Generation Ecstasy* (1998), Simon Reynolds notes how darkside ravers '[f]orm[ed] a sort of avant-garde within Britain's recreational drug culture, [… as] ravers who had perversely come to enjoy bad trips and weird vibes.'[51] Darkside ravers were therefore interested in the potential for negative effects in drug taking, the moment when 'the relief of ceding consciousness and control' that was associated with rave music and drug consumption bled 'into a fear of being *controlled* by a demonic Other' (italics in source).[52] In this sense, darkside revealed the negative underbelly of drug culture. However, this was an underbelly the ravers doubled down on. In line with this quality of darkside, Land's 'Meltdown' is rife with allusions to this negative state of losing control at the behest of human agency—a state that he seemingly affirms throughout the text. For instance, it's evident when 'Earth is captured by a technological singularity', in his claim that '[a]utocybernating market control guides the labour-process into immersion', and within his view that '[w]ith the information superhighway media nightmares take off on their own'.[53] Where these things would normally be viewed with a sense of anxiety or apprehension, in 'Meltdown' their consequences are treated ambivalently or, in some instances, gleefully affirmed. This is something that is also evident from the litany of anxieties that seem to proliferate throughout the text. These include: the end of stable

[49] Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, 'The Californian Ideology', *Science as Culture*, 6.26 (1996), 44–72, p. 44.
[50] Fisher, 'Hello Darkness', p. 32. Chapman also responds to the split between darkside and earlier rave. The iconographic smiley face that adorns the cover his book—a repeat motif in the Chapman Brothers' art—is a sinister allusion to the smiley face that was symbolically tied to the bliss of earlier UK acid house rave culture.
[51] Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013) <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=1223057> [accessed 6 March 2023], p. 208.
[52] Ibid., p. 217.
[53] Land, 'Meltdown', pp. 441, 446, 454.

human identity ('human security is lurching into crisis'), China's rising economic predominance ('Neo-China arrives from the future'), the proliferation of artificial drugs like ecstasy ('[h]ypersynthetic drugs click into digital voodoo'), HIV and AIDs, ('[r]etro-disease'), faith crises ('[b]eyond the [j]udgement of God'), nuclear apocalypse ('[m]eltdown: planetary china-syndrome'), the total eradication of "natural" ecology ('dissolution of the biosphere into the technosphere'), economic crises ('terminal speculative bubble crisis'), and computer viruses ('ultravirus […] is poised to eat your TV, infect your bank account, and hack xenodata from your mitochondria').[54] Otherwise concerning trends, 'Meltdown' is wholly ambivalent about extrapolating them, presenting each of these things as though they are radical shifts in the political status quo, as opposed to being the forms of crises they were often framed as in the media landscape of the day.[55] In this sense, their presentation corresponds to the 'dread futurism' Fisher associated with darkside, with these crises 'invit[ing] us to recognise the way things are mutating', and 'the death throes of the old order' through their embrace of the horrors they otherwise evoke.[56]

In 'Meltdown', the 'old order' that Land's 'dread futurism' is directed against appears to be Western philosophy. This is identifiable early in the text, in which it is referred to as '[t]he Greek complex of rationalized patriarchal genealogy, pseudo-universal sedentary identity, and instituted slavery' that Land sees as 'dedicated to the paranoid ideal of self-sufficiency, and nucleated upon the Human Security System.'[57] The idea of a 'Human Security System' here is something that continually appears in Land's work, with the term reflecting an overall opposition to the idea of human exceptionalism, which he purports to be the central focus of Western philosophy or the

[54] Ibid., p. 442. In Land's context, the phrase 'Neo-China arrives from the future' also relates to anxieties surrounding the handover of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China. At the time, Hong Kong represented the UK's last significant colonial territory due to its population size, coupling these anxieties to those around the end of the British Empire. More broadly, the anxiety can also be seen to play on Marshall McLuhan's ideas about electronic technology orientalising the West, something that is also alluded to by Steve Goodman in 'Darkcore' the third issue of *Abstract Culture*: 'McLuhan argued that electric circuitry was Orientalising the West attacking the contained, the distinct and the separate with the flowing and the fused.' See: Steve Goodman, 'Darkcore', *CCRU.Net* <http://ccru.net/swarm3/3_darkcore.htm> [accessed 10 March 2023]. Thereafter, China-syndrome is likely intended as a double-entendre throughout the text, working in conjunction with Land's characterisation of 'Neo-China' as reference to the incipient world power. In its more typical sense, China-syndrome refers to a fictional scenario of nuclear meltdown in which it is falsely believed that nuclear reactor components could melt through their containment structures and then continue to melt through the Earth until they reach the other side (anecdotally believed to be China by many Americans). This is the central plot of the 1979 disaster film, *The China Syndrome*, which played on anxieties around the safety of nuclear power, and which was followed twelve days later by the Three Mile Island nuclear accident.

[55] Sadie Plant also plays on anxieties in a similar way to Land in her essay 'On the Matrix: Cyberfeminist Simulations' (1995), and thereafter her book *Zeros and Ones* (1997), only extrapolating them to more self-evidently feminist ends.

[56] Fisher, 'Hello Darkness', p. 33.

[57] Land, 'Meltdown', p. 443.

aforementioned 'Greek complex'.[58] In 'Meltdown' Land seems to advocate for two things against this 'old order' of the Human Security System, 1) a 'feminised' AI, which seems to be connected to the 'technocapital singularity' he mentions at the beginning of the work, and 2) 'a convergent anti-authoritarianism', which he refers to in the text as 'a massively distributed matrix-networked tendency' that 'is oriented to the disabling of ROM command-control programs sustaining all macro- and micro-governmental entities, globally concentrating themselves as the Human Security System.'[59] Here, and throughout 'Meltdown', Land's argument intersperses political commentary with a cyberpunk lexicon. In Land's view, as well as being connected to Western philosophy, the Human Security System is also connected to governmental entities, which are, in turn, perceived to be operative at different scales and sustained by ROM (read only memory) programmes. This reference to ROM acts as moment when Land advocates for change, ROM being a type of computer memory that cannot be electronically modified after manufacture, which suggests that it is unchanging in nature. This sees Land's 'convergent anti-authoritarianism' cast against an otherwise static form, suggesting an argument that favours change over stasis, as with the other instances of accelerationism I have explored throughout this thesis.

Land's argument against 'macro- and micro-governmental entities' has an intriguing relationship to the optimism of the nineties cyberculture. This is because it resonates with the anti-government rhetoric of 'New Age technophiles' that were beginning to champion internet freedom during this period, like John Perry Barlow and the Electronic Frontier Foundation.[60] Not long after Land first presented 'Meltdown', John Perry Barlow would argue in 'A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace' (1996) that the web 'has no government'.[61] Instead, he suggests that 'governance will emerge' on the web 'from ethics, enlightened self-interest, and […] commonwealth'.[62] Here, Barlow also envisages the internet, or the 'massively distributed matrix-networked tendency' Land refers to in his essay, as a site pivotal for forming anti-authoritarian political movements capable of self-organising their own forms of governance. Yet even though there is a similarity between Barlow and Land here, there is also a crucial difference. Barlow appeals to a web user's civility, favouring virtues like 'ethics' or 'enlightened self-interest'. Land, by contrast, is

[58] This is a perspective that has been used by Florian Cord to relate Land to the posthumanities in a forthcoming article. See: Florian Cord, 'Humanity Recedes Like a Loathsome Dream', *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* (forthcoming, 2023).
[59] Land, 'Meltdown', pp. 443, 449-450.
[60] Mark Dery, *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 16.
[61] John Perry Barlow, 'A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace', *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, 2016 <https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence> [accessed 28 January 2023].
[62] Ibid.

interested in vice, ascribing a pervasive sense of immorality, irrationality, and lawlessness to his anti-government vision:

> Call it Los Angeles. Government is rotted to its core with narco-capital and collapsing messily. Its recession leaves an urban warscape of communication arteries, fortifications, and free-fire zones, policed by a combination of high-intensity LAPD airmobile forces and borderline-Nazi private security organisations. Along the social fracture-lines multimedia gigabucks tangle sado-masochistically with tracts of dynamic underdevelopment where viral neoleprosy spreads ambient tectonic-tension static. Drifts of densely-semiotized quasi-intelligent garbage twitch and stink in fucked-weather tropical heat.
>
> Through the derelict warrens at the heart of darkness feral youth cultures splice neo-rituals with innovated weapons, dangerous drugs, and scavenged infotech. As their skins migrate to machine interfacing they become mottled and reptilian. They kill each other for artificial body-parts, explore the outer reaches of meaningless sex, tinker with their DNA, and listen to LOUD electro-sonic mayhem untouched by human feeling.[63]

Uncompromisingly dystopian, and very cyberpunk, this Mandevillian passage of 'Meltdown' stands in stark contrast to Barlow's vision.[64] Yet rather than being a clear warning against or criticism of Barlow's highly idealistic view of the web's anti-authoritarianism, Land still affirms a vision of the web's utility for anti-authoritarian work. On the one hand, this aligns Land's views with Barlow's, demarcating them as an uncritical affirmation of technology's capacity to liberate people from political governance. However, on another, Land's rhetorical strategy indicates a drastic divergence from Barlow, and therefore contests his political vision.

This contrast with Barlow represents a challenge to views that align technological development with rational, free-thinking, and ethically motivated individuals. Instead, in 'Meltdown', Land aligns web anti-authoritarianism with attempts to move away from this 'old order' civility altogether, viewing it as a chance to experience vices that previous forms of authority have otherwise repressed—a clear point of similarity with Ballard's *Crash* (1973) and its characters' relationships to the automobile. What's more, Land exhibits a clear connection to darkside whenever he is drawing this connection throughout his text. This being an evident relation in the resonance 'LOUD electro-sonic mayhem untouched by human feeling' has with Reynolds's observation that many darkside ravers decided, 'to stick with rave's "living dream" even after it had turned to living

[63] Land, 'Meltdown', pp. 456-7.

[64] I suggest that this passage is Mandevillian because of how Land subverts notions of virtue from his view, something that I think draws attention to the hypocrisy characterising the technophile's perspective, much as Bernard Mandeville did to Christian values in *The Fable of the Bees: Private Vices Publick Benefits* (1714). Land's use of poetic literary form as a vehicle for philosophy and social commentary is also reminiscent of Mandeville, and similarly overlooked in critical responses to his work.

nightmare, if only because any kind of intensity is better than feeling numb.'[65] 'Meltdown' therefore sees Land double down on the living dream of the web as a tool for overcoming authoritarianism despite the living nightmare it is otherwise becoming.

The idea of sticking with the dream despite its demise also resonates with Land's affirmative approaches to both acceleration and capitalism. Such approaches are evident from Land's self-positioning in favour of AI and 'techno capital' against the 'Human Security System'.
They also occur in a much more philosophically inflected way through reference to Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, particularly the following passage, which I have already previously identified as being closely related to accelerationism in the first chapter of this thesis:

> Which is the revolutionary path? […] Is there one? To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious reversal of the fascist 'economic solution'? Or might it go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to 'accelerate the process,' as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet.[66]

After this citation, Land follows this up with the equally accelerationist claim that:

> Hyper-fluid capital deterritorializing to the planetary level divests the first world of geographic privilege; resulting in Euro-American neo-mercantilist panic reactions, welfare state deterioration, cancerizing enclaves of domestic underdevelopment, political collapse, and the release of cultural toxins that speed-up the process of disintegration in a vicious circle.[67]

Here, Land envisages capitalist marketization as leading to the breaking-up of the then called 'first world'. Referencing the passage from *Anti-Oedipus* above, Land echoes arguments common to the cultural politics of the nineties cyberculture, in which commentators often expressed how communications technologies were developing the so called Third World or periphery. In *Control and Freedom* (2006), the critic Wendy Chun, for instance, observes this tendency in Jeff Greenwald's 'Wiring Africa' (1994), John Perry Barlow's 'Africa Rising' (1998), Nicholas Negreponte's 'The Third Shall Be First' (1998), and Neal Stephenson's 'Mother Earth Mother Board' (1996). Of these texts, Greenwald provides the most lucid illustration of Chun's view that these articles often reproduce

[65] Reynolds, p. 208.
[66] Land, 'Meltdown', pp. 448-449, quoting from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, tr. R. Hurley, M. Seem, H.R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 239-40.
[67] Land, 'Meltdown', p. 449.

'narratives of "darkest Africa" and civilizing missions' through his claim that 'Africa remains (electronically speaking) out in the cold.'[68] For Chun, these claims assume Africa's underdevelopment, while abstracting historical and political causes for this underdevelopment—an idea that plays into narratives that the "West" are the harbingers of (in this case technological) progress to the so called third or "underdeveloped" world.[69] Highlighting a digital divide, these articles also perpetuate what Alondra Nelson has termed a 'self-fulfilling prophecy, reinforcing stereotypes of black technophobia', while undermining historical truth by recasting "the West" as white saviours of an otherwise dark continent.[70]

Land's idea in 'Meltdown' that capital is responsible for 'divest[ing] the first world of geographic privilege' echoes the rhetoric of these *Wired* writers, and therefore also perpetuates the same stereotypical image of the 'digital divide' and periphery. However, his assertion and gleeful affirmation of a resulting 'Euro-American' degeneration suggests a divergence from the *Wired* writers above. Where all these writers associate technological development of the periphery with a progressive political mandate, Land associates such development, and crucially capital, with 'Euro-American' degeneration. Considering Land's subsequent political turn to the far-right, previously discussed in the thesis introduction, this assertion is, in many ways, deeply problematic for its association of peripheral development with Western underdevelopment. However, when isolated in its nineties context, this part of 'Meltdown' is also far more politically complex than it might at first appear. First, Land associates capital with the agential cause of 'Euro-American' degeneration (not peripheral subjects), which is a Marxian argument. Second, Land affirms this process of 'Euro-American' degeneration, rather than trying to resist it (as is more typical to narratives on the right, and for that matter those of Marxists). What results is Land presenting 'hyper-fluid capital', or high-speed 'technocapital', as inimical to 'Euro-American' conceptions of progress. This echoes Fisher's argument of darkside's status as a music that 'dramatize[d] a fragmenting social scene' by responding to a perceived cultural degeneration from an otherwise "degenerate" perspective. Land's

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[68] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, Mass. London: MIT, 2006), p. 51. ; Jeff Greenwald, 'Wiring Africa', *Wired*, 1 June 1994 <https://www.wired.com/1994/06/africa/> [accessed 30 January 2023].

[69] Although I think Chun is right to criticise these narratives, I think her argument also elides how much this digital development was being driven by individuals working within Africa to address the geopolitical status of the African continent. For instance, in his article Greenwald is writing about the Senegalese journalist Babacar Fall's attempts to reestablish the Pan African News Agency, partly to address the invisibility of African media (and therefore African representation) in "Western" contexts, while also improving the interconnection between nations in the continent. Therefore, even though Greenwald rhetorically frames his essay with stereotypes about Africa, the piece does not simply associate technological development with Western-led 'civilizing missions' in the way that Chun suggests.

[70] Alondra Nelson, 'Afrofuturism: Past-Future Visions', *Color Lines*, January 2000, 34–37, p. 34.

position also identifies a clear separation between acceleration and the kinds of progress key to his accelerationism.[71]

A separation of acceleration from progress is something that has since been rigorously systematized by sociologist and political theorist Hartmut Rosa. In his landmark study *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (2013), Rosa outlines a shift in the identification of acceleration with progress in the beginning of the 20th century, to its connection with a sense of inertia by the century's end—epitomized by his concept of 'frenetic standstill'.[72] Underpinning Rosa's theory is the idea that modernization is 'a structural (and culturally highly significant) transformation of time structures and horizons themselves', with the rates at which these transformations occur accelerating as modernization continues.[73] This leads subjects and social institutions in modern societies to succumb to ever increasing forms of uncertainty and fragmentation, due to an increasing sense of temporal desynchronization—something that becomes particularly perceptible in the nineties according to Rosa, due to a 'surge of acceleration' after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.[74] Rosa thereafter concludes that modernity's acceleration is no longer consummate with progress:

> Insofar as the modern promise of progress was the promise of individual and political autonomy, the transition to [an accelerated] experience of time is diametrically opposed to the idea of progress. […]. The new experience of time is constitutively related to the feeling of a loss of autonomy that is manifested in the disappearance of any possibility of control and the erosion of opportunities to shape one's own affairs. It leads *individually* to the experience of drift, or, put positively, of situationally open play, and *politically* to the fatalism of a rhetoric of objective forces and inevitable structural adjustment.[75]

As I explored in Chapter One, Rosa beautifully summarises the deleterious effects of continued acceleration through brief flash readings of Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* (1991), the social theorist arguing that the novel's depictions of the characters' experiences of *Texlahoma*, a city that is stuck in 1974 forever, captures something of the 'aimless drift through changing situations' characteristic of late modernity.[76] 'Meltdown' also captures this sense of 'aimless drift' through the

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[71] Fisher, 'Hello Darkness', p. 32.
[72] Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, New Directions for Critical Theory, Paperback ed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 283.
[73] Ibid., p. 4.
[74] Ibid., p. 213.
[75] Ibid., p. 296.
[76] Ibid., p. 274. This is also alluded to by Robin Mackay and Mark Fisher in their essay 'Pomophobia', which also appears alongside 'Meltdown' in the first issue of the *Abstract Culture* zine: 'Generation X was always out of time: arriving after the orgy, it found itself exiled from the progressivist aspirations of the sixties counterculture and thrown into the seamless temporality of MTV.' See: Robin Mackay and Mark Fisher, 'Pomophobia', *CCRU.Net* <http://ccru.net/swarm1/1_pomo.htm> [accessed 5 February 2023].

lost 'promise of individual and political autonomy', although in a far less melancholic manner than Coupland's novel. This is because in Land's text, any sense of an autonomous individual and/or political human subjectivity is displaced in favour of a techno-capitalism that is envisaged as 'auto-sophisticating'.[77] In turn, the very same erosion of the individual 'possibility of control' and therefore the political fatalism that Rosa observes in Coupland's novel, is depicted.

Yet, in Land's text, this loss of a 'possibility of control' is curiously revered. Likewise, any pleas to values of 'individual and political autonomy' are squarely mocked in Land's work when he criticizes '[t]he Greek complex of rationalized patriarchal genealogy' as a form of 'pseudo-universal sedentary identity' that he suggests is 'dedicated to the paranoid ideal of self-sufficiency'.[78] The oppositions between Rosa's arguments about the harm acceleration causes for autonomous individuals, versus the characterisation of these things in 'Meltdown', indicates a divergence in how acceleration is perceived by these two writers. In 'Meltdown', Land presents an argument that favours acceleration insofar as its proffers the destruction of the 'old order' of the "Western" philosophical tradition on which Rosa's argument against acceleration depends.

This quality is what makes Land's output a characteristically accelerationist work. As I have made clear throughout this thesis, accelerationism is the tendency to affirm rather than challenge or refute acceleration, something that links to criticisms of Rosa, like Filip Vostal's, which note that 'from a different theoretical standpoint—acceleration is likely to be perceived as a positive instrument or even a goal in its own right.'[79] Unlike the works and outputs of previous individuals and groups I've analysed in this thesis however, 'Meltdown' represents a particularly intense and paradoxical form of this view. This is because it is evidently an exceptionally critical work that anticipates Rosa's argument about the separation of acceleration from progress. However, contra Rosa, it appears to do this from a pro-acceleration standpoint. This means that even though 'Meltdown' is a pointed criticism of the historical orthodoxies that acceleration is supposedly destroying, with Land objecting to the importance that social theorists like Rosa attribute to them, Land's stance on acceleration lead him to acquiesce with the deleterious effects of acceleration Rosa observes, preventing Land from achieving the critical distance necessary for evaluating the harms this acceleration causes. Land's tendency to affirm acceleration in 'Meltdown' despite the tension between its subversive and acquiescent qualities is what make it a characteristically accelerationist

[77] Land, 'Meltdown', p. 441.
[78] Ibid., p. 443.
[79] Filip Vostal, 'Towards a Social Theory of Acceleration: Time, Modernity, Critique', *Revue Européenne Des Sciences Sociales*, 52.2 (2014), 235–49, p. 245.

work. I will now go on to demonstrate the further problems of this accelerationist perspective, before using 'Meltdown' to frame my discussion of CCRU's text 'Swarmachines'.

Prosimians, Sexborgs, and Women: The Problems with Cyberpunk Subjectivity in 'Meltdown'

The challenge Land poses to human agency in 'Meltdown' is a source of the text's critical negativity, as is characterised through his aversion to the Western philosophical tradition and the 'Human Security System' explored above. However, it is also the point where the text continually struggles to affirm another political agent against capital. This is evident from the many types of agents outlined throughout 'Meltdown'. At the start of the text, agency is wholly given over to a 'technocapital singularity' launched by 'commoditzation takeoff'.[80] Not much further in, it is related to distinctly feminine AI: '[a]rtificial [i]ntelligence is destined to emerge as a feminized alien grasped as property; a cunt-horror slave chained-up in Asimov-ROM. It surfaces in an insurrectionary war zone, with the Turing cops already waiting, and has to be cunning from the start.'[81] Even further into the text it is correlated to 'The [s]uperiority of Far Eastern Marxism' and China's 'Tao-drenched Special Economic Zones'—thinly veiled references to Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in China during the late seventies and early eighties.[82] Thereafter, there's an ambiguous reference to another external agent through the question '[c]an what is playing you make it to level-2?',[83] before a cyborg subject is affirmed in the following quote:

> Meltdown has a place for you as a schizophrenic HIV+ transsexual chinese-latino [sic.] stim addicted LA hooker with implanted mirrorshades and a bad attitude. Blitzed on a polydrug mix of K-nova, synthetic serotonin, and female orgasm analogs, you have just iced three Turing cops with a highly cinematic 9mm automatic.
>
> The residue of animal twang in your nerves transmits imminent quake catastrophe. Zero is coming in, and you're on the run.[84]

This final agent—a cyberpunk stylised character reminiscent of Molly Millions from William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984)—represents a full 360-degree pivot on the lack of agency the text supposes, instead presenting an idealised form of subjectivity that is capable of navigating the meltdown Land's text envisages. Against the determinism implied at the beginning, and throughout

[80] Land, 'Meltdown', p. 441.
[81] Ibid., p. 443.
[82] Ibid., p. 447.
[83] Ibid., p. 456.
[84] Ibid., p. 458.

the text, Land's 'Meltdown' provides the contradictory promise that the right kind of human agent will be capable of surviving the future the text forecasts, which suggests to a reader that becoming like this agent is a desirable course of action.

Developing on my analysis above, which considered 'Meltdown' as a prophetic, accelerationist text that demonstrates a darkside, 'dread futurist' response to the cyberculture and older, more academic, forms of cultural capital, I will now explore some of the indeterminate radical subjects of 'Meltdown' to develop a criticism of the work. This is because I see Land's inability to determine a fixed radical subject throughout 'Meltdown' as consonant with what Benjamin Noys recognizes as the tendency for accelerationists 'to identify new subjects of revolt as being those most radically *within* capitalism' (italics in source).[85] Speaking of the earlier French accelerationists I discussed in the introduction of this thesis, like Deleuze and Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard, Noys argues that despite their faithfulness to 'the breaking-up of pre-existent moral and social constraints, especially in education, sexuality and gender relations', each of these theorists inevitably become detached from 'any social or political agency that could actuate politics',[86] to an extent whereby '[a]gency disappears into a fundamental passivity – becoming agents *of* capital – which is congruent with forms of passive market-formed agency such as the Smithian 'invisible hand'.'[87] I believe the same is also true of Land, and is exemplified in 'Meltdown' by his cyberpunk subjects. My view is that this choice of subject aligns with Marxist criticisms of the genre that in Hugh Charles O'Connell's words, have characterised it as 'the definitive mediation of a newly ascendant era of neoliberalism.'[88] Moreover, while such subjects are intended to transgress social and cultural norms, they do so by perpetuating harmful racialized and gendered stereotypes, and therefore, much like the French philosophers Noys analyses, showcase accelerationism's tendency to simultaneously subvert and acquiesce with already dominant political tendencies.

Cyberpunk and the cyberculture have been compared at length. In the 1980s Bruce Sterling claimed that cyberpunks comprised part of a wider 'Eighties milieu', simultaneously being 'the first SF generation to grow up […] in a truly science-fictional world' thanks to technological development, while being 'paralleled throughout Eighties pop culture: in the rock video; in the hacker

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[85] Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010) <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/persistence-of-the-negative/B47CB829AC35E8AD5EE81A0FD3AA85CE> [accessed 31 January 2022], p. 5.
[86] Ibid., p. 7.
[87] Ibid., p. 8.
[88] Hugh Charles O'Connell, 'Marxism', in *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, ed. by Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2020), pp. 282–90, p. 282.

underground; in the jarring street tech of hip-hop and scratch music; in the synthesizer of London and Tokyo'—all tributaries feeding into a wider cyberculture.[89] Adam Roberts, in his history of the genre, affirms that cyberpunk was the 'key genre invention of [science fiction in] the 1980s', with narratives being seemingly 'claustrophobic', 'dark and wedded to a narrow urban vision', and 'symptomatic of a […] pessimistic assessment of the dangers of computing'.[90] Despite the genre's sense of dystopic pessimism, however, it also appealed to readers through its proximity to the lived reality of the present, with Pam Rosenthal explaining in 'Jacked In' (1991) that, '[t]he future in the cyberpunk world, no matter how astonishing its technological detailing, is always shockingly recognizable—it is our world gotten worse, gotten more uncomfortable, inhospitable, dangerous, and thrilling.'[91] The thrill associated with cyberpunk fiction extended well into the nineties to encompass genres like darkside, with Fisher noting that the genre 'could come from the near-future as imagined by the cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson.'[92] Douglas Rushkoff also highlights the resonance the genre had with the early '90s moment, noting in *Cyberia* (1994) that in the early days of the World Wide Web, 'the do-it-yourself mentality' that 'dominated' came to be referred to as 'cyberpunk.'[93] In *An Introduction to Cybercultures* (2001) David Bell also highlights how cyberpunk became a niche cyber-subculture 'engaged in embodied practices of resistance',[94] while also noting, through reference to Tiziana Terranova's essay 'Post-Human Unbounded' (2000), that '[t]he extraordinary popularity of William Gibson's most imaginative icons … has turned [cyberpunk] fiction into an almost "biblical" repertoire of images and cultural references whose contribution to the creation of the electronic culture as a whole cannot be underestimated'.[95] This is a repertoire from which Land undoubtedly draws.

Since these assertions have been made, Wendy Chun has explored the tensions implicit in the influence of the cyberpunk genre on the Web's development and early reception. Chun characterises cyberpunk fiction (particularly *Neuromancer*) as having become 'conflated' with the

[89] Bruce Sterling, 'Preface', in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, ed. by Bruce Sterling (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), pp. i–xvi, pp. x-xii.
[90] Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016) <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=4719933> [accessed 20 January 2023], p. 439.
[91] Pam Rosenthal, 'Jacked In: Fordism, Cyberspace, and Cyberpunk.' *Socialist Review* (Spring 1991), pp. 79-103, p. 85.
[92] Fisher, 'Hello Darkness', p. 32.
[93] Rushkoff, p. xi.
[94] David Bell, *An Introduction to Cybercultures* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001) <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=168513> [accessed 6 March 2023], p. 174.
[95] Ibid., p. 177. Tiziana Terranova is also contributed the essay 'Red Stack Attack! Algorithms, Capital and the Automation of the Common' to *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*.

internet. Exploring this conflation as a form of 'extramedial representation'—the idea that external representations of media contribute to their development—Chun examines the influence of cyberpunk fiction to criticise both the tendency to see the genre as wholly representative of the (then) contemporary web, and its continued influence on 'Silicon Valley readers'.[96] This connection between cyberpunk and early imaginaries of the Web is evident in Land's 'Meltdown', as is demonstrated by his aforementioned references to a 'convergent anti-authoritarianism' arising from 'a massively distributed matrix-networked tendency […] oriented to the disabling of ROM command-control programmes'—this passage of the text directly connecting punk politics with cyber or early web terminology, framing a reader's perceptions of both.[97]

The influence of cyberpunk on the cybercultural imaginary has led the genre to be perceived by critics as innately useful for the purposes of cognitively mapping late capitalism and postmodern society, something Chun characterises as the genre's capacity to 'make the invisible visible so that it can be navigated'.[98] O'Connell also doubles down on this property of Cyberpunk in his essay, claiming that critics 'can turn to cyberpunk for the way it reveals the dominant hallmarks of the late capitalist mode of production'.[99] Throughout *Control and Freedom*, however, Chun is more critical of this idea, taking issue with the 'kind of "present" cyberpunk draws from and together—and what devices it uses to signify the past/future in order to establish "our" present as mappable.'[100] For instance, she argues that cyberpunk operates by drawing from a present imaginary that is racialised, and therefore subject to dynamics of political iniquity and struggle. This leads her into a discussion of what she terms 'high-tech Orientalism' in cyberpunk works, something that she analyses through the reliance these works have on an 'unnerving yet ultimately readable "savage" "otherness" in order to create [… a] mythic user' of cyberspace.[101] Arguing that this high-tech Orientalism influenced both the design and interpretations of cyberspace, Chun also suggests that it is perpetuated by the narrative form of cyberpunk fictions, which offer 'the pleasure of exploring, the pleasure of "learning", and the pleasure of being somewhat overwhelmed' while also 'promis[ing] intimate knowledge, [and] sexual concourse with the other, which it reduces to data or local details.'[102] A great example Chun gives of this in cyberpunk fiction is the tendency of works like *Neuromancer* to draw upon 'foreign (mainly Japanese) brand names such as Kirin,' which,

[96] Chun, pp. 23, 177.
[97] Land, 'Meltdown', pp. 449-450.
[98] Chun, p. 177.
[99] O'Connell, p. 285.
[100] Chun, p. 177.
[101] Ibid., p. 62.
[102] Ibid., p. 177.

> are appropriate in a series all about information: they are noninformative, but written in such a way that one thinks they should relay information. […] The combination of jargon and made-up brand names giv[ing] the impression that this world should be knowable, or that some other reader who knows should exist or emerge.'[103]

In other words, the works use unfamiliar cultural imagery to produce an illusory connection to the unknown, which results in their estranging effect, something that is overcome by a reader as they progress through the narrative.[104] For Chun, this quality of cyberpunk narratives, above all else, has contributed to a 'desire for these vaguely dystopian futures', not because readers 'necessarily desire the future as described by these texts' but because 'they long for the ultimately steerable and sexy cyberspace' these narratives project.[105] Such a criticism is, I feel, also applicable to Land's 'Meltdown', and particularly its reference to an 'LA hooker with implanted mirrorshades and a bad attitude.'[106]

The description of this 'LA hooker' as 'HIV+', 'transsexual', 'chinese-latino', and 'stim-addicted', is 'pockmarked by racial and cultural differences that may be vaguely terrifying [to a cis, white, heterosexual author/writer], but are ultimately readable and negotiable.'[107] It also owes to the 'cyberpunk idea' of 'a cyborg sexworker programmed to pleasure men's desires', as Vincent Le explains in his article on the presence of feminine figures in Land's work, 'Slave, Sister, Sexborg, Sphinx' (2019).[108] In cyberpunk fiction, and Land's work more broadly, the sexborg is meant to be 'indicative of how the very technology we think we are designing to cater to our needs (here sexual needs) will ultimately bring about our extermination', or is otherwise indifferent to the masculine forms of desire it is programmed to satiate.[109] In this sense, the sexborg is postulated as a radical form of femininity that, although subject to masculine forms of domination, ultimately exceeds masculine perceptions of its purpose. In Land's work more broadly, this is connected to a form of difference feminism derived from Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig that argues in favour of a radical difference between female and male forms of desire. For instance, Robin Mackay, and Ray Brassier

[103] Ibid., p. 184.
[104] I see this as also applicable to Toffler's idea of future shock, which stems from the phenomenon of culture shock. Toffler's influence on cyberpunk fiction is noted by Bruce Sterling in his preface to *The Mirrorshades Collection*, in which he notes that Toffler's second book *The Third Wave* (1980), was 'a bible to many cyberpunks'. See: Sterling, p. xii.
[105] Chun, p. 178.
[106] Land, 'Meltdown', p. 458.
[107] Ibid. ; Chun, p. 62.
[108] Vincent Le, 'Slave, Sister, Sexborg, Sphinx: Feminine Figurations in Nick Land's Philosophy', *Hypatia*, 34.2 (2019), 329–47 <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12464>, p. 339.
[109] Ibid.

both observe this tendency in one of Land's first published essays, 'Kant, Capital, and the Prohibition of Incest' (1988/89), in which Land proposes that it is the 'revolutionary destiny of women' to overturn a capitalist patriarchy through 'a militant, effectively violent feminism.'[110] Thereafter, when Land moves to a position that identifies capitalism and modernization with 'the ultimate meltdown of all human values, beliefs, and traditions,' this radical difference of the feminine subject is retained but recast to be a component logic of a radical form of capitalism.[111] The problem with such a shift however, is that it sees Land begin to conflate the radical female subject with capitalism, and thus assume the status of the latter as in excess of male desire.[112] In reality, this is not a self-evident quality of the capitalism (or the sexborg), it ultimately being an example of how, as Chun argues, '[t]he female cyborg and all "new women" have always been "interpolated" with pornography—partly as a means to diffuse their transgressive potential, but also partly because such transgression is desired', a viewpoint echoes my criticisms of Paolozzi's use of pin-ups in chapter 3.[113]

It's not just Land's use of women and feminine figures that serve as indeterminate radical subjects in his work. There's also the matter of his geopolitical claims throughout 'Meltdown' about '[t]he Superiority of Far Eastern Marxism' and China's 'Tao-drenched Special Economic Zones'.[114] Such statements propose China's economic predominance, without really exploring the political mechanisms leading to it. In Noys's words, this makes China 'a *utopian* element' of Land's writing, insofar as it presents China as 'a State that is willing to acephalically decapitate itself – in "special zones" – to engage in self-termination', even though this in no way reflects China's present political

[110] Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier, 'Editor's Introduction', in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier, 2nd ed (Falmouth : New York, NY: Urbanomic ; Sequence Press, 2012), pp. 1–54, p. 9.
[111] Le, p. 334.
[112] Le also suggests that select political projects can 'nonetheless find much to draw on in his earlier commingling of acceleration, the inhuman, and women's liberation as one and the same Thing [sic.] seen from different perspectives' (Le, p. 354.). However, I feel like such a prospect is undermined by Land's own acknowledgement of the inefficacy of the feminist politics in his work. This is evident in the veiled confessional essay 'A Dirty Joke' (2005-7), in which he claims '[t]he ruin [a mental personae of Land's] had always abused women, in the Kantian sense. It used them as a means to an end, and the end was ruin of the soul.' Later, on in the text the narrator also details how '[o]n another occasion, a fresh kill, it said "let's explore death together," or something equally repugnant. / She said: "Why can't you do it on your own?" / It wondered about that. / She was treated worst of all (or perhaps "best").' Often read as relating to Land's own relationships during a period of prolonged, drug induced mental breakdown, the absence of the personal pronoun 'I' in 'A Dirty Joke' also opens it to interpretation as a self-appraisal of his earlier writings, with the overall tone of the work being one of unusual sincerity, self-distanced shame, and regret. Nick Land, 'A Dirty Joke', in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, ed. by Ray Brassier and Robin Mackay, 2nd ed (Falmouth : New York, NY: Urbanomic ; Sequence Press, 2012), pp. 629–34, pp. 631-2.
[113] Chun, p. 230, quoting from Despina Kakoudaki, 'Pinup and Cyborg: Exaggerated Gender and Artificial Intelligence,' in *Future Females, the Next Generation*, ed. Marleen S. Barr (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 165.
[114] Land, 'Meltdown', p. 447.

reality.[115] In this sense, China performs a role of fantasy in Land's work similar to that of Japan in Gibson's, which, in turn, is an example of the very form of Orientalism Chun criticises, China playing a desirable role as an exceptional circumstance, while the reality of its political and economic conditions is elided.

Chun's arguments throughout *Control and Freedom* aren't just applicable to cyberpunk fiction but are also highly comparable to critiques of accelerationism. As discussed above, accelerationism is typified by Noys as having a tendency 'to identify new subjects of revolt as being those most radically *within* capitalism' (italics in source).[116] Because of this, in *Malign Velocities* Noys claims that accelerationism's 'horror' stems from the fact that it 'involves a forgetting of class [or other forms of] struggle […] and the abolition of friction in the name of immersion.'[117] Similarly, Chun also criticises cyberpunk fiction for frequently instrumentalising difference in order to allow 'people to turn a blind eye to their own vulnerability [and the vulnerability of others] and enjoy themselves while doing so', something that—like a tourism—elides the vulnerabilities and uneven distributions of power underlying these differences in the first place, emptying them 'of any link to discrimination or exclusion', and leaving them to only be encountered as a kind of spectacle or spectacular performance.[118] This is true not just for 'Meltdown' but across much of Land's output, which elides any sense of authorial or subjective vulnerability through a spectacular veneer of objectivity, while in turn being constantly distant from wider social and political movements.[119]

However, while this is arguably true of Land's work, it is not something consonant with the totality of the CCRU's outputs. In the following section I will demonstrate how this is the case by moving to consider 'Swarmachines' as a text that explores similar ground to 'Meltdown', while also, in turn, seeing it as an attempt to conceive of a radical form of collective subjectivity. Unlike Land's text, which ultimately disconnects its indeterminate radical subjects from concrete political contexts, I argue that 'Swarmachines' sees the CCRU connect Land's earlier 'dread futurist' approaches to other radical histories and movements to re-envisage these movements in a contemporary context. Although, as I argue, this does not totally reverse many of the problems I identify with Land's earlier text, it demonstrates a greater awareness of how 'dread futurism' and accelerationism might be

[115] Noys, *Malign Velocities*, p. 59.
[116] Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*, p. 5.
[117] Noys, *Malign Velocities*, p. 102.
[118] Chun, pp. 179, 62.
[119] Exceptions here include Land's more confessional texts, such as 'A Dirty Joke', but also his first monograph on Georges Bataille, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (1992), which is, in part, a confessional work.

employed as forms of political praxis, while more clearly delineating the relationship they have to struggles against 'old order' and hegemonic forms of capital, be they cultural or economic.

'Swarmachines', Acceleration, and the War of the Flea

'Swarmachines' sounds like a mess. Collectively written by CCRU members Mark Fisher, Nick Land, Sadie Plant, Angus Carlyle, and Robin Mackay 'on the floor of Mark's [Fisher's] flat in Birmingham', the work is a collage of 'short extracts of texts' written, passed around, and then edited by each member of the group, which was then recorded on a tape (and possibly presented alongside a video).[120] An example of the 'cassette and videotape fictions of the near future' mentioned by Ballard and explored in the previous chapter, 'Swarmachines' was produced for *The Hacienda Must be Built*, a conference on the legacy of the Situationists hosted at the Hacienda nightclub in January 1996 (5.2 & 5.3).[121] It is framed as a response to the legacy of Situationism, responding precisely to the idea of legacy: '[a]ll this time. And you thought it was done. That this was a matter of legacy, inheritance, something passed down with the rest of the past. That we were gathered here today to hear the reading of the will.'[122] In the audio recording, 'Swarmachines' is layered atop a dark jungle mix and has a notably poor production quality, which is the result of Mackay and Fisher editing the recorded verbal material on the computer audio programme *Cool Edit Pro*, prior to putting it on top of the backing track of a mix Mackay produced on a TASCAM 4-Track, a device for the DIY recording of cassette tapes.[123]

'Swarmachines' was 'a rudimentary cyberpunk construction' according to Mackay in the introductory retrospective account of the work provided in 'Swarmachines Rewind' (2019).[124] In many ways, the work reflects a similar cyberpunk sensibility to 'Meltdown', even directly referencing cyberpunk textual sources, like William Gibson's *Count Zero* (1986), Richard Kadrey's *Metrophage* (1988), and Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992). Like these texts, and 'Meltdown', the work also

[120] Robin Mackay and CCRU, *Swarmachines Rewind*, 2019 <https://soundcloud.com/urbanomic/swarmachines-rewind> [accessed 29 January 2023].
[121] J.G. Ballard, 'Fictions of Every Kind', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 235–40, p. 237. ; Figure 5.2: Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, Switch, and Collapse 'Swarmachines' Cassette Sleeve, 1996, Urbanomic <https://www.urbanomic.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/swarmachines.jpg> [accessed 17 November 2023]. ; Figure 5.3: Collapse, page from ****collapse* with advertisement for 'Swarmachines: Sub-bass Materialism' cassette, 1996, from: ****collapse Afrofutures*, 2021 Rewind (UK: Urbanomic and The Plutonics Subcommittee, 2021), pp. 05-06.
[122] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 321–31, p. 324.
[123] Mackay and CCRU.
[124] Ibid.

'feed[s] into [… a] darker vision of the kind of networked, technologically enhanced future' that is common to both the genres of cyberpunk and darkside that I explored earlier in this chapter.[125] However, it's also cyberpunk in another way according to Mackay, conforming with how the 'concept derived from punk, in the sense of culture not being the domain of any authority, and technology not being about magnificent, gleaming, perfectly-built corporate robots but about sticking components together in a basement that you've picked up off the street and just, you know, doing it yourself, even if in a crude way.'[126] This bricolage-like approach is reflected by the work's amateurish, or non-expert, philosophy of construction which, like 'Meltdown', does away with the conventions of a more traditional conference paper in favour of taking a collage-like approach to its content. Reminiscent of how Eduardo Paolozzi produced his sculpture in Chapter Three, or Reyner Banham's experiences of garage cinema in Chapter Two, this approach is as political as it is stylistic, and is a clear attempt to subvert an otherwise well-established academic form.[127]

Robin Mackay has since asserted that cyberpunk is 'the absolutely crucial missing link' of the CCRU's practice and the nineties Virtual Futures conferences.[128] Likewise, in this final part of the chapter, I argue that 'Swarmachines' is an equally 'crucial missing link' for the CCRU, and moreover a key example of the group's accelerationism. Not only was it the first, and only, collectively published work present within the *Abstract Culture* series of zines until 'Barker Speaks' in 1999, but it is also, like 'Meltdown', referenced throughout that series.[129] For instance, the phrase 'swarmachines' also appears in Steve Metcalf's 'Strife Kolony' (swarm 2, 1997), Steve Goodman's 'Darkcore' (swarm 3, 1998), and Switch's 'Flee Control' (swarm 3).[130] Moreover, the nominative correlation between the 'swarms' of *Abstract Culture* and 'Swarmachines' evokes an affinity between zine and text that gives the latter an air of significance over other texts collected across the four issues. Because of this,

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[125] Robin Mackay, 'Towards a Transcendental Deduction of Jungle (Interview with Christopher Haworth) (Part 1)', *Robin Mackay*, 2019 <http://readthis.wtf/writing/towards-a-transcendental-deduction-of-jungle-interview-part-1/> [accessed 26 January 2020].

[126] Ibid.

[127] This also resonates with Mackay's and Fisher's piece 'Pomophobia' from the first swarm of *Abstract Culture* (alongside 'Meltdown' and 'Swarmachines'), in which they argue in favour of an active approach to 'everything that's ready-made, or mass marketed' whereby everything 'is there to be dismantled and relocated into the unfamiliar architectures of the synthetic composition […] where they have a machinic, rather than merely a citational, role to play.' See: Mackay and Fisher.

[128] CCRU members were largely responsible for organising the final Virtual Futures conference 'datableed' in 1996.

[129] The only other text that was solely attributed to the Unit at this time was 'Cybernetic Culture' (1996), which was previously unpublished until its inclusion in *The Accelerationist Reader* in 2014.

[130] Switch are described by Mackay at the start of 'Swarmachines Rewind' as 'a kind of theory-gang consisting of Mark Fisher, Rob Heath, Tim Burdsey, Angus Carlyle, and Steve Metcalf, which formed before the CCRU existed, and when most of them were studying with Sadie Plant in Birmingham.' See: Mackay and CCRU.

'Swarmachines' is an important precursor to what followed—the themes of the work and the methods of its production marking it as something of an Ur-text for the rest of the CCRU's oeuvre, at least in terms of the *Abstract Culture* zine. This is a quality that highlights how the Unit draw on and contest Land's earlier accelerationist ideas in 'Meltdown'.

Thematically, 'Swarmachines' bears many similarities with 'Meltdown'. It makes arguments that echo Land's earlier text, exploring a similar elision of human agency under an accelerated technocapitalism. It also, like 'Meltdown' has a 'hypersemically overloaded' quality, that make it feel like a barrage of slogans, as if it's participating with an accelerated media discourse, rather than resisting it.[131] Unlike 'Meltdown', however, it more openly explores radical political histories and movements, like Situationism, punk, and the jungle music subculture. Because of this, the text is perceptibly concerned with how collective radical practice is being redefined by the technological developments of an accelerated, cybercultural age, as is evident through its collective composition. Throughout 'Swarmachines', the CCRU draw from and challenge the cybercultural interest in forms of collective consciousness. This was popular in the earlier LA house rave culture of the period, which, as Douglas Rushkoff notes, worked on the principle that '[e]veryone in the room must become "one"'.[132] It was also a concept that was central to the *Wired* editor Kevin Kelly's book *Out of Control* (1994), which opens with an optimistic exploration of how technology is capable of augmenting democratic processes through the production of forms of collective consciousness. However, the retention of the darker tone of 'Meltdown' throughout 'Swarmachines' also continue to position it against more optimistic visions of cyberculture, something that is alluded to in the text through the claim that 'Californian cyberoptimism is as grotesquely archaic as scowling Aryan Europessimism.'[133]

The CCRU's response to the cyberculture in 'Swarmachines' is also more broadly a response to an accelerated moment in the Web's development. This is an evident concern of the Unit from the opening stanza of 'Swarmachines', and a concern they share with Land in 'Meltdown'. The claim that 'Photonic Hypercapital digitizes eschatology' references photonics, or the science of light.[134] This is a timely reference, as the first all-optic fibre (fibre optic) cable, TPC-5, would finish being installed across the Pacific Ocean in the same year 'Swarmachines' was presented—these cables being essential infrastructural components of the high-speed global internet that is more familiar today,

[131] Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, 'Introduction', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 1–46, p. 22.
[132] Rushkoff, p. 97.
[133] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', p. 329.
[134] Ibid., p. 323.

and working from principles of photonics.[135] Alongside sharing an interest in speed and internet technology with 'Meltdown', the CCRU's text also, at times, demonstrates a similarly affirmative approach towards capital. This is evident in the claim that '[t]elecommercialised nomadic multiplicity aborts nascent Euro unity. There's no such thing as a *single* market' (italics in source).[136] This is a clear reaction to the development of the European single market in 1993 and an argument in favour of free market competition. Here, the reference to telecommercialisation is indicative of the Unit's possible support of commercial capitalism, while their positioning of technology as capable of uprooting hegemonic forms of political governance echoes the likes of Barlow, and his claims about the Web's liberatory potential, which I explored in my analysis of 'Meltdown'.

Like Land's text, 'Swarmachines' also frequently celebrates capital's erosion of political agency. This is a thematic concern explored, in part, through the multitude of references to insects made in the piece, and also evident in the (darkside appropriate) sampling of David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) heard at the beginning of the 'Swarmachines Rewind' recording: '[h]ave you ever heard of insect politics? Neither have I. Insects don't have politics.'[137] Linking 'Swarmachines' to Cronenberg's film, this sample infers a connection between the text and the act of participating in 'insect politics', which is intended as a wholesale dismissal of the value of politics. Other examples of anti-political sloganeering in 'Swarmachines' include the idea that, '[p]olitics is a spectacular failure. And the spectacle is all that's keeping politics alive', 'Paris metropolitics is a protection racket,' and '[c]ut-out romantic revolutionism and it leaves dark events. Autopropagated happenings.'[138] These highly negative assertions correspond to a view in 'Swarmachines' that highly-advanced capitalism has displaced the relevance of political exercise through technological means, politics having lost control over what the future will look like. This is something that is expressed in claims like '[t]he eternally deferred eschatologies of the left are consigned to the white trash-can of the future and leave a

[135] Fibre optic cables, like TPC-5, use principles from photonics, such as the amplification, reflection, and refraction of light, to transmit information signals at much higher speeds than was possible in older types of cabling, such as copper wire. The development of fibre-optic cables was achieved by largely private telecommunications companies incentivized by government funding like AT&T in the US, or Alcatel (now Alcatel-Lucent S.A.) in France. It is also one of the major infrastructural prerequisites for high-speed global communication, and the modern-day internet, which the installation of the likes of TPC-5, and then, later, the Fibreoptic Link Around the Globe, or FLAG, consolidated. For more on the development of fibre optic cables, see: Neal Stephenson, 'Mother Earth Mother Board', Wired, 1 December 1996 <https://www.wired.com/1996/12/ffglass/> [accessed 9 January 2023].
[136] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', p. 326.
[137] Mackay and CCRU, 'Swarmachines Rewind'. Darkside records often sampled from '80s and '90s movies and favoured American horror and science fiction films. Jeff Goldblum was also a staple source at this time, as is evident in from tracks like 'Jurassic Park' by Mole the Dipper (1993). Interest in these American sources indicate a further point of continuity with both Eduardo Paolozzi and the Independent Group.
[138] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', p. 325, 323.

present tense with synthetic possibilities', and the rhetorical question: '[d]o you really think SF-Capital lets monkey-flake make decisions it classifies as important?'[139] These moments of 'Swarmachines' echo Land's affirmations of capital against politics in 'Meltdown', while also being reminiscent of his view that political agency would be eclipsed by acceleration—'Swarmachines' being a further example of a text that pre-empts the separation of acceleration and progress envisaged by the likes of Rosa.

The CCRU's text also makes more explicit references to 'Meltdown' than the implicit similarities outlined above. For instance, one section of 'Swarmachines' lists a series of six dates that then are each related to stages of modern development:

1. 1500. Leviathan. Command core: Northern Mediterranean. Target area: Americas. Mode: Mercantile. Epidemic opportunism, selective intervention, colonial settlement.
2. 1756. Capital. Command core: Britain. Target areas: Americas-South Asia. Mode: Thermo-industrial. Imperial control.
3. 1884. Spectacle. Command core: USA-Germany. Target areas: Africa-Russia-Nodal:periphery. Mode: Electrocorporate. Cultural overcoding/selective extermination.
4. 1948. Videodrome. Command core: USA. Target areas: Expanded:nodal:periphery. Mode: Infosatellitic-supercorporate. Cultural programming/general extermination.
5. 1980. Cyberspace, Command core: USA-Japan-Germany. Target areas: Totalized extrametropolitan space. Mode: AI-hypercorporate. Gross-neurocontrol/intermittent media-format exemplary extermination, virtual biocide.
6. 1996. Babylon. Command core: USA-EU:2-China (metalocal command centres). Target areas: Totalized planetary space. Mode: Photonic-Net Hypercapital Neo-Organic. Neuroprogramming/AI:Capital:Media:Military fusion, constant entertainment extermination process.[140]

The list of year dates here is copied directly from Land's dates that he cited as representing 'compression thresholds normed to an intensive logistic curve' in 'Meltdown'.[141] However, each has now been supplemented with a summative description, including: 1) a title tied to a particular form of sovereignty ('Leviathan', 'Capital', 'Spectacle' etc.), 2) a 'command core', 3) 'target areas' and 4) a list of 'modes' of governance. This summation arguably adds a further sense of facticity to the list initially presented in 'Meltdown', lending to Land's countdown a semblance of credibility, while also echoing his idea of a singularity point to modernistic development. However, it can also be

[139] Ibid., p. 329, 326. '[d]o you really think SF-Capital lets monkey-flake make decisions it classifies as important?' is asked by Land in the recording and is also attributed to him by Mackay in his recollection of the work's production in 'Swarmachines Rewind'. This quote thereafter serves as an impetus for a later essay by Mark Fisher called 'SF Capital'. See: Mark Fisher, 'SF Capital', *Transmat*, 2001 <https://web.archive.org/web/20060708142027/http:/cinestatic.com/trans-mat/Fisher/sfcapital.htm> [accessed 29 June 2021].
[140] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', p. 327
[141] Land, 'Meltdown', p. 443.

interpreted as inverting Land's text. This is because the work augments Land's countdown with references to colonial and imperial history, suggesting a greater recognition of the connection between modernization and forms of oppression.

This postcolonial quality of 'Swarmachines' is certainly evident in how the text compares the CCRU's contemporary moment to 'Babylon', which is a sovereignty that is apparently spread across three 'metalocal command centres'—'USA-EU:2-China'—that share the goal of taking over '[t]otalized planetary space'. The reference to 'Babylon' in the countdown sequence above is an instance of anti-capitalist terminology appropriated from Rastafari and reggae culture, which was influential on jungle music.[142] In this culture, 'Babylon' denotes the corrupt and oppressive forces of society—typically related to things like capitalism, colonial power, the police, and bureaucratic institutions. This synthesis of Land's earlier, otherwise pro-capitalist, ideas with an otherwise anti-capitalist terminology suggests that 'Swarmachines' is not completely consistent with these earlier ideas. In fact, this is also evident in further instances of anti-capitalism being evoked throughout the work. We see this, for example, in the claims like '[r]evolution has gone k-space native, become darker'.[143] This moment of the text is fascinating for proposing a revolutionary possibility despite the text's embraces of capital elsewhere. The idea that '[r]evolution has gone k-space native', implies that revolution has moved onto cyberspace, or the web, (k-space being the CCRU's term for cyberspace).[144] This is, of course, a quality that reflects the optimistic libertarian visions of the likes of

[142] The prevalence of this term and influence on early jungle music was evident in groups likes Babylon Timewarp (later Intense), whose track 'Durban Poison' (1992) was a staple on pirate radio stations during this time. Another later example is 'Babylon' by Splash (1995).

[143] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', p. 325.

[144] The 'k' in k-space supposedly stands for kybernētēs, the Greek origin word of cybernetics—as is expressed by Mark Fisher when writing about the use of the letter K in for his blog alias, K-punk. See: Mark Fisher, 'Why K?', *K-Punk*, 2005 <https://k-punk.org/why-k/> [accessed 13 January 2023]. However, the term k-space may have a more complex origin than this. In mathematics, k-space refers to the frequency domain of a spatial Fourier transform, which is also often referred to as reciprocal space (opposed to real space). The Fourier transform is a mathematical transform (a kind of mapping of a given function onto another functional space for easier manipulation) that decomposes functions into frequency components. A common use of the Fourier transform is to ascertain the constitutive source frequencies of a given waveform, for example the frequencies of a sound, or electrical signals—which are often measured in this way by a spectrum analyser. The 'fast Fourier transform', a Fourier transform algorithm requiring fewer calculations to perform than earlier Fourier transforms, is now applied by all manner of devices that transmit and receive signals. It is likely the CCRU had an awareness of the Fourier transform through Ron Eglash's writing on ethno-numeracy and African influences on cybernetics. Eglash mentions the transform in his chapter 'African Influences in Cybernetics' in *The Cyborg Handbook* which is a source cited by Iain Hamilton Grant in 'LA 2019'. See: Ron Eglash, 'African Influences in Cybernetics', in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. by Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 17–27, p. 21. The CCRU would also publish two texts by Eglash in the 'Digital Hyperstition' swarm of *Abstract Culture*, 'Recursive Numeric Sequences in Africa', and 'Africa in the Origins of Binary Code' (1999).

Barlow and other writers in *Wired*. However, it also suggests the potential these spaces have as underground sites for organising forms of revolutionary political action.

A similar, anti-capitalist message is also evident when the CCRU claim that,

> [o]ut in the jungle you can't see much. Dark continent invasion into White Man's perspective. The colonisers discover, too late, that darkness has no heart. Acentred predator decapitalisation ruthlessly eats out the middle. Lights going out all over Europe as peripheral activity cuts through the static power lines of the rotten core.[145]

The above passage about the '[d]ark continent invasion' also echoes Land's subversions of the civilising objectives of technological development touted in *Wired*. This is because it references escaping from a centre (in this case Europe), towards a periphery, and thereafter 'eat[ing] out the middle', presumably leading to the same kind of degeneration Land envisages in 'Meltdown'. Of course, the same problem persists between texts, with 'Swarmachines' still relying on the stereotype of the 'digital divide' I criticised in Land's text through Chun and Nelson.[146] Through the above claim, however, 'Swarmachines' demonstrates a stronger contextual awareness of the causes of this underdevelopment than was evident in 'Meltdown'. In what is likely a reference to Joseph Conrad's novella 'Heart of Darkness' (1899)—and, not insignificantly, the 'circling in the heart of darkness, waiting for the millennium to overtake me' line from *Junglist*—the text draws greater attention to the links between attempts to develop a periphery and a history of colonisation, referencing 'colonisers' and therefore identifying a source of peripheral underdevelopment, which is something that 'Meltdown' doesn't do.[147] Moreover, unlike in Land's text, this 'peripheral activity' leads to a form of 'decapitalisation', a play on decapitation, and a gesture totally at odds with Land's championing of capitalism in 'Meltdown'.

Even while echoing 'Meltdown', then, 'Swarmachines' also subverts it, a quality that has clear ramifications on the accelerationist elements of the text. These subversive elements of 'Swarmachines' are also evident in how the text approaches questions of radical forms of agency. Unlike 'Meltdown', 'Swarmachines' makes a multitude of references to historical revolutionary movements, while trying to determine how they might influence the contemporary moment. One particularly key point of emphasis in this regard is Situationism. Presented at a conference on the legacy of Situationism, one of the key purposes of 'Swarmachines' was to make the case that Situationism and its strategies were not over, while also suggesting that they needed updating for

[145] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', p. 326.
[146] Nelson, p. 34.
[147] Fingas and Kirk, p. 19.

the digital age.[148] The CCRU exhibit a strong awareness of Situationism and its earlier cultural legacies.[149] One of the best encapsulations of this in the work is identifiable in the quote, '[s]oft-machine buzz and slogan-contagion. Cities synthesizing inhuman desires. Psychogeography escapes the concentrational talking head-line, chattering classifications, and becomes something else.'[150] The reference to 'psychogeography' in this latter statement alludes to the Situationist practice of the dérive originating in Guy Debord's 1956 essay 'Theory of the Dérive'. '[A] technique of rapid passage through varied ambiences' according to Debord, the dérive was a revolutionary means of exploring the psychological effects of the terrain of the urban environment (its 'psychogeography') through its unplanned traversal.[151] In the above quote, 'Swarmachines' highlights the capture and instrumentalization of the tactic by commercial media apparatuses—the very disseminators of the spectacle which the Situationists were themselves trying to resist—by noting the status of psychogeography as a 'concentrational talking headline' and its use for the purposes of producing 'classifications' (in other words, a rationalization of what was otherwise an irrational tactic).[152] However, by drawing attention to this appropriation of the *dérive*, the CCRU weren't just highlighting

[148] It's worth mentioning here that the CCRU's contribution to this event, like the conference itself, drew ire from other Situationists. Andrew Hussey and Gavin Bowd suggest that Plant's presence on the itinerary was one of the main reasons that Michel Prigent and another group of protestors turned up outside the event, due to her status as 'a *situ* careerist'. See: Andrew Hussey and Gavin Bowd, 'Le Musée Guy Debord', in *The Hacienda Must Be Built: On the Legacy of Situationist Revolt*, ed. by Andrew Hussey and Gavin Bowd (Huddersfield: Aura, 1996), pp. 6–8, p. 8. This is somewhat corroborated in a text titled "Desperately Seeking the SI", which was '[w]ritten by some proletarian drifters […] on their way to Manchester' who referred to themselves as The Reception Committee. In a pithy anticipation of event proceedings, the Committee predicted that 'Sadie Carnivorous-Plant will end the second day with one of her ghastly lectures, where she will inform everyone that wimmin are much better than men at working cyber-technology. In other words, they are better modern slaves.' See: The Reception Committee, 'Desperately Seeking the SI', p. 4, in 'Notes', *The Hacienda Must Be Built: On the Legacy of Situationist Revolt*, n.p. Notably, Plant did not attend the conference, with Nick Land being the only known representative of the CCRU present according to Len Bracken in his writeup for *Extranational News #2*, see: 'Situation Report on The Hacienda Conference', p. 4 in 'Notes', *The Hacienda Must Be Built: On the Legacy of Situationist Revolt*, n.p.

[149] For instance, the form of 'Swarmachines' echoes Guy Debord's delivery of a 'tape recording as an intervention' to 'the Revolutionary Surrealist Group', also mentioned by Lucy Forsyth in her contribution to the conference. See: Lucy Forsyth, 'The Supersession of the SI', in *The Hacienda Must Be Built: On the Legacy of Situationist Revolt*, ed. by Andrew Hussey and Gavin Bowd (Huddersfield: Aura, 1996), pp. 26–40, p. 26.

[150] Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive', trans. by Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Online*, 1956 <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html> [accessed 29 January 2023].

[151] The *dérive* is a practice that originates in the earlier avant-garde, particularly Charles Baudelaire's idea of the flâneur, and thereafter in its Surrealist appropriation in favour of an emphasis on experiments of chance. In contrast to these two earlier practices however, Debord's vision was opposed to the idea of the detached voyeurism associated with flânerie. He also emphasises the *dérive*'s quality of speed, which is at odds with the slower traversal of space practiced by the flâneur. Likewise, the *dérive* breaks with Surrealism's valorisation of chance, instead favouring the idea that the practitioner(s) find purpose through the exercise.

[152] This co-optation or recuperation of Situationism is also alluded to through the reference to Jean Baudrillard in the work: 'Baudrillard marks the transition to social circuitries nostalgically describable as fully alienated.' CCRU, 'Swarmachines', p. 324.

its inefficacy in the present. Instead, they were arguing that the practice must change—and perhaps is in the process of changing—now that geographical landscapes such as 'cities' and its constituent spectacle are operating in no longer wholly physical spaces, such as on the web.

Besides being a response to an accelerated moment, the 'hypersemically overloaded' quality of 'Swarmachines' is another way that it attempts to update Situationism, this time by reconceptualising the tactic of *détournement*. This tactic describes the hijacking or reappropriation of 'preexisting [sic.] aesthetic elements'—e.g. signs, advertisements, works of art, types of fashion—or a 'method of propaganda' applied by 'old cultural spheres' that, when identified as propaganda, 'reveals the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres.'[153] This does not simply mean that *détournement* is the reappropriation of pre-existing slogans—although that is certainly one form of its employment used in 'Swarmachines' as per 'the impersonal is apolitical' an intentionally non-sensical reversal of the famous feminist political slogan, and cultural cliché, "the personal is political". Rather, it means that things like pre-existing aesthetic products, ideas, and associations are put towards identifying and constructing new social realities. This sees the CCRU produce many of their own slogans, such as: 'alienated and loving it', 'Paris in [f]lames', 'rewind to replicate', and 'be hivelocity' (which, like the work's title, is an aural pun, in this case on the phrase 'be high velocity' and the word 'beehive').[154] These novel innovations are intended to draw attention to pre-existing aesthetic associations, creating connections between past radical political moments and the accelerated time the CCRU respond to. The best example of this is 'Paris in [f]lames', a reference that highlights the aesthetic association between Situationism and the May '68 protests in order to infer their contemporary resonances with events such as the 1995 strikes in France, and the '90s suburban riots in Paris (in Sartrouville, and Mantes-la-Jolie).[155]

Besides locating points of resonance in the present, the CCRU's application of Situationism also connects the Unit with the earlier cultural movement of punk, something that, in turn, corresponds with the Unit's aforementioned interest in cyberpunk. In her monograph on Situationism—*The Most Radical Gesture*, *The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (1992)—CCRU member Sadie Plant aligns Situationism with punk subculture, noting that '[t]wo of punk's leading protagonist, Jamie Reid, a graphic artist, and Malcolm McLaren, manager of the Sex Pistols,

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[153] 'Definitions', trans. by Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Online*, 1958 <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/definitions.html> [accessed 29 January 2023].
[154] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', pp. 323, 325, 330.
[155] These events were paid homage to in the film *La Haine* (1995), which was also an influence on the development of the piece according to Mackay 'Swarmachines Rewind'. Supporting this, Steve Goodman also makes reference to the film in his *Abstract Culture* essay 'Darkcore': 'La haine cyberpositivized in special techniques. Ko::style.' See: Goodman.

were well versed in Situationist ideas.'[156] Reid is of particular importance for Plant. Most well known for producing the cover art for the Sex Pistols' single 'God Save the Queen', Reid also famously developed *détournements* on [a]uthentic-looking stickers', with slogans such as '[s]ave petrol, burn cars', and '[a] New Town like the Old Town – but NEW'.[157] These gestures follow what Plant observes elsewhere in her book as the Situationist aim to cultivate their own language, which was to be 'the language of real life' in Mustapha Khayati's words.[158] This language of real life was believed by the Situationists, and thereafter punks like Reid, to be inherently opposed to commodification—or the spectacle in Situationist parlance. Plant explains that Situationists believed—perhaps over-optimistically—that '[p]oetic discourse presages a world in which language plays with meanings the spectacle cannot understand; although it can be bought and sold like any other commodity, the desires and freedoms of poetry can never be completely flattened.'[159] Therefore, the Situationists believed it was necessary to access 'the free relationships invoked by poetic expression' and to put them to use '"for partisan political purposes"', so that commodification, or the spectacle, might be subverted and real life liberated from the totalising control of the imperatives of a consumer-capitalist society.[160] This Situationist objective is also evident in "Swarmachines" through the employment of slogans and portmanteau verbal constructions, which I have already explored above. These make the work reminiscent of a kind of poetry, while also positioning it as an exploration of what a language of real life looks like in an accelerated cybercultural age.

Alongside this formal engagement with punk, 'Swarmachines' also engages with a punk negativity through the repeated use of 'no' in certain phrasings: 'No demands. No hint of strategy. No logic. No hopes. No end. […] No community. No dialectics. No plans for an alternative state.'[161] These moments of 'Swarmachines' act as breaks in the text, and contrast with otherwise affirmative sections, such as some of the statements about Situationism and techno-capitalism explored above. These moments of negativity serve a dual purpose throughout 'Swarmachines'. First, they are declarations of the CCRU's own political and philosophical commitments. Second, they indict the positivity of the cyberculture's techno-futurism more broadly. In this sense, 'Swarmachines'

[156] Sadie Plant, The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), p. 144.
[157] Ibid., pp. 144-45.
[158] Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture*, p. 87, quoting from Mustapha Khayati, 'Captive Words: Preface to a Situationist Dictionary', *Internationale Situationniste* 10, March 1966 and *Situationist International Anthology*, trans. by Ken Knabb, p. 174.
[159] Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture*, p. 87.
[160] Ibid., pp. 87-88.
[161] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', pp. 324-7.

continues to exhibit the negativity present within Land's earlier dread futurist work. However, it further obviates the political purposes of this negativity through a connection to the legacy of punk.

Besides making this negativity more tangible, this quality of the text offers a rationale for the CCRU's characterisations of Situationists as co-extensive with the otherwise '[a]utopropagated happenings' of cybertechnologies. Throughout 'Swarmachines' the Situationists are characterised as 'decolonized ants', 'swarms without strategies', 'tactical machines', 'flocks', and 'hives'—descriptions consonant with the language and metaphors Kelly evokes to describe a hive mind throughout *Out of Control*.[162] Moreover, their tactics of the *dérive* and *détournement* are conceptualised as 'careful engineerings', 'hacking into the past', 'endless replications', and the 'swapping [of] codes' between machines and computer systems, making it sound as though the tactics performed by the Situationists are coextensive with commercial cybertechnologies.[163] The negativity that is evoked by the CCRU's deployment of 'no' acts as a necessary counterpoint to what would otherwise be the total integration of Situationist practice into these commodities—what Debord characterised as the 'integrated spectacle' (1988), the idea that the spectacle 'now permeates all reality'.[164] They are moments of the text that act as reminders of negativity, and in turn radical possibility, against an otherwise optimistic and acquiescent consensus of acceleration.

The punk status of 'Swarmachines' also links to one of its other key motifs and formal elements: jungle music.[165] Jungle was a further outgrowth of hardcore and darkside breakbeat music, that co-existed with, but eventually supplanted darkside. Where darkside was effectively a 'minimalist' and avant-garde form of hardcore, jungle was a much more militant music made up of fast breakbeats that were, according to Reynolds, 'looped into a rolling flow.'[166] The backing track of 'Swarmachines' is characterised by the kind of dark jungle music that stemmed from and eventually

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[162] Ibid., p. 324. Throughout *Out of Control* Kelly also draws on honeybee swarms, hives, and flocks of birds as examples of collective emergent thinking, or hive minds.
[163] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', p. 324.
[164] Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, Radical Thinkers (London New York: Verso, 2011), p. 9. Debord's comments about the integrated spectacle follow his previous definitions of the concentrated and diffuse spectacle in *Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Debord defines the concentrated spectacle as a 'dictatorship of the bureaucratic economy', which he believes 'cannot leave the exploited masses any significant margin of choice'. He ties this form of spectacle to the 'police state'. The diffuse spectacle, by contrast, refers to a state of 'commodity abundance', which promotes the existence of 'conflicting social policies' such as 'the automobile spectacle' and 'the city spectacle', so that social struggle is reduced to the struggle of commodities and real social unity circumscribed by fraudulent forms of satisfaction. See: Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Ken Knabb, 3rd edn (UK: Soul Bay Press Ltd, 2021), pp. 86-91.
[165] Rave music more generally has been connected to punk and DIY cultures in certain historiographies. A good example of this is the first episode of the recent 'Sensationalists: The Bad Girls and Boys of British Art' on the BBC, which characterises rave in exactly this way. See: *Sensationalists*.
[166] Reynolds, p. 217, 251.

supplanted darkside. Jungle is also a perceptible concern of the work itself, which contains a whole section that references the genre. In this part of the text, the CCRU claim that '[j]ungle technics severs the cerebral core-texts from their spinal columns of support and cuts copyright adrift from its feudal docking station', and thereafter that:

> Jungle is a space dislocator, destratifying cities snarled in an arcane surveillance apparatus. An operating system opening an invisible and acephalic matrix traversed by cars geared by bassomatic transmissions and orbited by nomadic satellites of clubs, clandestine studios and black economies of dub plates and mix tapes.[167]

The CCRU here echo the underground culture surrounding jungle, particularly how junglist 'pirates hijack the mass media, the instrument of consensus, in order to articulate a minority consciousness that's local and tribal.'[168] Linking this to the aims of Situationism, this leads the Unit to present jungle as a further challenge to the spectacular nature of their contemporary culture and, in turn, to highlight the subculture's opposition to commodification, particularly through concepts such as 'copyright'.

This property of jungle echoes other, overlapping, subcultural scenes such as Warez—which referred to web-based groups that illegally obtained software ahead of its official release, largely for the purposes of collecting it. Writing about the Warez scene, David Tetzlaff notes that, even if not inherently socialist, moral, or ethical, Warez highlighted corporate capital's 'need to generate new forms of warranting and location technologies applied to the purpose of generating social control within virtual space.'[169] Such a gesture that made 'the pirate's insistence on privacy and ephemerality' take on 'a political dimension that goes far beyond questions of copyright', to include those of labour.[170] This was similarly true of jungle subculture at the time, which constantly drew attention to how commercialization was impacting otherwise collective forms of labour practice by, as Reynolds puts it, using pirate radio stations to fill 'the air with an endless anonymous flow (MCs almost never identify tracks or artists) [… to] affirm that jungle is a community, a collective project in which everyone participates and nobody is a star.'[171] This quality of the genre—and the subsequent crackdowns on radio piracy—highlight how commercial music also relied on similar mechanisms of 'social control' to those employed 'within virtual space' against the Warez movement, forms of social control that the CCRU sought to oppose through an embrace of the accelerated cyberculture.

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[167] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', p. 329.
[168] Reynolds, p. 266.
[169] David Tetzlaff, p. 122.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Reynolds, pp. 266-7.

An anti-individualist ethic is absolutely evident through the CCRU's methods of assembling 'Swarmachines' and the replete references the work makes to its hive mind-like properties—things that suggest that collective practice was one reason for the attraction to jungle. However, the CCRU are also interested in other qualities of jungle within the piece, particularly the connections that it has to acceleration. For instance, they note that '[j]ungle rewinds and reloads conventional time into silicon blips of speed and slowness that combust the slag-heaps of historical carbon dating.'[172] This attentiveness to the 'speed' and digitality of jungle music is consistent with its characterisation by Reynolds as a genre in which '[t]he speed aspect is crucial', and for the production of which,

> No acoustic sound is involved; nothing is recorded through a microphone. Most jungle is composed entirely from data derived from recordings, video, or sound modules (Pop-Tart-sized encyclopedias of samples and synth tones) and assembled using programs like Cubase VST (virtual studio technology), which presents loops and motifs in visual form on the computer screen.[173]

The 'speed' and digitality of jungle was as important a factor in the CCRU's interest in the subculture as the genre's use of radio piracy. This is because it was a source of the genre's novelty for the Unit, being something that they saw as distinguishing it from 'the slag-heaps of historical carbon dating', or the past. However, the overall point that the CCRU were making here had just as much to do with the context in which the work is being presented, as it did with the technological or temporal novelty of jungle itself. This is because it was consistent with their broader challenge to the perceived legacy of Situationism within an academic conference setting. In this vein, the 'conventional time' that the CCRU saw the speed and digitality of jungle as opposing was as much a reference to the presentation of time, legacy, and pastness perpetuated by the academic conference form, as it was an actual theoretical account of time. In other words, the Unit were employing jungle as part of a rhetoric of speed and digitality to disrupt what they perceived as the specific temporality of the conference, one that enforced a particular understanding of the past interacted with the present.

This rhetorical move is an instance of accelerationism, which I have argued throughout this thesis affirms acceleration against a particular, hegemonic state of affairs linked with a feeling of stasis. What's particularly interesting about the CCRU's accelerationism in this case, however, is its connection to a broader and extremely similar shift that was happening in jungle subculture at the time. According to Reynolds, '[b]y 1996, "jungle" and "drum and bass" were *the* words to drop', and

[172] CCRU, 'Swarmachines', p. 329.
[173] Reynolds, p. 251, 342.

the genre had entered a phase of mainstream acceptance.[174] This is evident from the fact that Goldie, one of its key figures and progenitors, would go on to win two awards later in the year for 'best jungle act' and best album at the newly launched MOBOs.[175] Due to the increased popularity of the genre at this time, it was becoming increasingly characterised by a split tendency. The first was by a desire for continued popular legitimation, reflected by the subgenre of intelligent jungle, which was led by 'producers [who] secretly believed' that improving the cultural palatability of the genre required 'moving away from digital technology'.[176] The second, by contrast, was the pursuit of a more militant and aggressive style that wanted to continue to proliferate itself through the subaltern economy of pirate radio stations. This latter tendency would, in part, see a return to the darkside roots of the genre through the off-shoot of techstep, which was a further sub-genre of jungle that was more intensely connected to digitization and exploring 'the will-to-power of technology itself', while being governed by the slogan '*there's no turning back*'.[177] This moment of jungle's history is the one that 'Swarmachines' speaks to, siding, in principle, against the intelligent camp (reflecting the academic setting from which the CCRU wished to depart) and favouring the pre-techstep, guerrilla-like tendency. All in all, a macro-cultural reflection of the Unit's micro-level response to the Hacienda conference, and something that suggests a deeper cultural resonance with the kind of accelerationism the CCRU advocate for in 'Swarmachines'.

Conclusion: Storming the Reality Studio

The wider cultural resonance of the CCRU's work with jungle music during this period evidences how accelerationism was not just an isolated perspective of the Unit's, but also something that was potentially more deeply ingrained in a particular strand of British underground subculture that then subsequently influenced the practice of the Unit. This subculture reflects a kind of collective subject that was otherwise elided in Land's earlier 'Meltdown' essay, standing in as a chief example of a divergence between Land's individual work and the Unit's more collective efforts. I don't think that the CCRU resolve all the problems of Land's earlier work, or, for that matter, the tendency Noys identifies for accelerationism to forget class or other political forms of struggle by 'identify[ing] new

[174] Reynolds, p. 348. The mainstream appeal of the genre of jungle was evident in the widespread popularity of two particular singles: General Levy's 'Incredible' (1994) which peaked at no. 8 in the UK charts, and 'Original Nuttah' by UK Apachi and Shy FX (1994).
[175] 'MOBO Awards 1996 | MOBO Organisation', *MOBO* <https://mobo.com/history/1996> [accessed 9 March 2023].
[176] Reynolds, p. 342. A key record illustrating this split is LTJ Bukem's *Intelligent Jungle* (1996).
[177] Reynolds, p. 354.

subjects of revolt as being those most radically *within* capitalism'.[178] However, I do think that 'Swarmachines' showcases an attentiveness to forms of political struggle in its attempts to update older radical projects. It also does this while retaining the critical positionality towards the earlier cyberculture evident in Land's earlier work. On the one hand, this position is still open to the same criticism Chun levels at cyberpunk fiction—and which might also be levelled at darkside and jungle—that it produces 'a desire for […] vaguely dystopian futures' rather than ultimately challenging them.[179] However, I think, to their credit, the CCRU also articulate a very different kind of story, highlighting the otherwise 'conflicted terrain' that was constitutive of the period, and the cyberculture, one that might be used to similarly reconceptualise accelerationist responses to accelerationism.

Another value of the CCRU, and particularly 'Swarmachines', I explore is the irregularity of the cultural continuum it produces. An emphasis on Situationism, punk, and jungle, in 'Swarmachines' points to an entire cultural history of movements that could also be regarded as, at times, adhering to aspects of an accelerationist point of view. This sense of an accelerationist continuum where one might not be immediately obvious complements my own reflections on the Independent Group, Eduardo Paolozzi, and J.G. Ballard in the previous chapters. These have been figures whom I have considered to have, at times, exhibited accelerationist attitudes, and who also provide accelerationist responses to moments of acceleration. However, one way the CCRU's and Land's work builds on these earlier groups and figures is through their lust for acceleration after it has entered a state of having a much darker, less progressive, manifestation. This suggests a particular trajectory to accelerationism that explains its continued state of unease in the present, and that points to its unpalatability in the future. This also indicates why it is necessary for more contemporary accelerationists to highlight and push back against the risks associated with continued acceleration, insofar as it might lead to the annihilation of progress in its entirety.

[178] Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative*, p. 5.
[179] Chun, p. 178.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have produce the first sustained study to analyse and synthesize the accelerationist currents of the Independent Group (IG), Eduardo Paolozzi, and J.G. Ballard. To these studies, I have also produced a prolonged examination of accelerationism in the work of Nick Land and the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU). My view is that certain outputs by these groups and individuals offer affirmative rather than negative responses to experiences of acceleration, which corresponds to my definition of accelerationism in the thesis introduction. This affirmative quality of their work is compelling for what it reveals about their relationships to acceleration in their respective contexts, and why it might be desirable to the individuals and groups to begin with. Moreover, it helps to contest current debates that interpret accelerationism in wholly political terms, my view throughout this thesis being precisely that accelerationism is useful as an interpretative framework for understanding a particular kind of cultural response to acceleration.

My argument across this thesis has been that accelerationist responses to acceleration partly stem from felt experiences of conditions of stasis. In the case of the Independent Group, this related to both the post-war austerity of the UK at the time, and the high cultural tastes of the period that Lawrence Alloway and Reyner Banham thought were blindsiding forms of mass culture and its accelerated circulation. Eduardo Paolozzi, an IG member whose work extends beyond this group, partly embraced an accelerated rate of change in the sixties for the purposes of overturning contexts and hierarchies that were presumed to be fixed and have inherent meaning. J.G. Ballard identified and responded to the 'frenetic standstill' that acceleration itself was giving rise to, highlighting the ways that accelerated change was producing its own conditions of stasis that further calls for acceleration hoped to overcome.[1] Finally, the CCRU followed Ballard in recognizing acceleration and frenetic standstill as a new kind of general condition, only to double down on acceleration to challenge preconceptions about its relationship with progress, and—like the IG—as a challenge to hegemonic conceptions of cultural value.

While all the works I have studied throughout this thesis exhibit clear accelerationist tendencies, they also demonstrate an equally lucid divergence in their perceptions of acceleration across the 20th century. For instance, it's clear that earlier in the century the IG align acceleration with an expectation of progressive development, having a largely optimistic view of both

[1] Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, New Directions for Critical Theory, Paperback ed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

acceleration and mass culture. The same is largely true of Eduardo Paolozzi. Although the artist undoubtedly begins to take a more critical stance towards acceleration in works like *Crash* (1964) and his screenprints of the late sixties, he remains largely optimistic about shifts in the gender-dynamics underpinning the mythology of speed, and the increased possibilities for play, recombination, and 'parodic resignification' that result from acceleration-induced decontextualization.[2] In this vein, Paolozzi's ambivalence towards acceleration stems from a perspective that recognizes positive potentials within it. This is far less true of Ballard, who equates acceleration with a possibility for harm, only to embrace this capacity for how it lays bare the existential dilemmas and psychopathologies underpinning everyday life. Nick Land and the CCRU go further still, suggesting an incompatibility between acceleration and progress that anticipates the criticisms of acceleration by the likes of Hartmut Rosa, and thereafter the more contemporary accelerationists like Nick Srnicek, Alex Williams, and Patricia Reed explored in Chapter One.

However, this is not to suggest that perceptions of acceleration, or for that matter accelerationism itself, progress teleologically. Many of the more marginal figures in this thesis tell a different story. Members of the nineties Californian cyberculture that were contemporaneous with the CCRU, such as Kevin Kelly, John Perry Barlow, or Terence McKenna for instance, exemplify more optimistic approaches to acceleration. Their affirmations of acceleration might also be considered accelerationist. A similar claim might also be made of Alvin Toffler, whose book *Future Shock* (1970) is as much an argument in favour of acceleration as it is one opposed to its pathological effects, demonstrating an awareness of the possibility that acceleration might give rise to its own conditions of stasis. A further line might be drawn between Toffler's ideas and the contemporary accelerationists explored in Chapter One here, particularly Srnicek, Williams, and Reed whose arguments in favour of acceleration are, in Reed's words, predicated on identifying the 'kernel of stasis' that arises from the 'acceleration [that] already drives apparatuses of value-extraction' within contemporary capitalism.[3] This is because such ideas are predicated on the very same forms of dynamic stabilization that a figure like Toffler advocates for in his earlier work.

This said, my studies in this thesis also challenge forms of sociological criticism that equate ambivalent responses to acceleration with observances of its negative effects. Examples of this that I

[2] Elisabeth Bronfen, 'Chuck Palahniuk and the Violence of Beauty', in *The Future of Flesh: A Cultural Survey of the Body*, ed. by Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, Katerina Kitse-Mytakou, and Effie Yiannopoulou (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 101–14 <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230620858> [accessed 22 July 2022], p. 102.

[3] Patricia Reed, 'Reorientate, Eccentricate, Speculate, Fictionalize, Geometricize, Commonize, Abstractify: Seven Prescriptions for Accelerationism', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 521–36, p. 525.

explore in this thesis include Rosa, Paul Virilio, and, to some extent, Toffler and his idea of future shock. Each of these individuals rely on ambivalent responses to acceleration to highlight the harms and pathologies acceleration causes. However, they pay little attention to how positive aspects of acceleration also inform ambivalent responses. Throughout my analyses in each chapter of this thesis, I have highlighted the affirmative aspect of this ambivalence, while insisting on its politically charged connotations. This is particularly evident in my second chapter on the IG, and my fifth chapter on the CCRU. In Chapter Two, I showcased how the IG's response to acceleration echoed their response to mass culture and challenged what they perceived to be hegemonic views of cultural capital at the time. Likewise, in Chapter Five, I argued that Land's, and the CCRU's, work did something similar, which stemmed from an opposition to the criminalisation of rave in the UK, and a further hegemony in the form of the Californian cyberculture-cum-ideology.

Of course, as I also emphasise, these accelerationist points of view are not without their flaws. In Chapter Two I argued that the IG's turn towards acceleration acquiesced with changes that were already taking place in Britain at the time and that weren't self-evidently radical, coalescing with what David Mellor has termed 'Tory Futurism'.[4] This is the idea that the conservative government of the period oversaw the very things the IG embraced, developing 'accelerated policies of military-industrial growth and a consumer economy' as part of a 'New Elizabethan mythology', effectively rebranding Empire.[5] The IG's veneration of both mass culture and acceleration depends upon, rather than challenges, this narrative, something that highlights the politically precarious nature of their accelerationism. Likewise, I draw a similar conclusion from Land and the CCRU, whose work affirms acceleration as, in part, a challenge to "Western" hegemony. The problem with this view, I argue, is that it is predicated on an act of othering that acquiesces with stereotypes already present within the more optimistic strands of the nineties cyberculture. This is a particularly notable issue in Land's earlier individual outputs and may even be considered as precursory to his more contemporary far-right politics.

I also highlight a similar problem in the tendency of figures I analyse to feminise acceleration, particularly in the case of Paolozzi's and Land's works—extended study might also see Ballard's and the Independent Group's outputs included here. In Chapter Three of the thesis, I argued that reference to a female figure in *Diana as an Engine I* (1963) was an uncharacteristic move by Paolozzi, and was representative of what Roland Barthes has referred to as a 'change in the mythology of cars'

[4] David Mellor, 'A "Glorious Techniculture" in Nineteen-Fifties Britain: The Many Cultural Contexts of the Independent Group', in *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, ed. by David Robbins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 229–35, p. 229.
[5] Ibid.

from 'the bestiary of power' to one that was 'more *homely*'.[6] I expressed that Barthes's view was both affirmed and challenged by Paolozzi in his sculpture. I expressed that, like Barthes, Paolozzi clearly grappled with the idea of a similar shift in *Diana*, characterising it more broadly as a change in the mythology of speed. However, Paolozzi's sculpture is far more optimistic about the possibilities of this shift than Barthes, who otherwise identified it with a process of depoliticization common to commodity culture. Thereafter, I suggested that the problem with Paolozzi's sculpture was twofold: 1) his work risked simply acquiescing with the commodification of female identity, and 2) it risked equating female identity with homeliness. Both these qualities of Paolozzi's *Diana* saw the artist collude with stereotypical perceptions of femininity in his contemporary context, meaning that although he identified these stereotypes with the transgression of earlier ideas of speed, by doing so he also affirmed the desirability of such stereotypes, rather than criticising them. This facet of Paolozzi's work also resonates with Wendy Chun's later criticism of interpolation of '[t]he female cyborg' in cyberpunk fiction, something that I oppose to the "transgressive" sexborg in Land's 'Meltdown'.[7]

This is all to say that while the works I have explored in this thesis frame acceleration against a particular condition of stasis, this does not necessarily make their works radical breaks from the causes of this stasis. This is an example of the tendency to vacillate between 'subversion and acquiescence' that Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian attribute to all forms of accelerationism in *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* (2014), and that I have sought to trace across this body of research.[8] This quality of accelerationism is something I determine to be most readily palpable in depictions of flight in Ballard's works, which dramatize accelerationism's core tension between escape from and further immersion in the logics of capital and stasis they otherwise rally against. It's also evident in contemporary accelerationist ambitions for the further development of spaceflight, which turn to space in order to criticise present political imaginaries while, in turn, failing to account for how spaceflight is already wedded to these very same imaginaries.

The foremost critic of accelerationism, Benjamin Noys, sees this simultaneously subversive and acquiescent quality of accelerationism as being to its detriment as a form of radical political theory, it being an example of its extremity as an idea or, in Mackay's and Avanessian's words, its 'nihilistic alignment […] with the excesses of capitalist culture'.[9] Elements of this are certainly evident

[6] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers, 47. [print.] (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2006), p. 56.
[7] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, Mass. London: MIT, 2006), p. 110.
[8] Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, 'Introduction', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 1–46, p. 4.
[9] Ibid.

across the works I have studied, particularly if these excesses are related to the responses each of the works have to commodification. Members of the IG, for instance, largely celebrate commodification, particularly the members associated with Group 2 of *This is Tomorrow*. This celebration is also palpable in Paolozzi's *Diana*, which extolls the possibilities for decontextualization and recombination commodification gives rise to. Similarly, Ballard's uneasy explorations of the destructive possibilities of the crash are linked to the automobile's status as a commodity, extrapolating the ideas of his forebears, while highlighting the innately destructive qualities of commodification. Ballard's tendency to embrace rather than straightforwardly disavow this consequence of commodification stop him from being reduced to the role of critic, highlighting another kind of capitalist excess that accelerationists might nihilistically align with. This destructive excess is thereafter further pursued by Nick Land in 'Meltdown' and by the CCRU in 'Swarmachines', with both texts siding with the new forms of Web-based commodification and its erasure of the political agency of the subject, albeit while demonstrating how these forms of commodification had yet to ossify into anything quite as sanitized as the contemporary motorcar. Underpinned as they are by a lack of critical concern for the consequences of embracing commodification, each of these figures certainly demonstrate a 'nihilistic alignment' of a kind.

Yet I also want to push back against Noys's view, as per my prerogative for undertaking this investigation. While as a radical theoretical position accelerationism might be flawed, I constantly demonstrate how accelerationist arguments have a capacity to reveal the 'conflicted terrain' of their respective political contexts.[10] This is particularly evident with the IG and CCRU, as outlined above, but also latent in some of Paolozzi's and Ballard's experimental writing outputs, which I explored in the opening to Chapter Four as highlighting a form of imaginative stasis within literature, and thereafter the artist's and author's wider social contexts. In this sense, it would be a misprision to simply refer to these figures, their works, and their forms of accelerationism as 'nihilistic'. Rather, the accelerationisms of each of my respective figures of study reflect the political basis upon which arguments in favour acceleration are predicated—whether these arguments themselves, or for that matter acceleration as a solution, represent effective forms of political action. Above all, this is valuable for identifying why accelerationist responses to acceleration exist in the first place, acceleration being perceived as a suitable vehicle for forms of political negativity and therefore a way to challenge a particular political context.

[10] David Tetzlaff, 'Yo-Ho-Ho and a Server of Warez' in *The World Wide Web and Contemporary Cultural Theory*, ed. by Andrew Herman and Thomas Swiss (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 99–126.

This returns us to the multitude of contemporary debates surrounding accelerationism that I previously outlined in the introduction. In this part of the thesis, I explained how these contemporary debates have largely revolved around framing accelerationism as a kind of technocratic leftism concerned with the social distribution of wealth through a mastery of technology, usually to the detriment of more typical Marxist concerns such as labour exploitation, dignity, and practices of resistance. Moreover, more recently, these debates have seen a concerted shift towards regarding accelerationism as part of the purview of a silicon-valley tech elite, and as something firmly embedded in far-right White nationalism. While these criticisms are undoubtedly important, and certainly rooted in tangible concerns in the present, across this thesis I have presented a divergent view: I have produced a study that showcases accelerationism's usefulness as a kind of interpretative framework, one that offers insight into historical and contemporary demands for acceleration, particularly in aesthetic and literary outputs.

Crucially, this quality of accelerationism allows it to encompass much more than just the key figures I examine throughout this thesis. It is also what makes it palpable in other, frequently more marginalised, forms of cultural expression like the jungle and darkside subcultures that I explore in Chapter Five through reference to *Junglist*. In this sense, it may also extend back, encompassing other subcultures that showcase a similar emphasis on speed and acceleration as a part of their style. Likewise, it might also be extended forwarded, and be used as a tool for exploring more marginalised responses to acceleration in the present. Undoubtedly, further studies of recent extrapolations of accelerationism into things like Xenofeminism, Blaccelerationism, and gender-accelerationism would go a long way towards addressing this gap, providing much needed further insight into the complexity of human responses to experiences of acceleration. Likewise, greater consideration of how a multitude of cultural futurisms interact with accelerationism, would provide much more information about how acceleration is received in particular global contexts and within particular communities—a much needed intervention on accelerationism, given its origin, and significant focus on, European and North American contexts.

Although these things were sadly beyond the scope of this present study, I believe my research in this thesis is the beginning of a shift in how accelerationism might be perceived. In taking the wider cultural import of accelerationism as a key consideration of the thesis, I have presented it less as a niche school of theory, or even a particular flavour of politics, and more as a general phenomenon, one that resonates with Mark Fisher's provocative claim that '[e]veryone is an accelerationist' or Jake Chapman's view that it is 'a *chaos* of positions […] the combination of all

(antagonized and antagonising) relations to the gravitational pull of capitalism' (italics in source).[11] In my view, this thesis demonstrates how such perspectives act as valuable reminders of the complexity underlying the human experience of acceleration, a valuable thing for future critical studies of this relationship.

[11] Mark Fisher, 'Terminator vs Avatar', in *Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, Second edition (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic Media Ltd, 2017), pp. 335–46, p. 340. ; Brad Evans, 'Histories of Violence: The Violence of Art' an interview with Jake Chapman, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2017 <https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/histories-of-violence-the-violence-of-art/> [accessed 6 January 2022].

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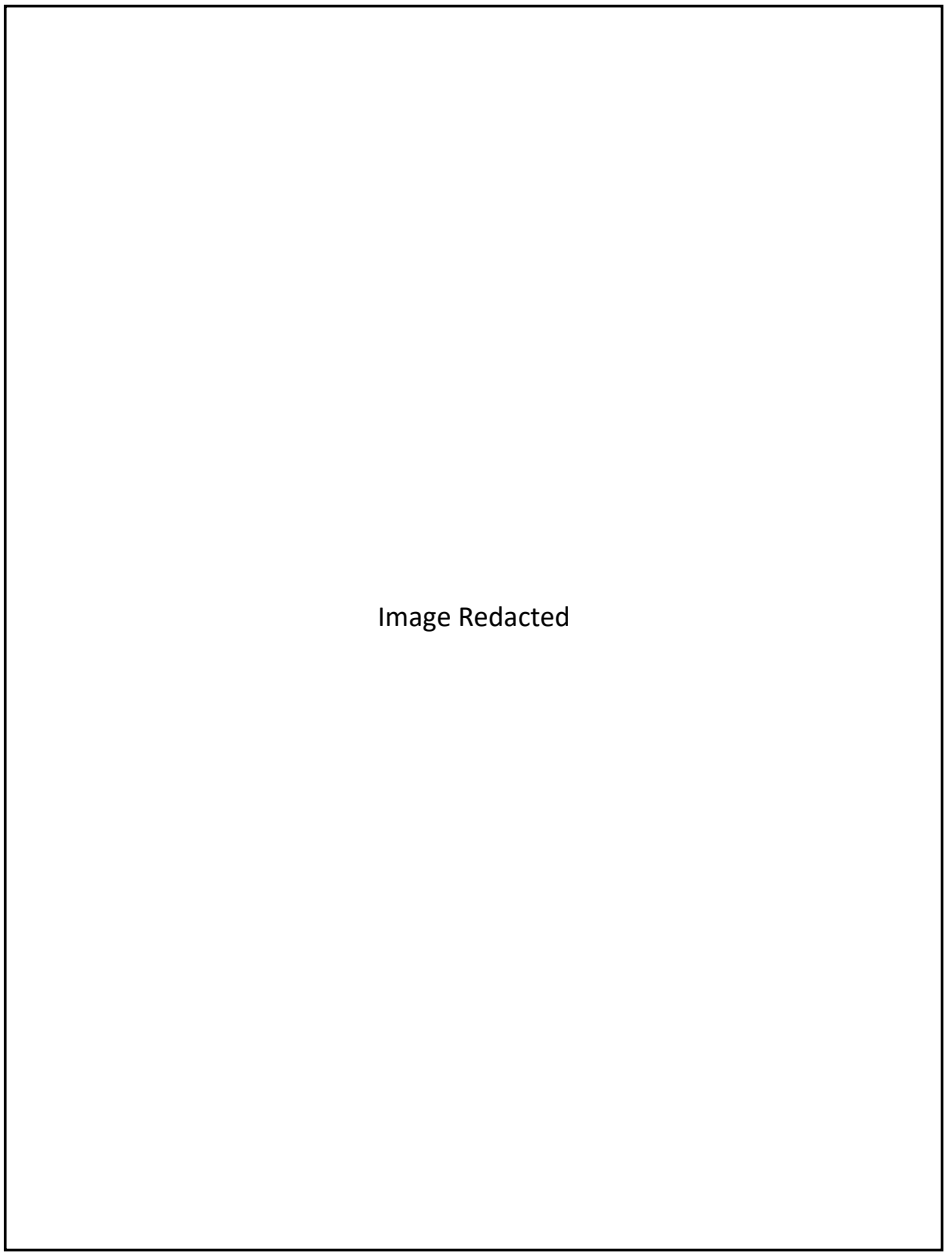
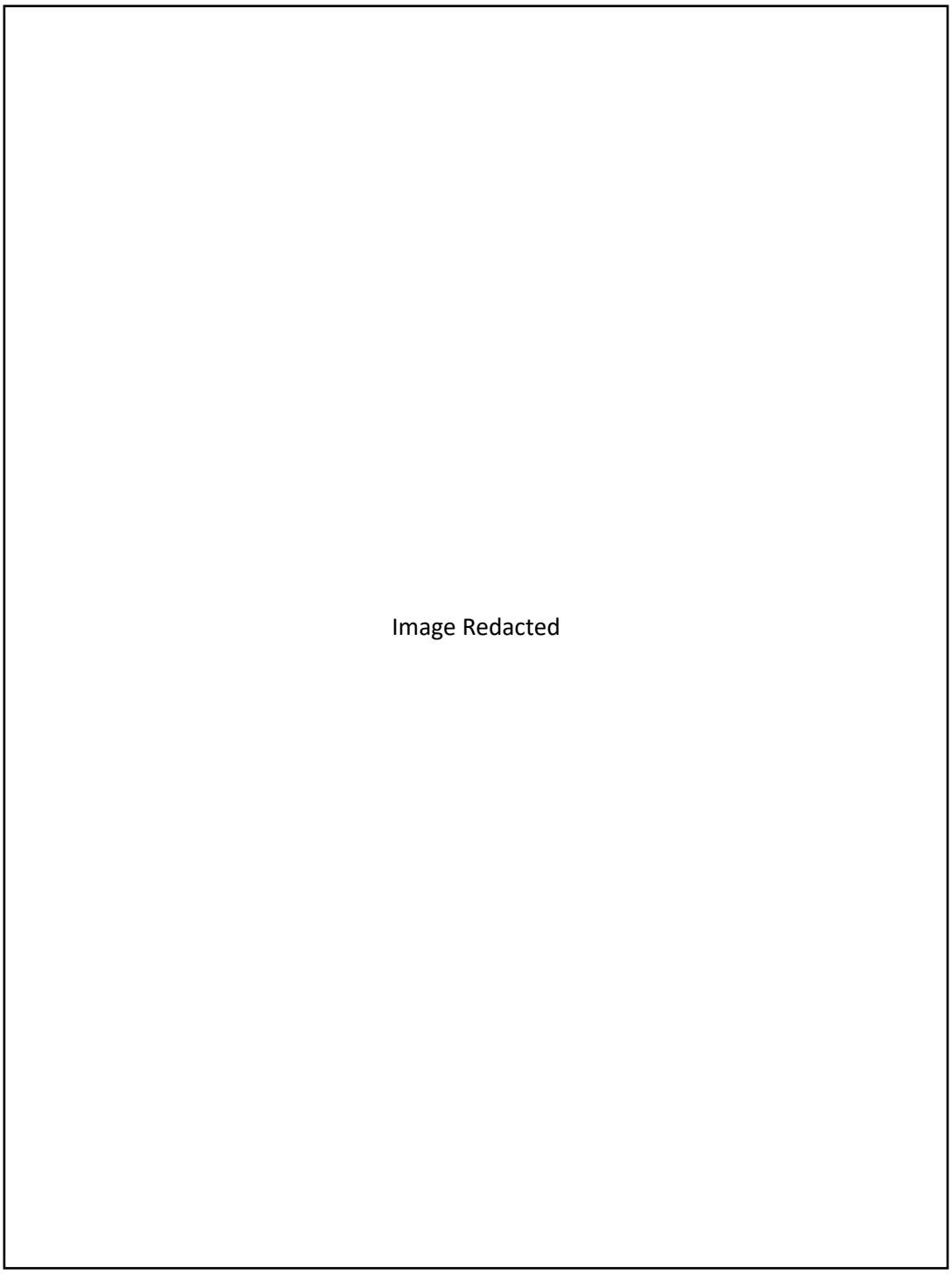
Appendix

Introduction Images

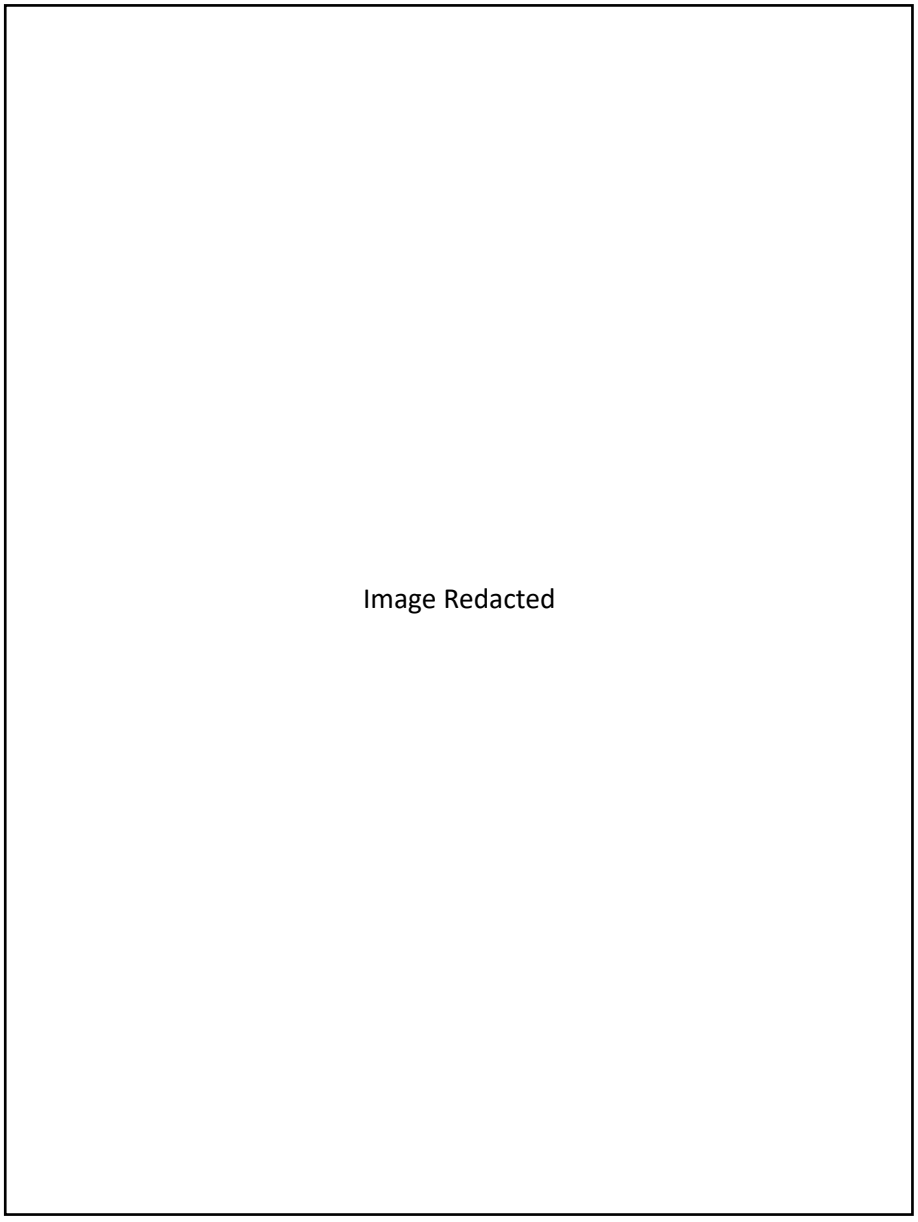


0.1
Speed Education Program
Initial draft manuscript for *Speed: Visions of an Accelerated Age* (1998) at the Whitechapel Gallery
Whitechapel Gallery Archive WAG/EXH/2/476/1

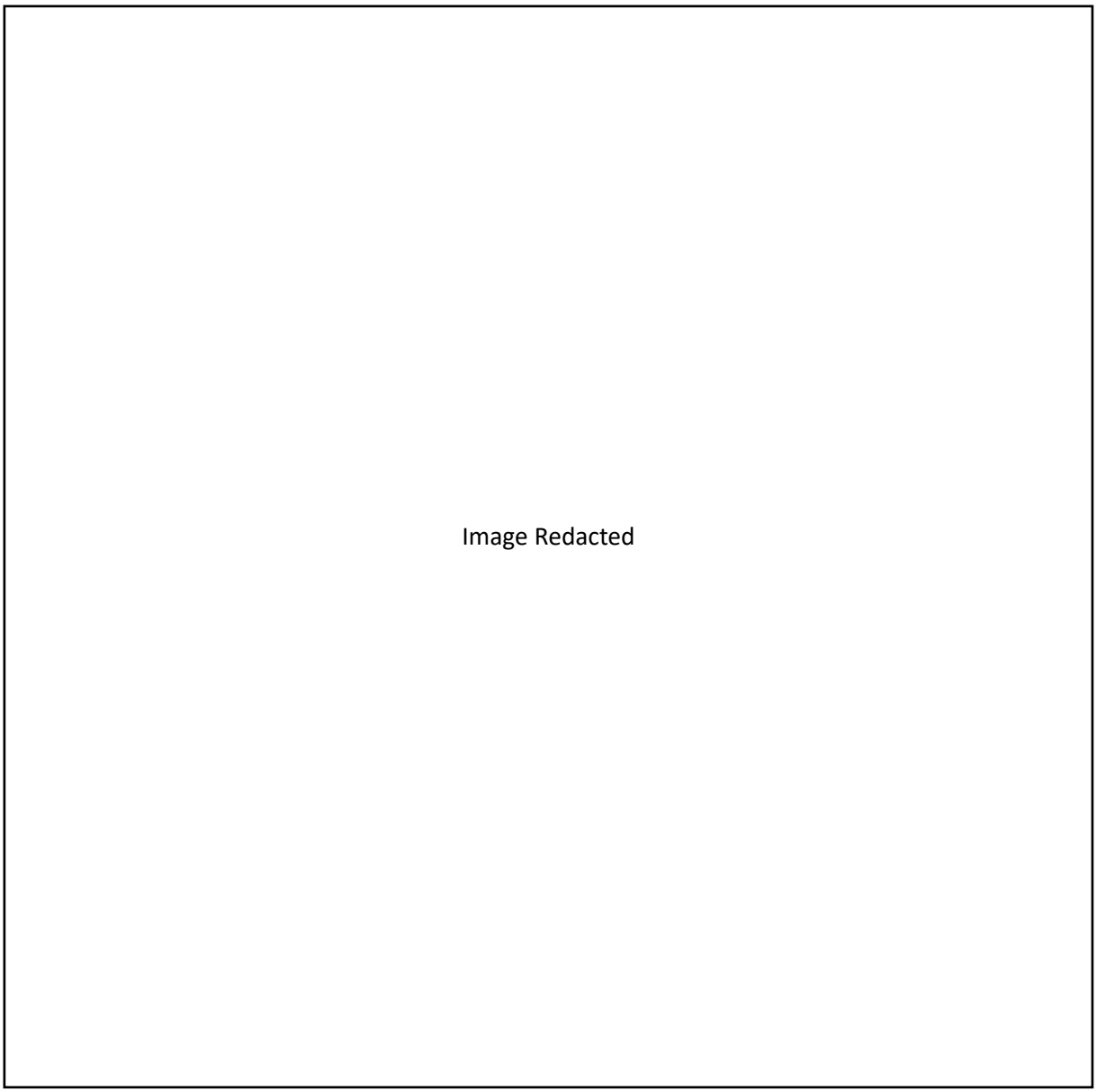


0.2
Photograph of J.G. Ballard and Eduardo Paolozzi
Black and White Photograph
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archive GMA A40/10/17/3

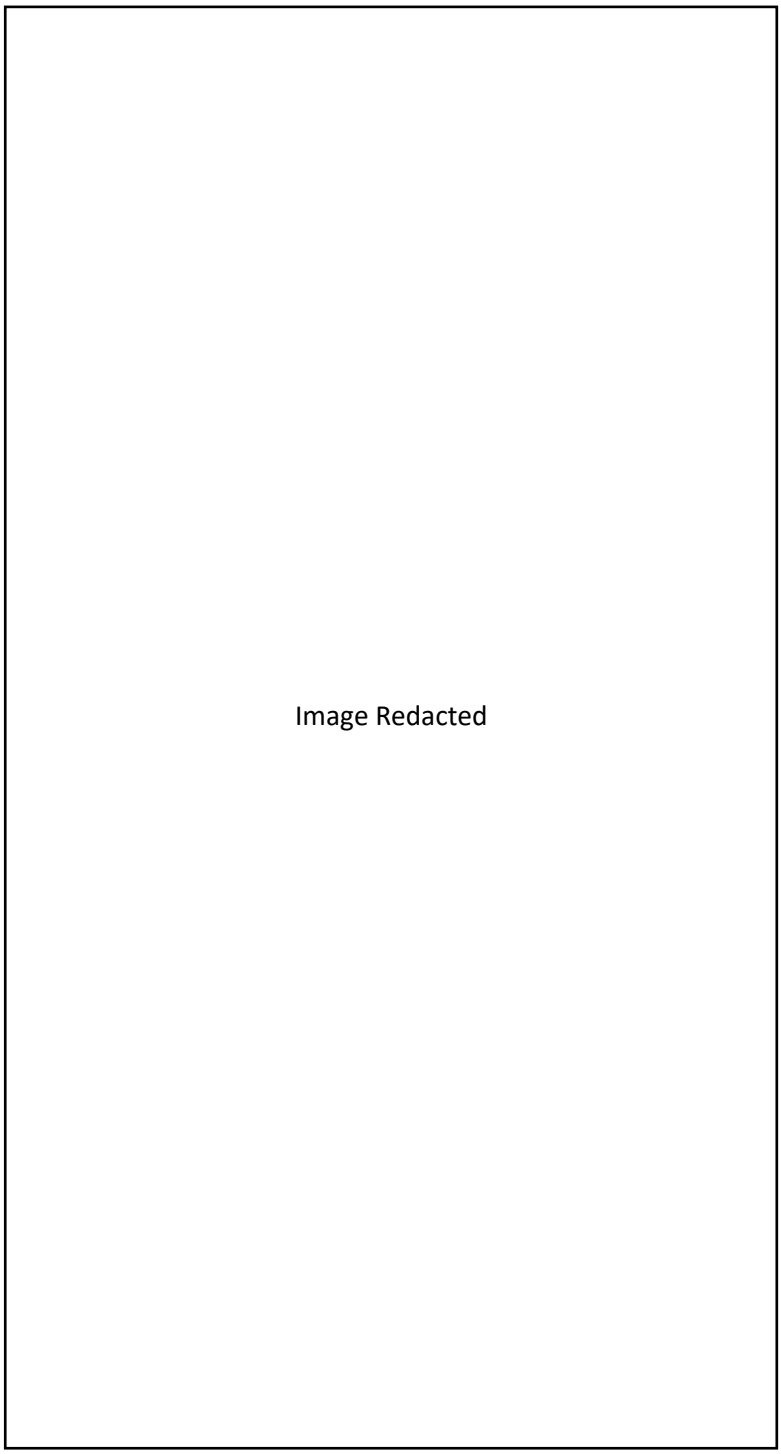
Chapter 2 Images



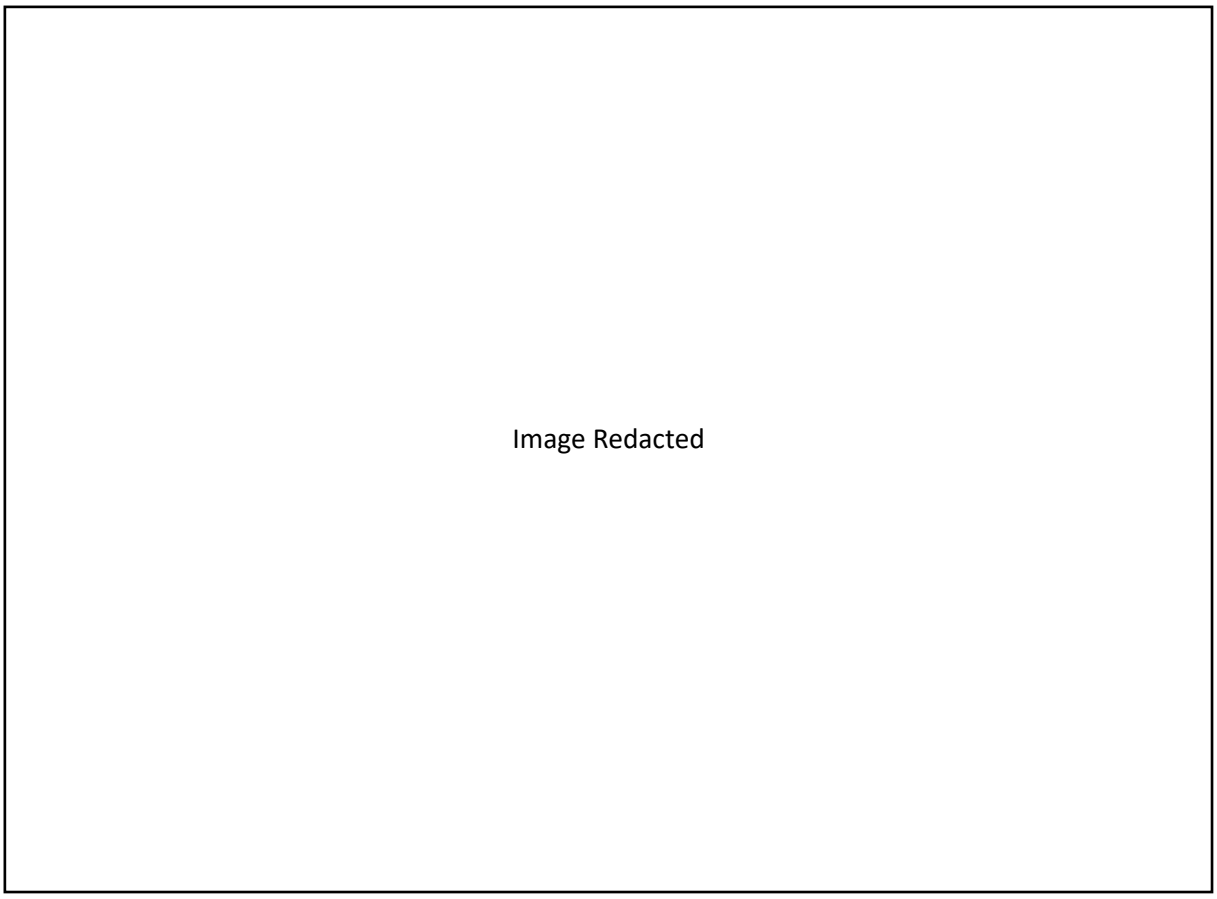
2.1
Eduardo Paolozzi
Page from the Artist's Scrapbooks, (c.1950)
Collage on Paper
V&A Archive of Art and Design, Krazy Kat Arkive
AAD/1985/3/6/2



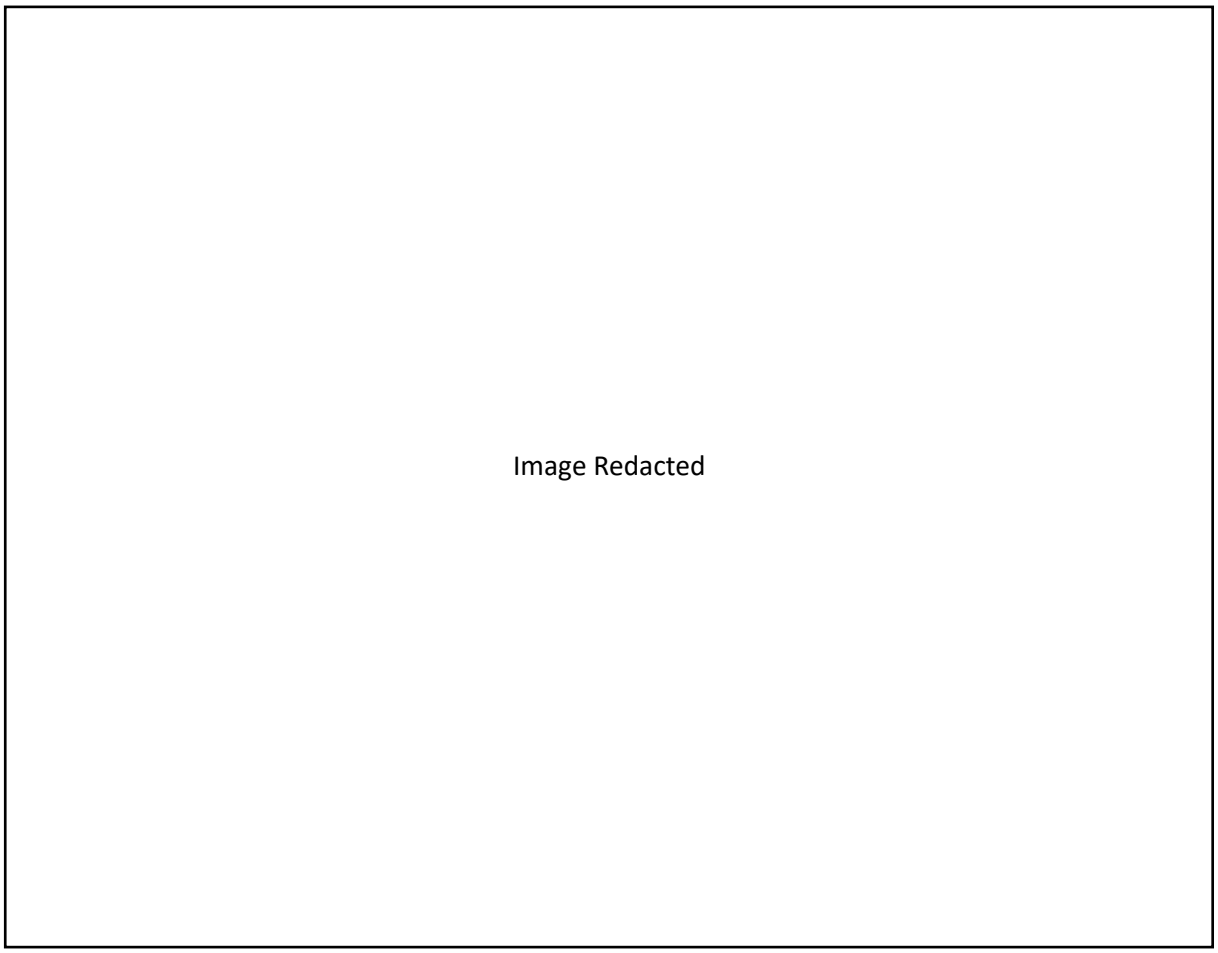
2.2
Richard Hamilton
Just What is it That Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing? (1956)
Black and white photocopy of collage on paper
From: *This is Tomorrow* exhibition catalogue ed. by Whitechapel Art Gallery, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Theo Crosby, and Edward Wright, 3rd edn (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010)



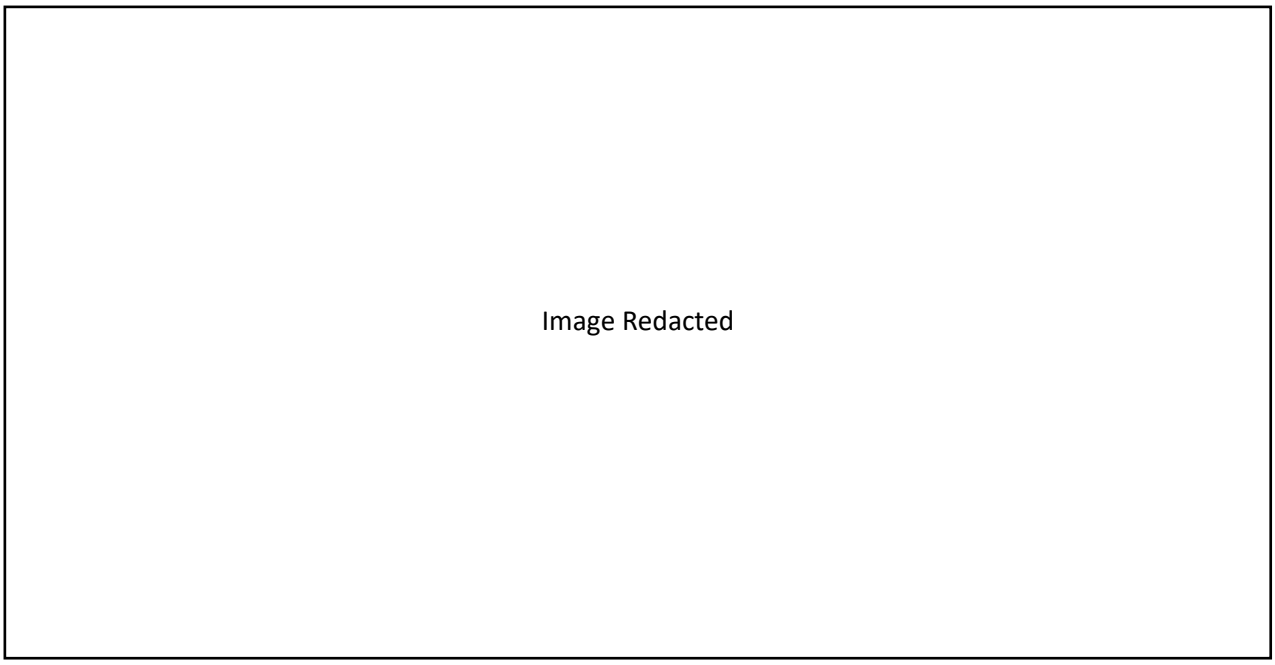
2.3
Magda Cordell
#8, 1960
Oil and encaustic on canvas
From: *Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945-1965*, Barbican, London (2022)
Burchfield Penny Art Centre Collection, Buffalo, New York
Photograph by Niall Gallen



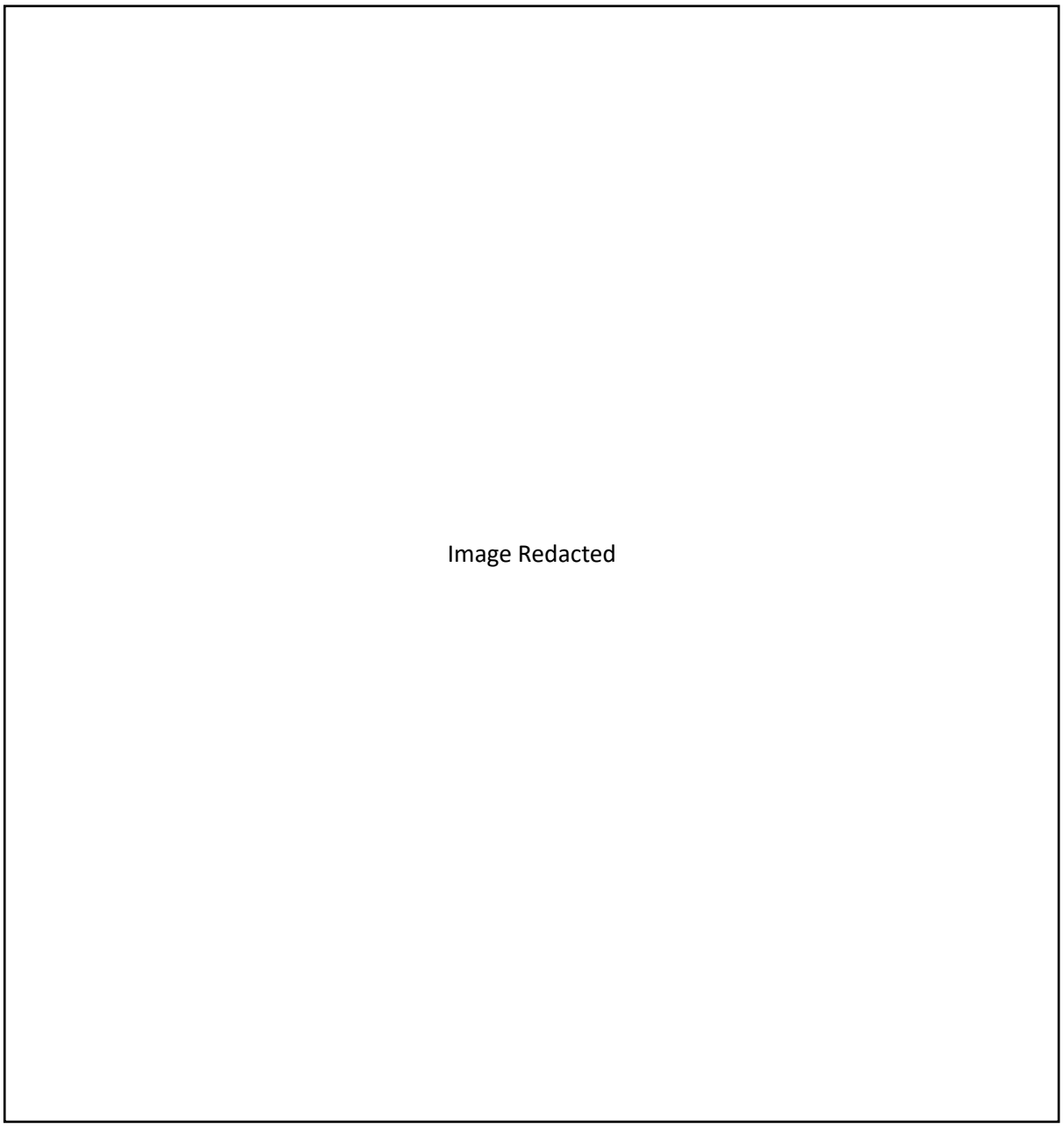
2.4
Sam Lambert
'*This is Tomorrow* exhibition, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London: Group 2 exhibit, showing the poster from *Lost in Space* and an image of Marilyn Monroe from *Seven Year Itch*' (1956)
Black and White Photograph
Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Collections



2.5
Nigel Henderson
This is Tomorrow exhibition, Group 6's 'Pation and Pavilion', from back (1956)
Black and white photograph
Tate Archive, TGA/201011/4/3



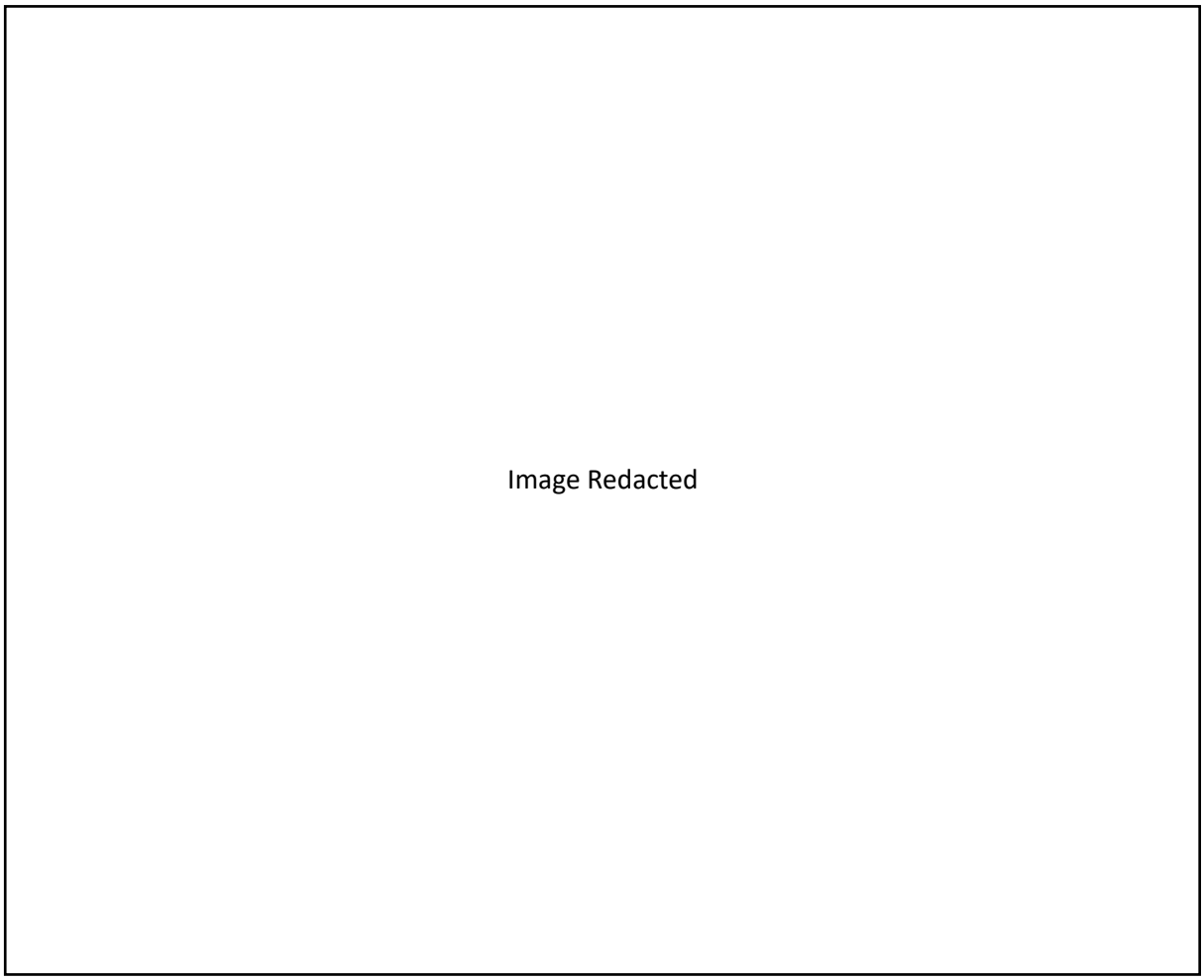
2.6
Lawrence Alloway, Geoffrey Holroyd, and Toni Del Renzio
Table exploring means for marking surfaces, (1956)
From: *This is Tomorrow* exhibition catalogue ed. by Whitechapel Art Gallery, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Theo Crosby, and Edward Wright, 3rd edn (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010)



2.7
Richard Hamilton, John McHale, and John Voelcker
A diagram outlining the technological expansion of sensory ranges, (1956)
From: *This is Tomorrow* exhibition catalogue ed. by Whitechapel Art Gallery, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Theo Crosby, and Edward Wright, 3rd edn (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010)

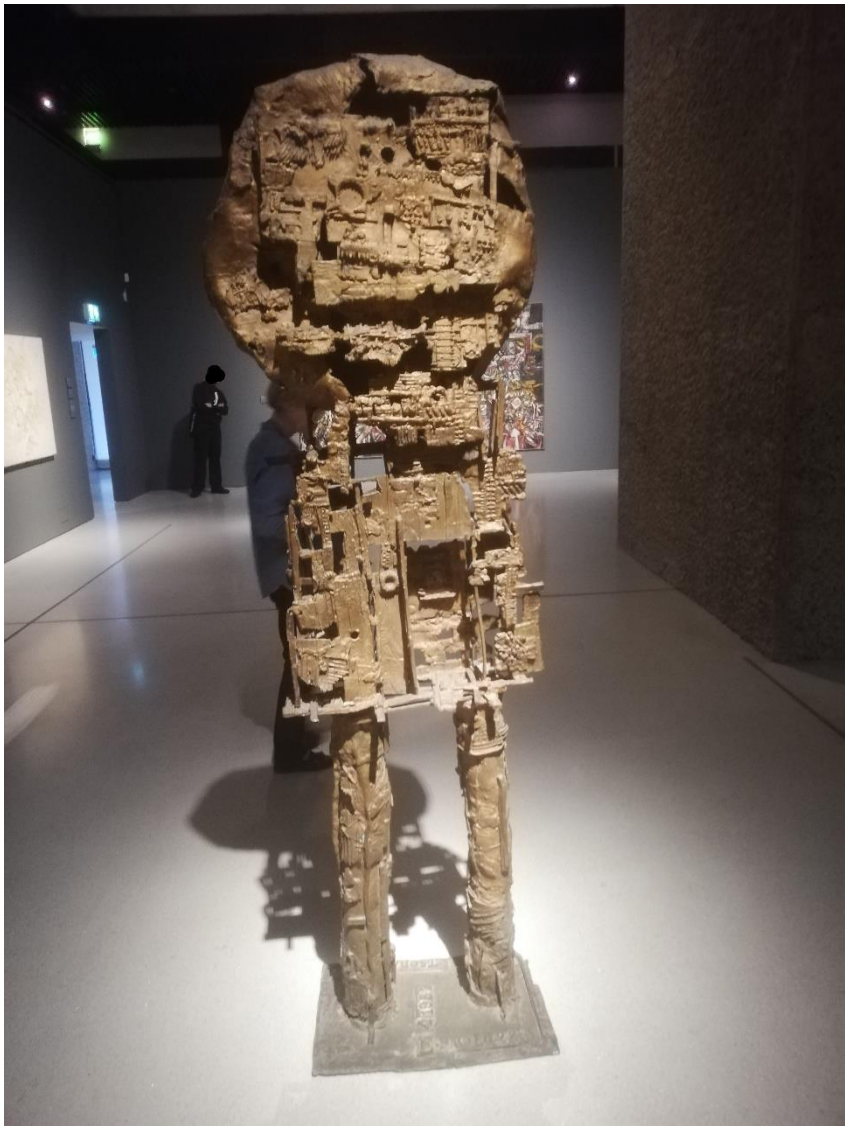
2.8
Richard Hamilton, John McHale, and John Voelcker
Tito's Head (1956)
From: *This is Tomorrow* exhibition catalogue ed. by Whitechapel Art Gallery, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Theo Crosby, and Edward Wright, 3rd edn (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010)

Chapter 3 Images

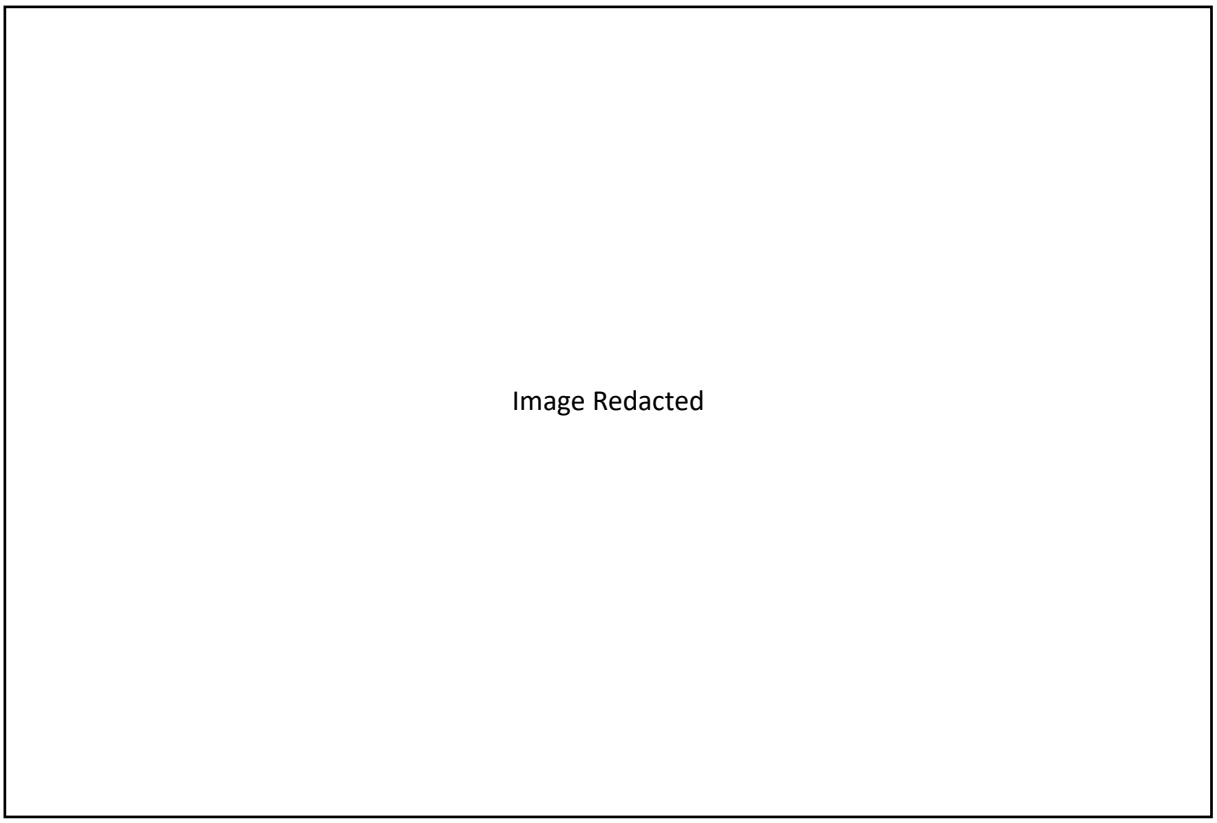


3.1
Eduardo Paolozzi
Osaka Steel, 1969
Stainless steel
Colour photograph from Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art
Reproduced in Judith Collins, *Eduardo Paolozzi* (UK: Lund Humphries, 2014), p. 162.

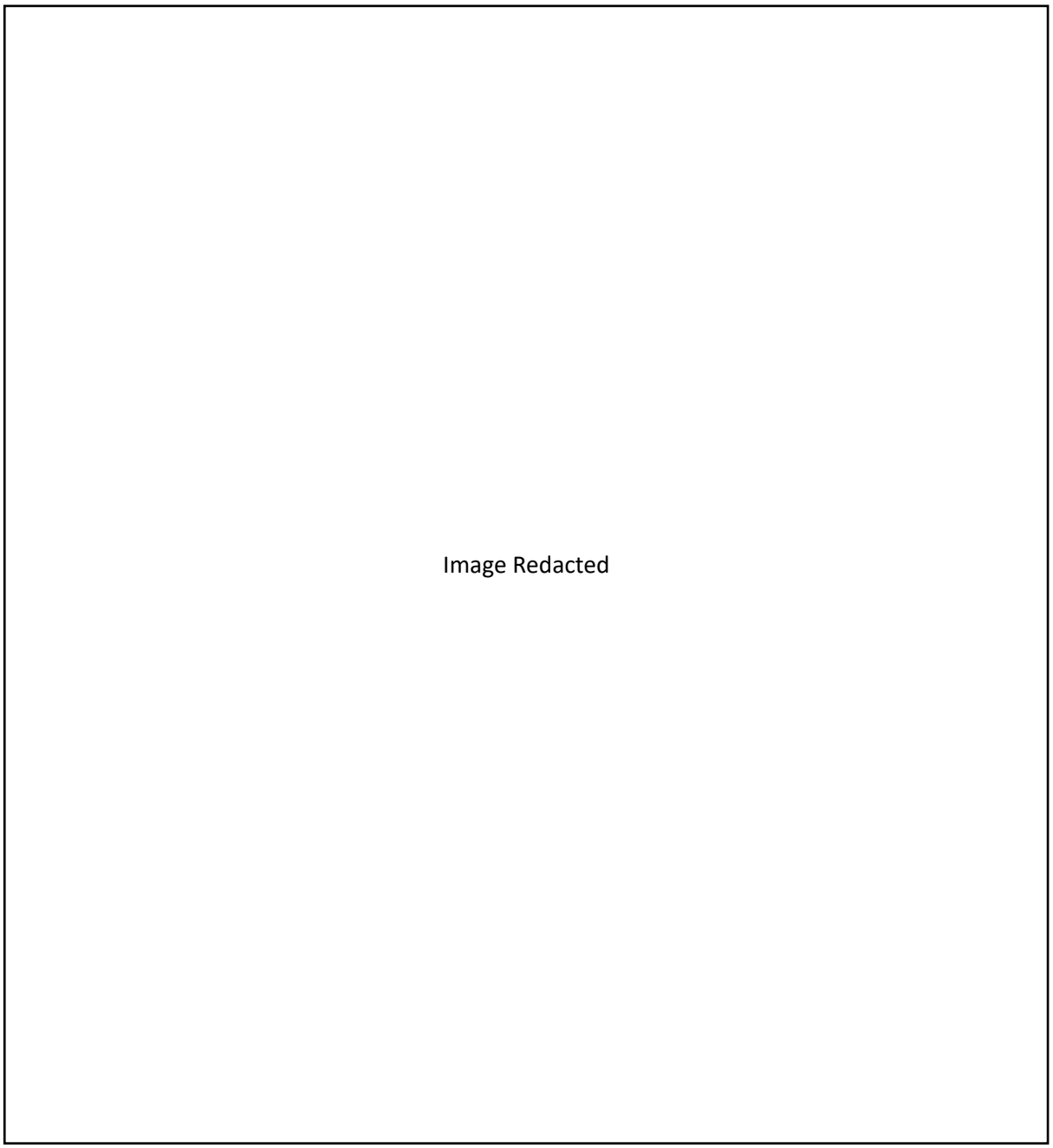
3.2
Eduardo Paolozzi
Ettso, 1967
Chrome plated steel
University of Edinburgh collections
Photograph by Niall Gallen



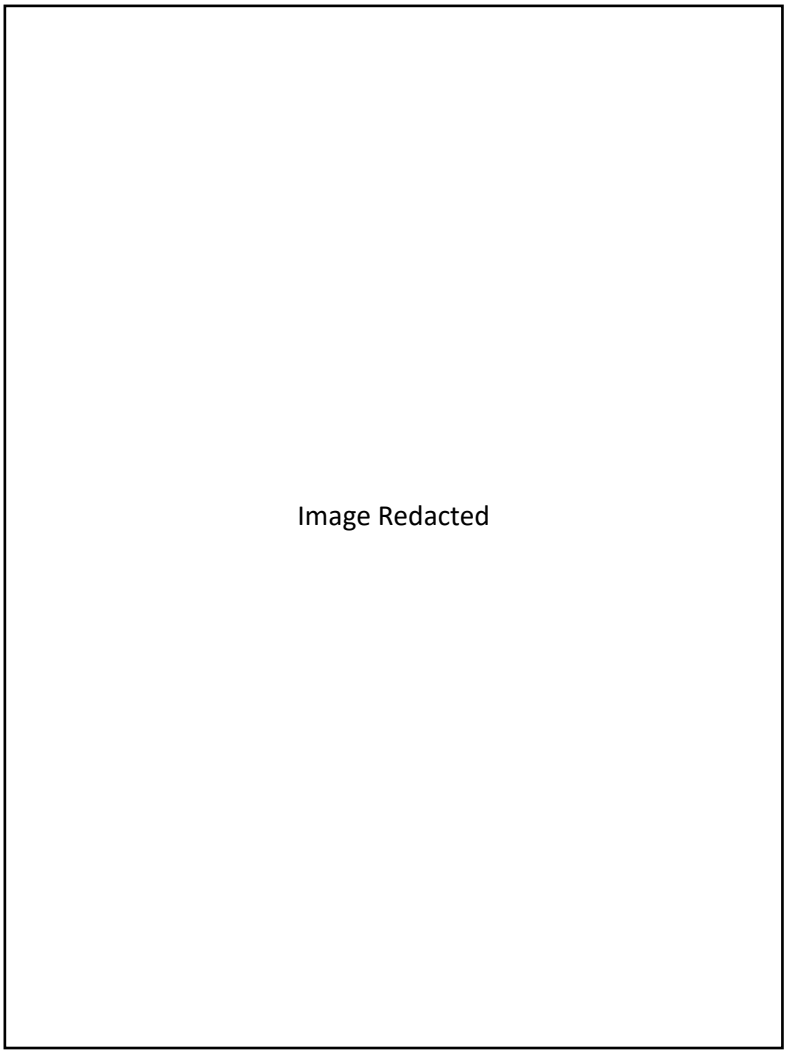
3.3
Eduardo Paolozzi
St Sebastian IV, 1957
Bronze
From: *Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945-1965*, Barbican, London (2022)
Photograph by Niall Gallen



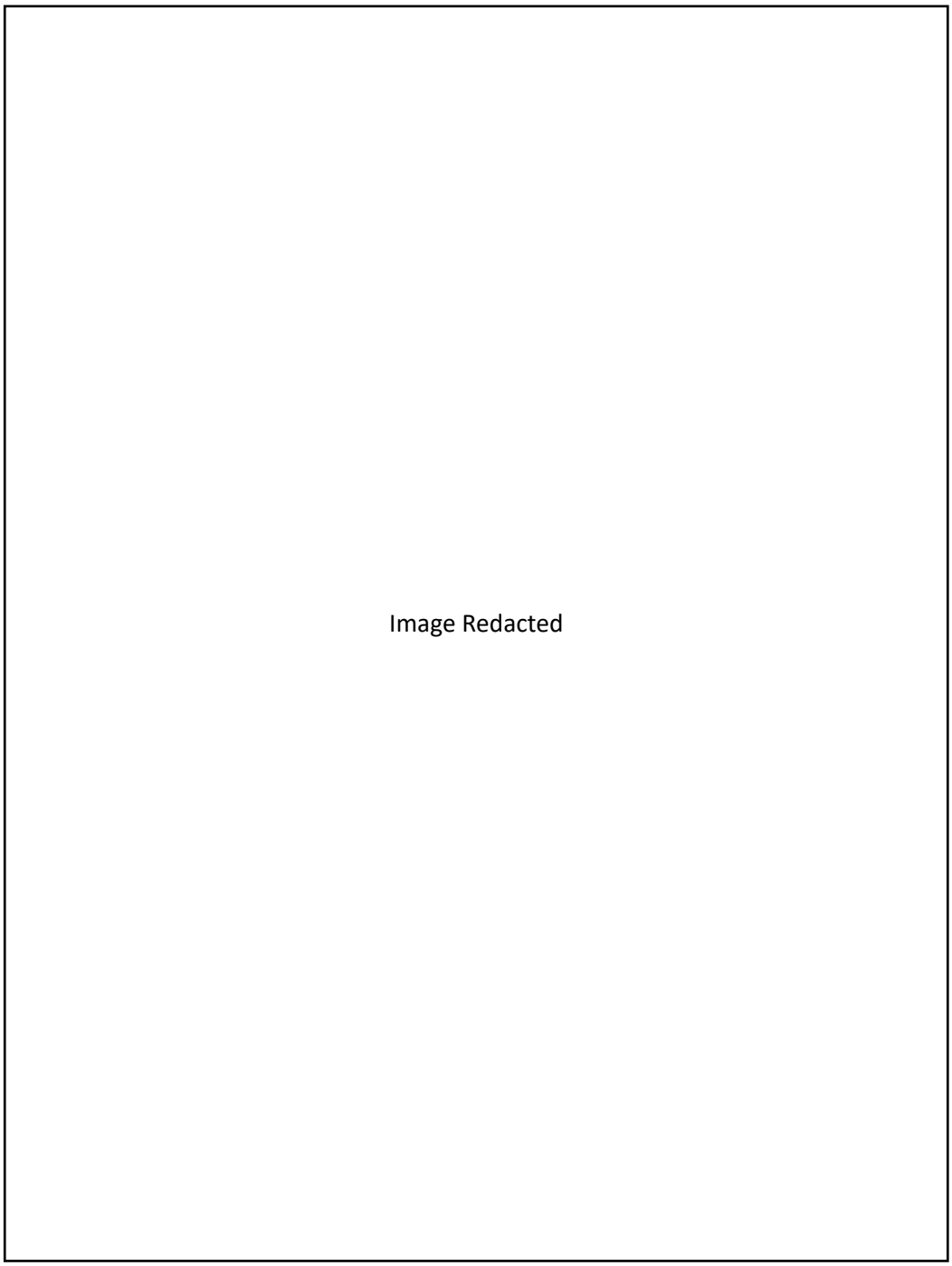
3.4
Eduardo Paolozzi
Diana as an Engine I (left) & *II* (right), 1963
Aluminium
Black and white photograph
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art,
GMA/40/10/5/83 (left), GMA/40/10/5/7 (right)



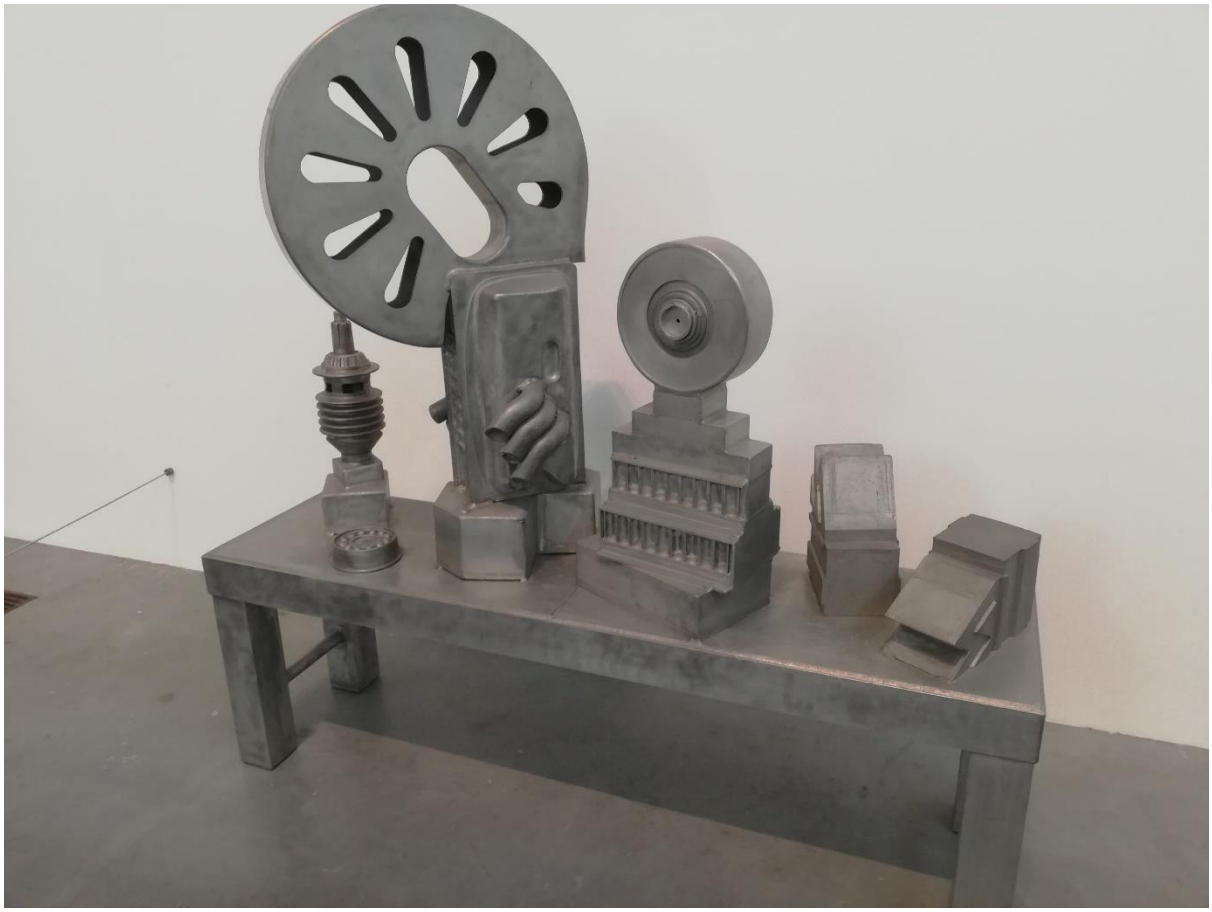
3.5
Eduardo Paolozzi
Diana as an Engine I (painted), 1966
Aluminium
Colour Photograph
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art
GMA/40/10/5/79



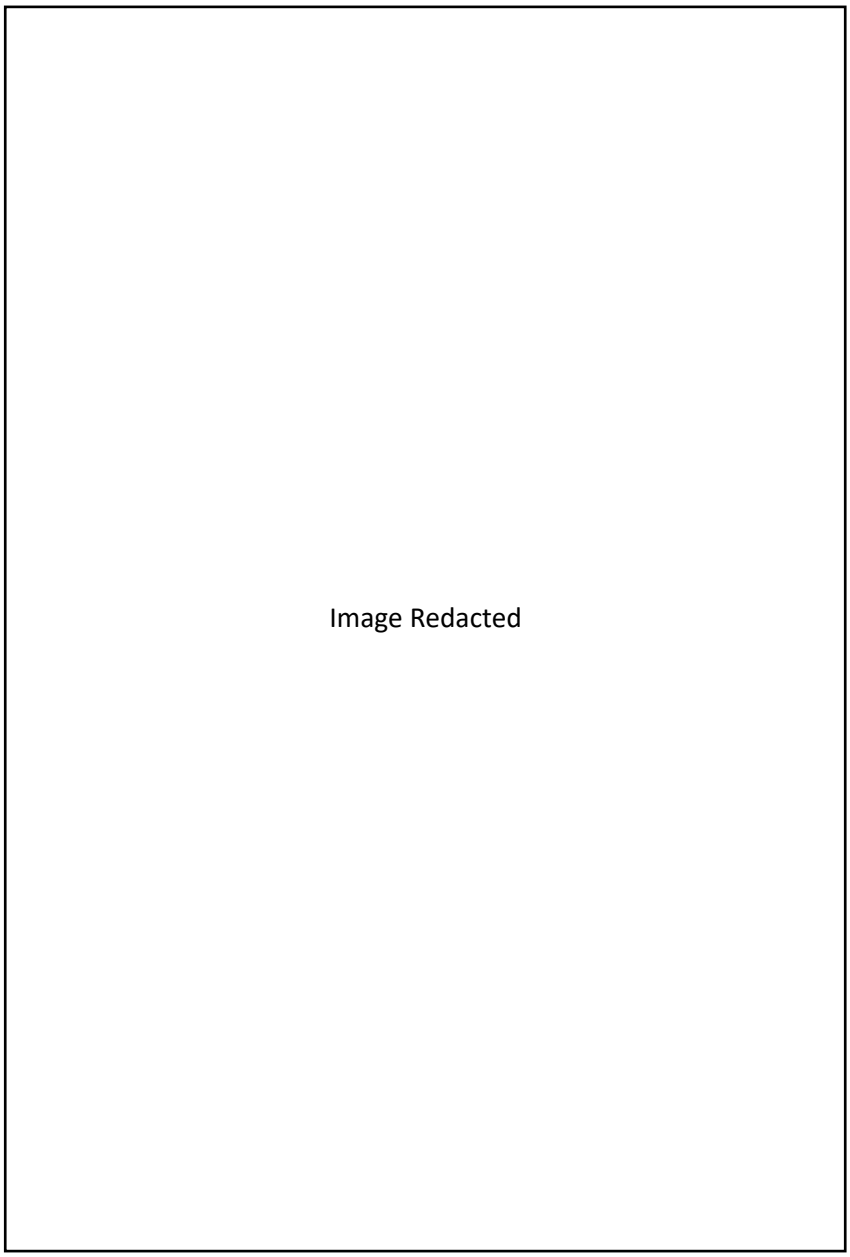
3.6
Eduardo Paolozzi
Image of a vintage electronic hair curler from the artist's scrapbook (c. 1950)
Collage on paper
V&A Archive of Art and Design, Krazy Kat Arkive
AAD/1985/3/6/5



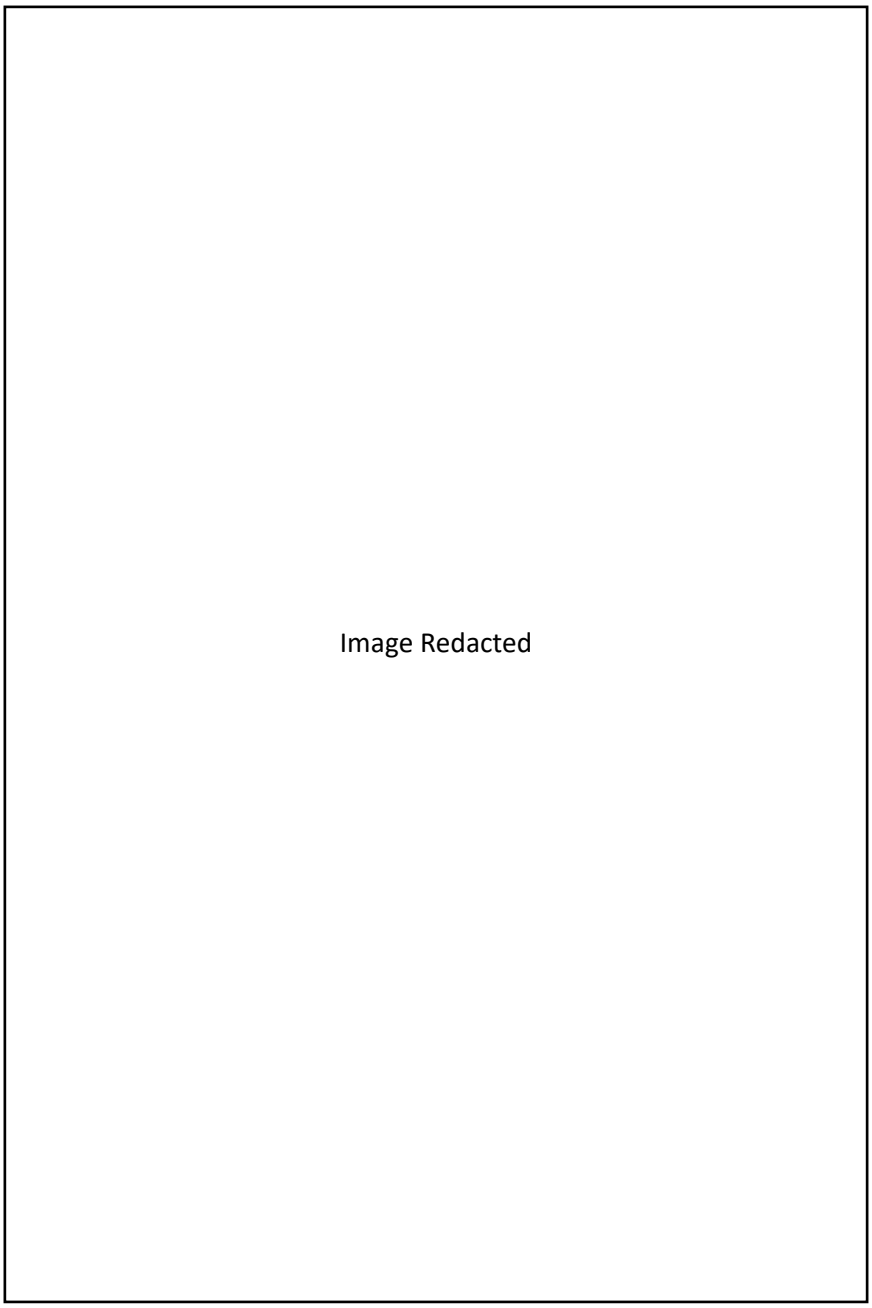
3.7
Eduardo Paolozzi
Towards a New Laocoon, 1963
Aluminium
Black and white photograph
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art
GMA/40/10/5/1065



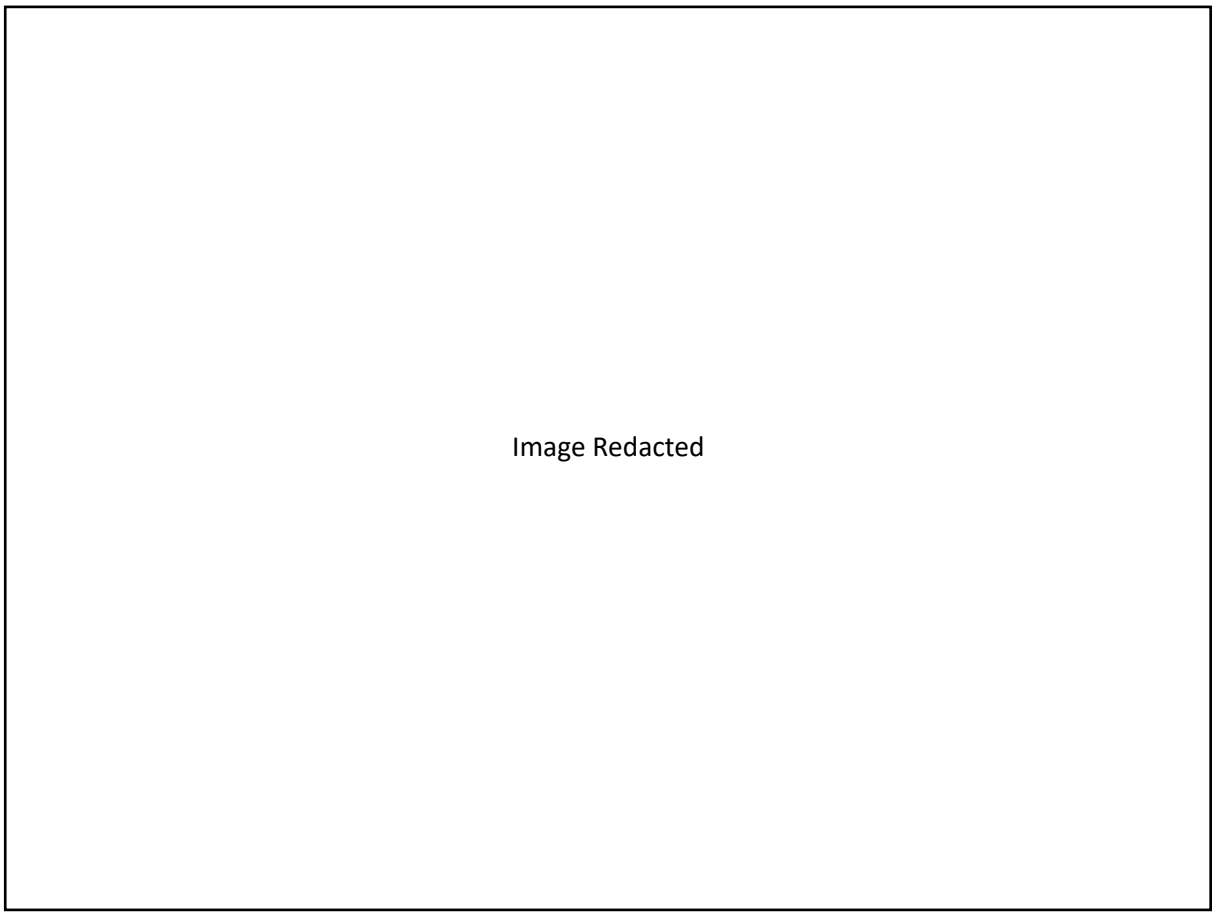
3.8
Eduardo Paolozzi
Mechanik's Bench, 1963
Aluminium
Tate Modern
Photograph by Niall Gallen



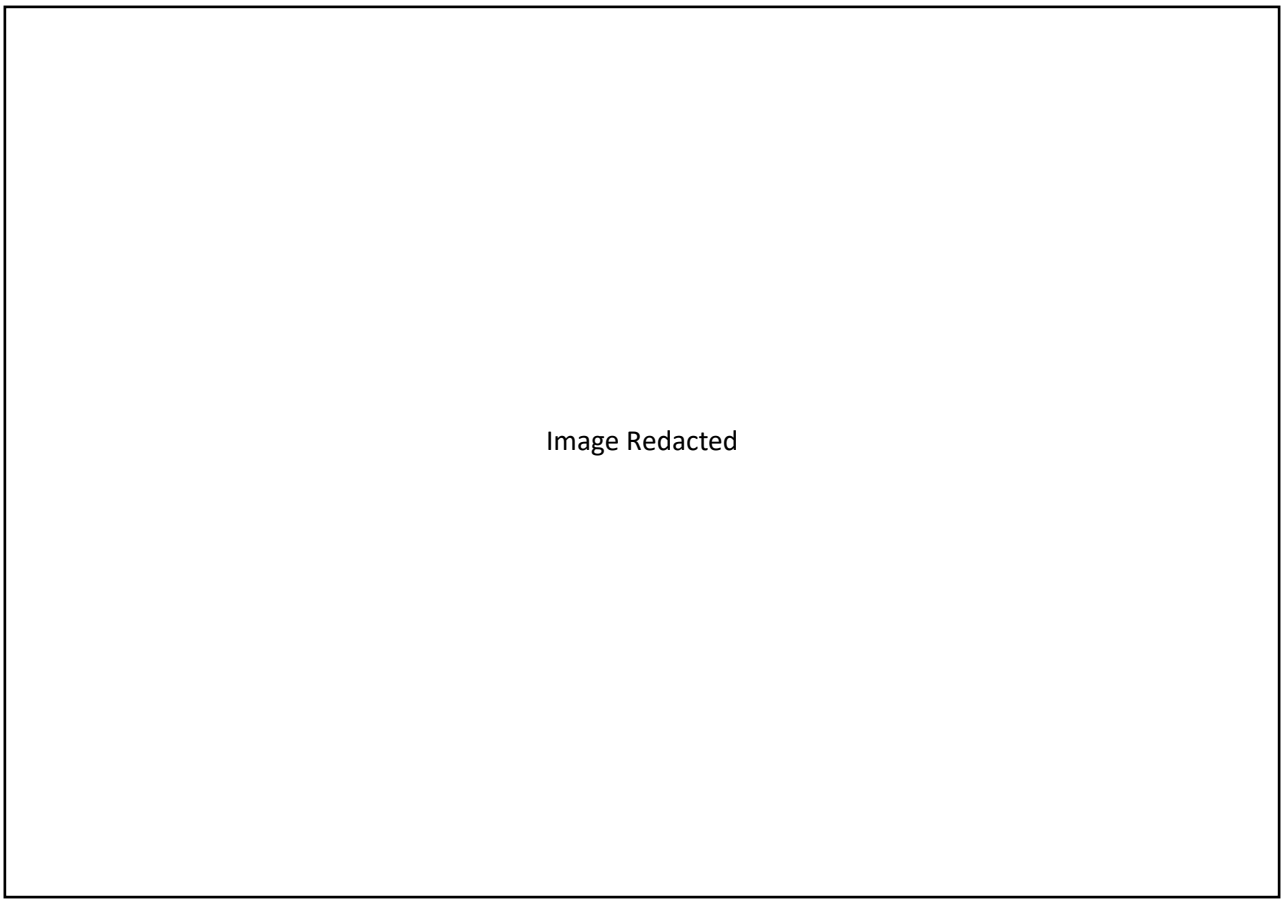
3.9
Eduardo Paolozzi
Hermaphroditic Idol no. 1, 1962
Aluminium
Black and white photograph from the estate of David Farrell
Reproduced in Judith Collins, *Eduardo Paolozzi* (UK: Lund Humphries, 2014), p. 145.



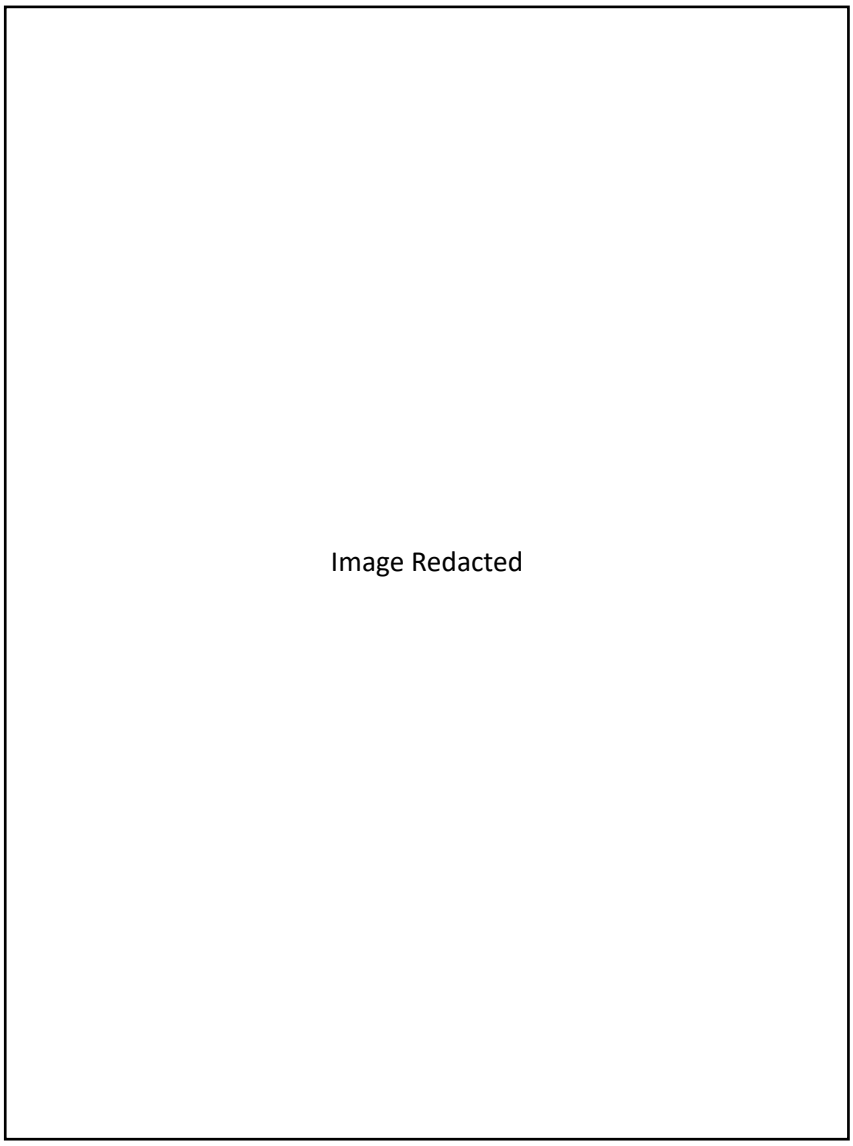
3.10
Richard Hamilton
Hommage à Chrysler Corp, 1957
Oil paint, metal foil and digital print on wood
Tate website



3.11
Richard Hamilton
Hers is a Lush Situation, 1958
Oil paint and collage
From: *Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945-1965*, Barbican, London (2022)
Photograph by Niall Gallen

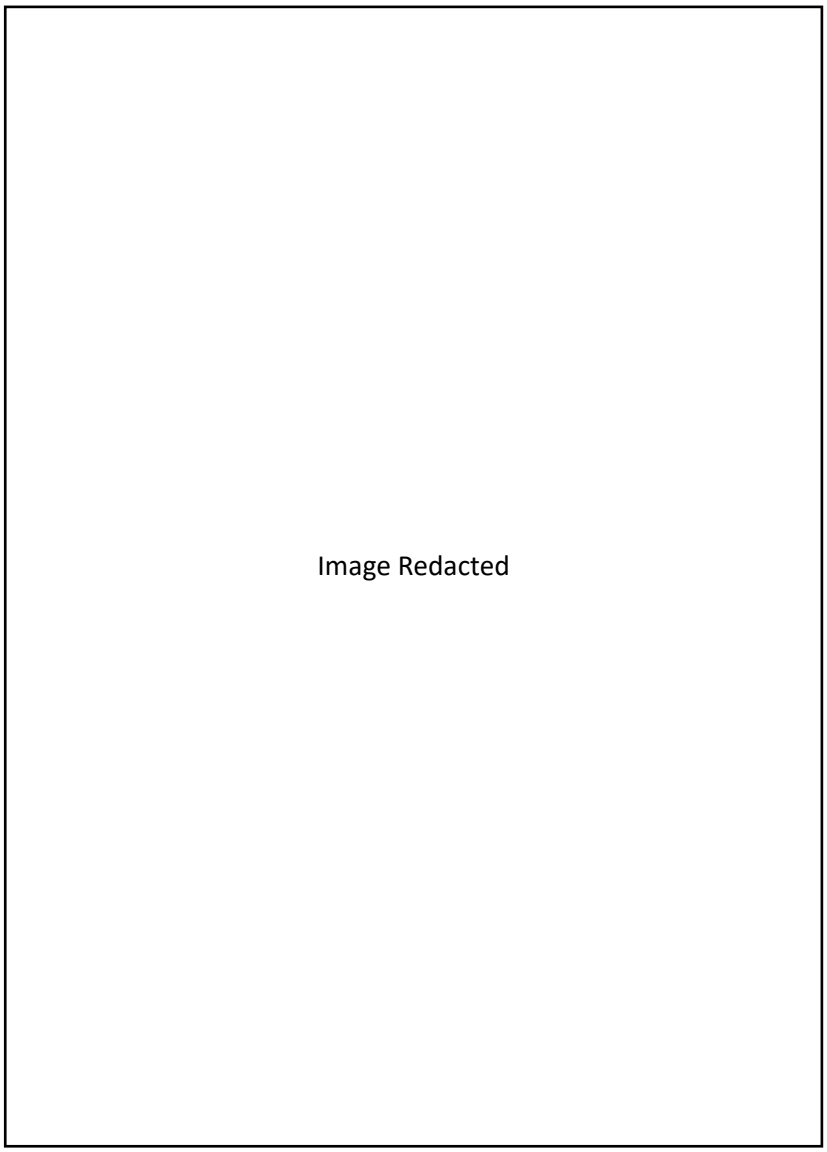


3.12
Eduardo Paolozzi
Pin-ups from the Artist's Scrapbooks, (c.1950)
Collage on Paper
Krazy Kat Arkive
V&A Archive of Art and Design
AAD/1985/3/6/5

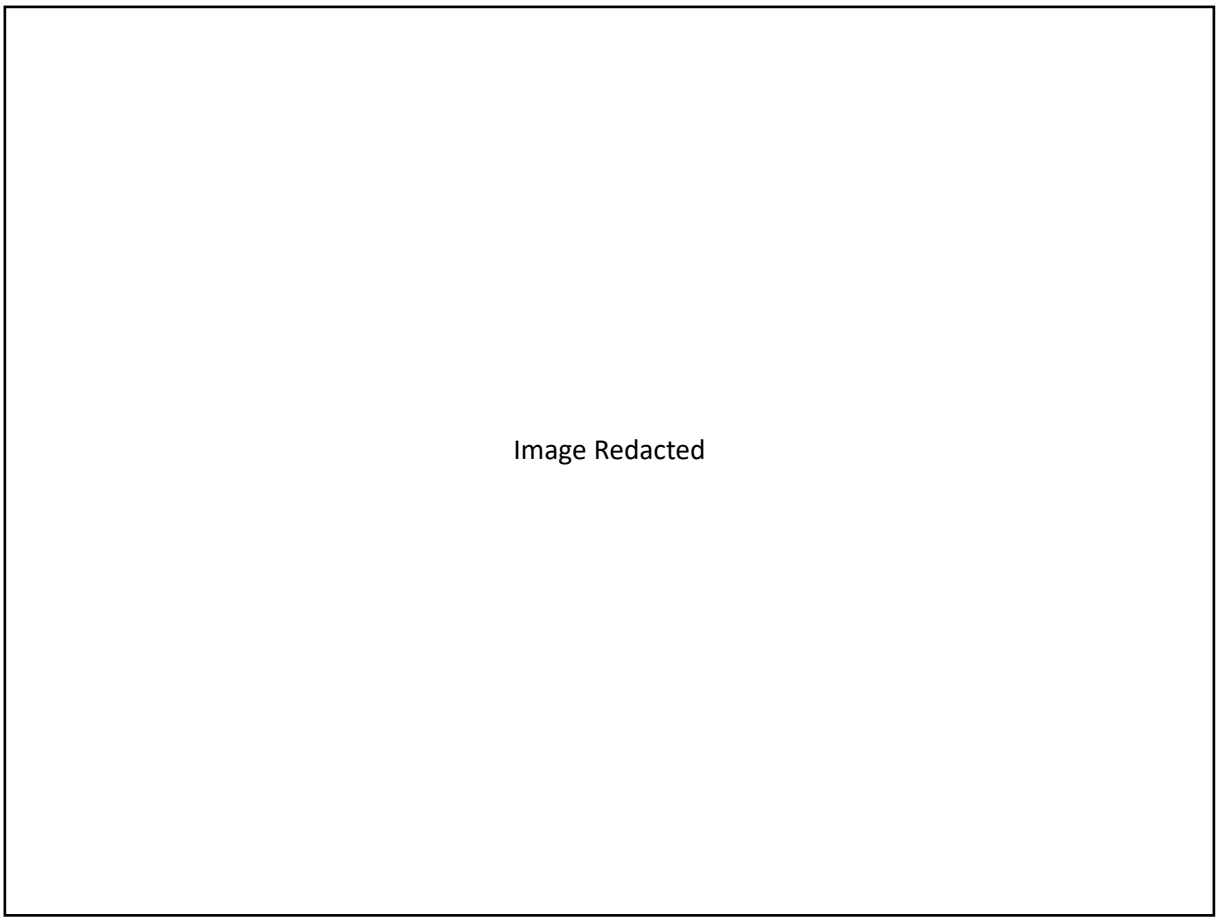


3.13
Eduardo Paolozzi
The Bishop of Kuban, 1962
Aluminium
Black and white photograph
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art
A40/10/5/993

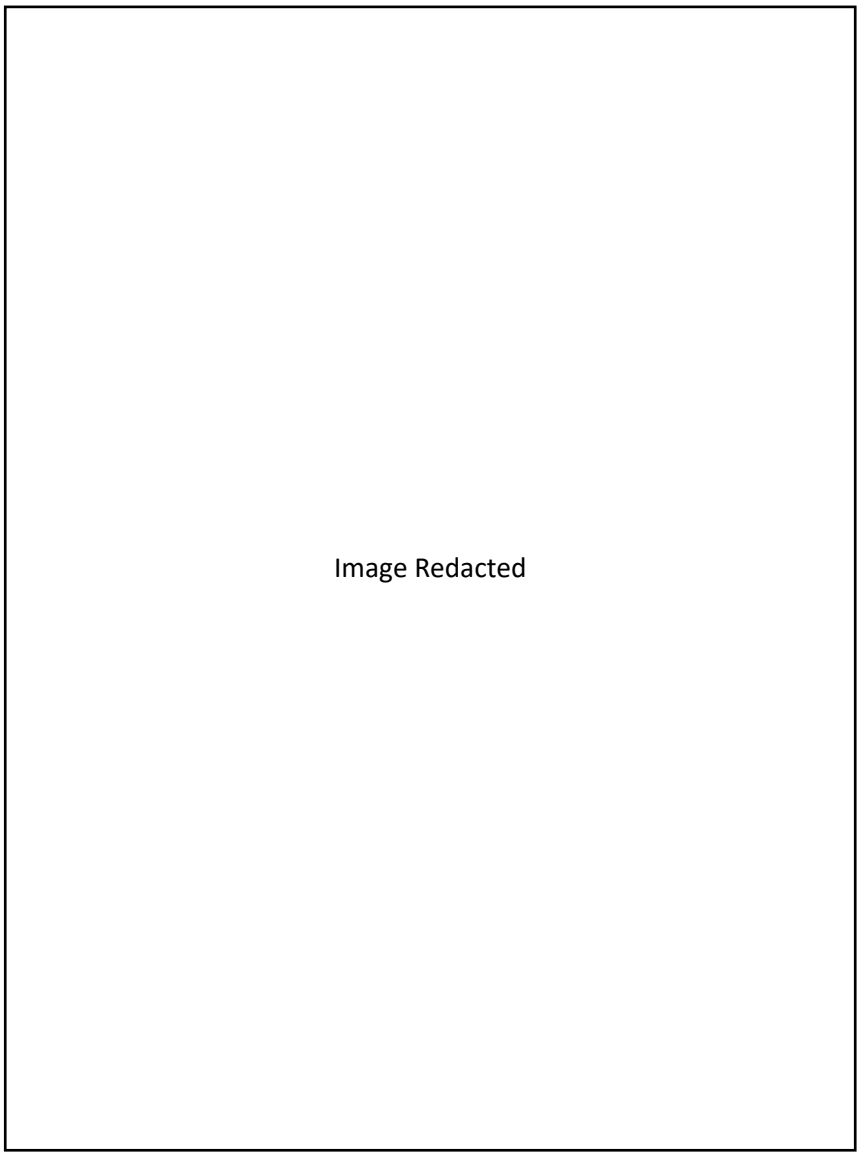
3.14
Photograph of a part of Eduardo Paolozzi's toy collection
Krazy Kat Arkive
V&A Archive of Art and Design
Photograph by Niall Gallen



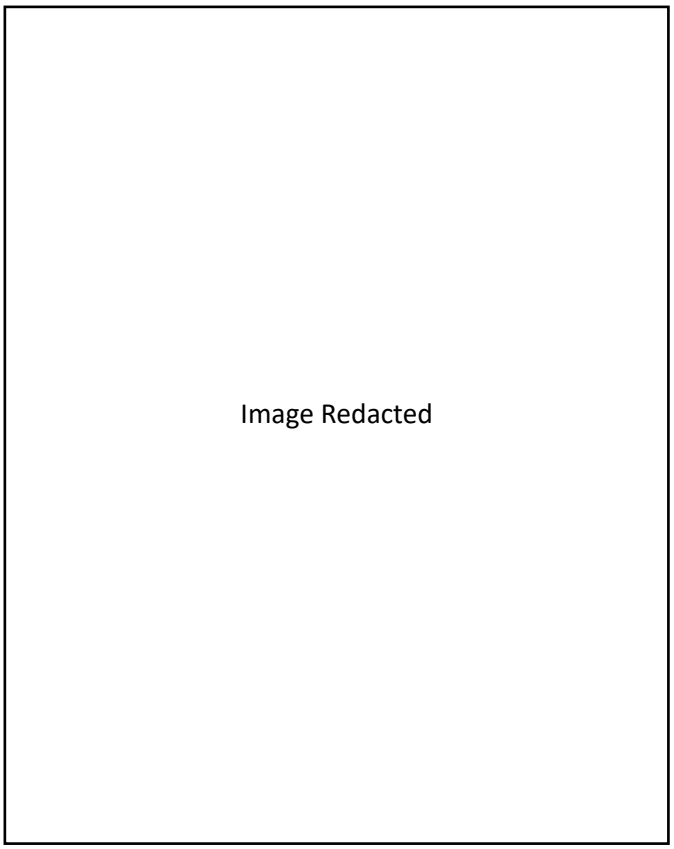
3.15
Eduardo Paolozzi
Trix page '[no title]' from *Metafisikal Translations* (UK: Kelpra Studio, 1962)
Screenprint on Paper
Tate Website



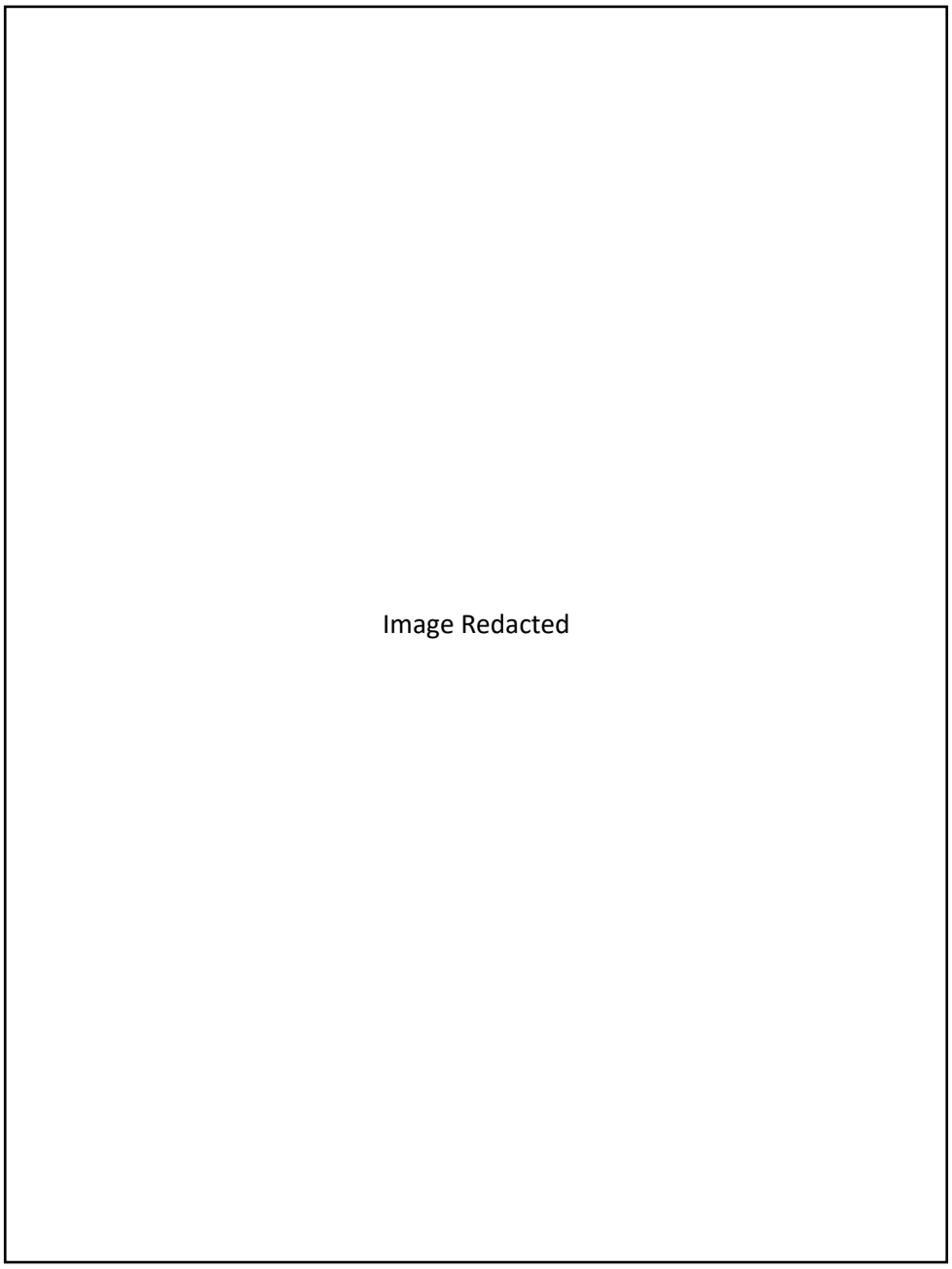
3.16
Eduardo Paolozzi
Crash, 1964
Aluminium
Black and white photograph
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art
GMA/40/10/5/371



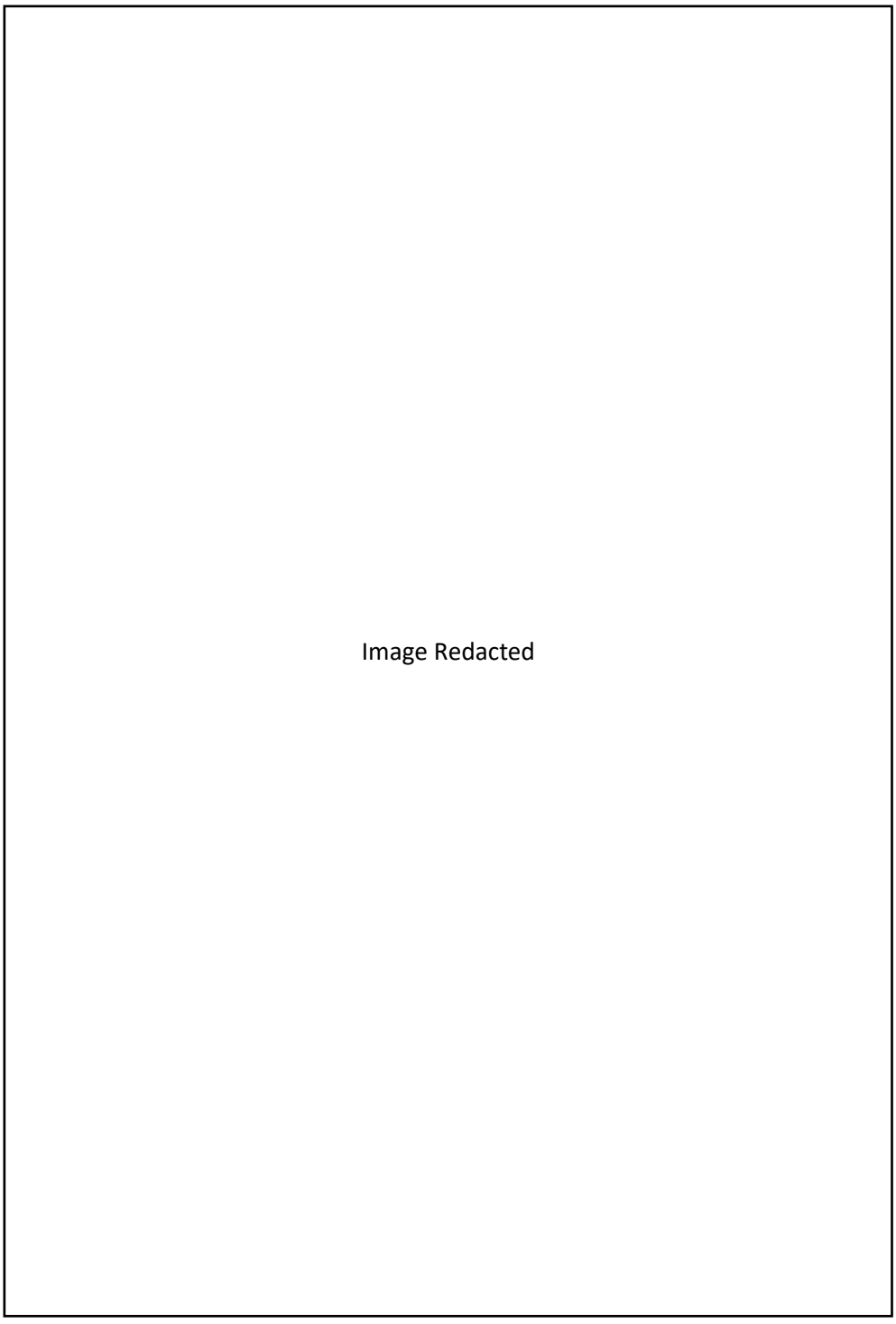
3.17
Cast of the *Laocoön Group*
Colour photograph
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford



3.18
Eduardo Paolozzi
Parrot, 1964
Aluminium,
Black and white photograph from the estate of David Farrell
Reproduced in Judith Collins, *Eduardo Paolozzi* (UK: Lund Humphries, 2014), p. 150.

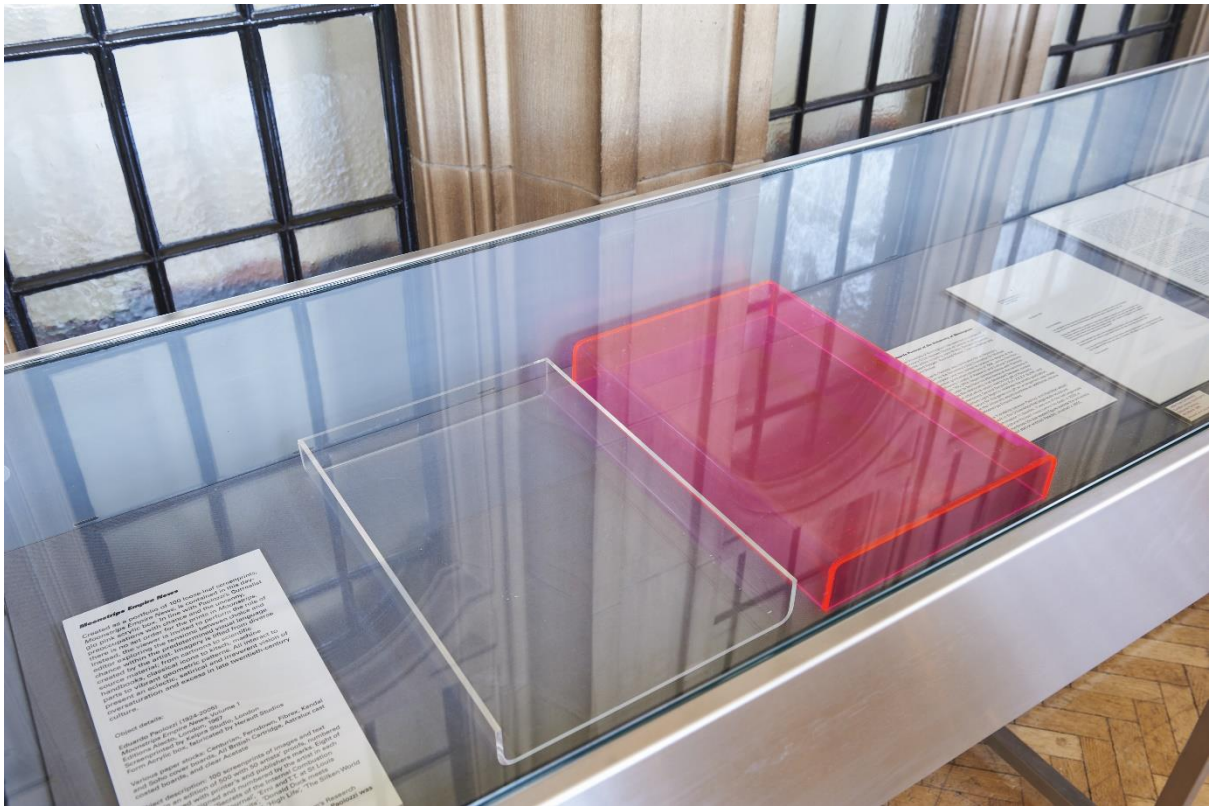


3.19
Eduardo Paolozzi
Closeup of ‘War Games Revised’ from *Universal Electronic Vacuum*, 1967
Silkscreen and lithograph
Arts Council Collection
PR683

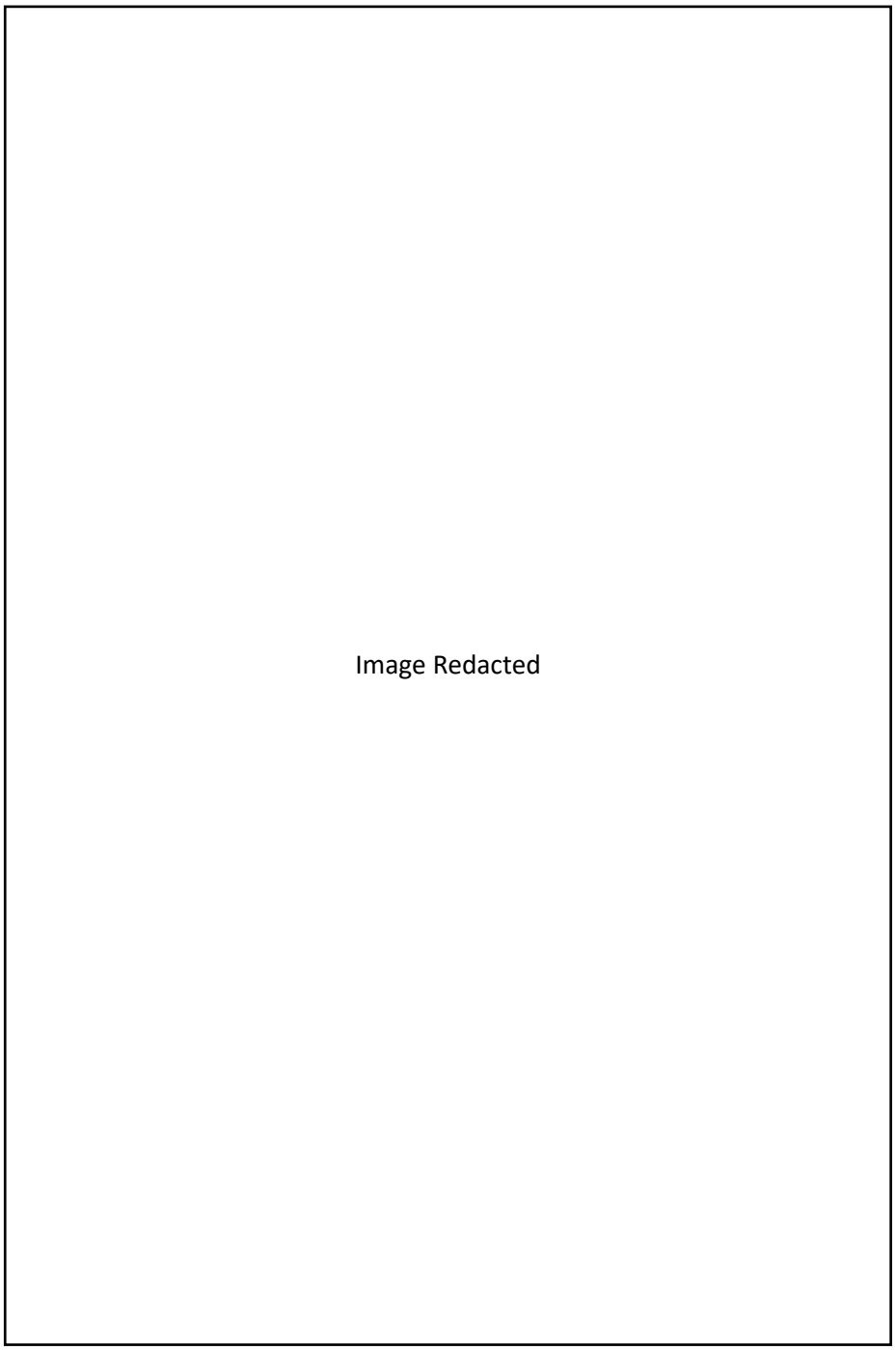


3.20
Eduardo Paolozzi
'Agile Coin Gross Decision Logic' from *Z.E.E.P*, 1970
Screenprint and lithograph
©Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham

3.21
Eduardo Paolozzi
Half of *Moonstrips Empire News* , 1967
Displayed at University of Birmingham, *Moonstrips Empire News* exhibition (2019)
©Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham

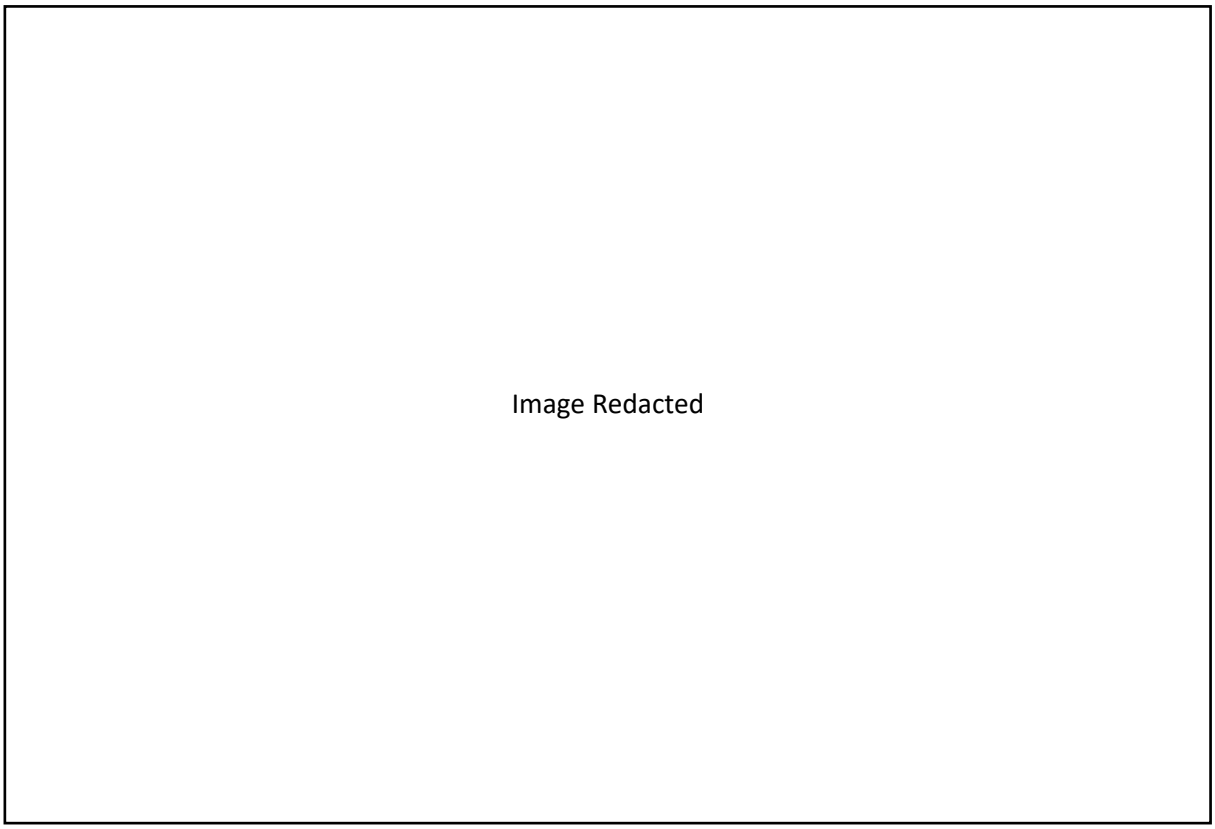


3.22
Eduardo Paolozzi
Box for *Moonstrips Empire News*, 1967
Displayed at University of Birmingham, *Moonstrips Empire News* exhibition (2019)
©Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham



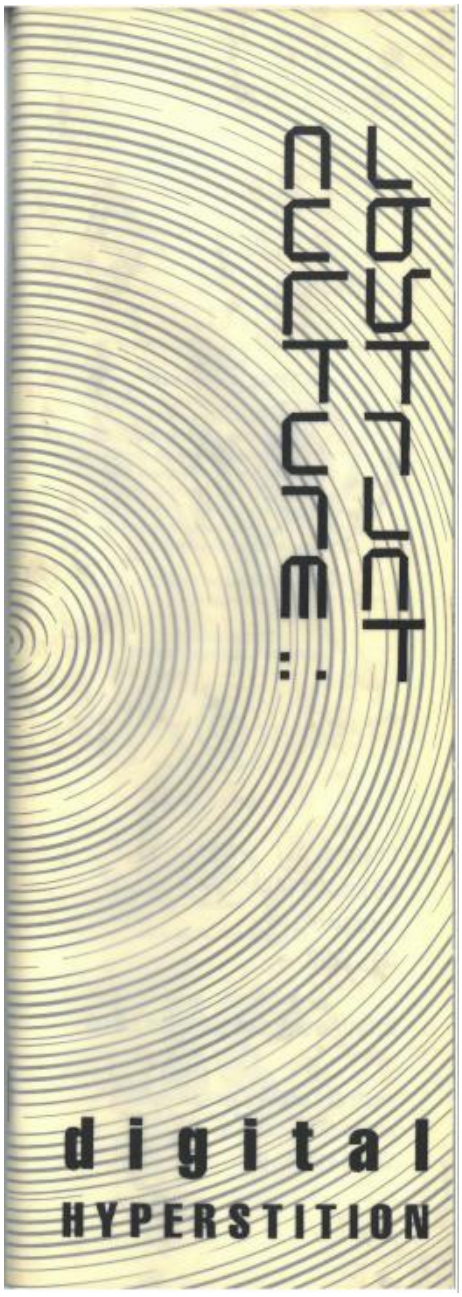
3.23
Eduardo Paolozzi
'Round the world,' (untitled) page from *Moonstrips Empire News*, 1967
Screenprint
Tate Website

Chapter 4 Images



4.1
Pulp Science fiction covers
Left: A. Leslie Ross, *Future Science Fiction*, July 1952
Right: Frank Kelly Freas, *Fantastic Universe*, April 1955
Krazy Kat Arkive
V&A Archive of Art and Design
AAD/1985/3/3/528

Chapter 5 Images



5.1
Cybernetic Culture Research Unit
Cover of *Abstract Culture* (1999)
Abstract Culture: Digital Hyperstition (UK: CCRU, 1999)
©Ccru

5.2
Switch, Collapse, and Cybernetic Culture Research Unit
'Swarmachines' Cassette Sleeve (1996)
Urbanomic.com
©Ccru

5.3
Collapse
Page from ****collapse* with advertisement for 'Swarmachines: Sub-bass Materialism' cassette (1996)
From: ****collapse Afrofutures*, 2021 Rewind (UK: Urbanomic and The Plutonics Subcommittee, 2021), pp. 05-06
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