

Gean Moreno
**Editorial –
“Accelerationist
Aesthetics”**

01/03

Where did the critical tradition of art go? Maybe that's the wrong question. Because we know the answer. It went into spectacle. It went into finance. It got privatized, democratized, scrutinized, defunded, bureaucratized, then professionalized. The critical stick became a seductive carrot. But maybe we don't have to see this only in terms of a fall from grace. Maybe this is the time for a long-overdue realism that an art field still in the thrall of modernist humanism struggles to avoid recognizing. Isn't it strange how we are subjected to the most extreme aspects of this new order and yet still suppress its most emergent qualities? What if we suspend the guilt of lapsed certainties and good-person compulsions for just a moment and take a look in the mirror? What would we see? We might see velocity-driven psychotics ravaged and dragged through sky and sludge, crying from revolution teargas and boring discussions at the same time. We might see uneducated beasts using their own bodies to mash culture with physics with economics with mysticism. We might see a strange new form of human tumble out. For the Summer 2013 issue of e-flux journal, we are very pleased to present Gean Moreno's guest-edited issue on accelerationist aesthetics. Read it at the beach!

– Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

e-flux journal #46 — June 2013 Gean Moreno
Editorial – “Accelerationist Aesthetics”

The entrenchment of neoliberal fundamentalism has been accompanied by a desire to save whatever critical edge art production can still muster. This has become increasingly pressing as art becomes decor for the offices of hedge fund managers, and as the art world – as David Graeber put it somewhere – mutates into “an appendage to finance capital.” The urgency to maintain a critical edge has manifested itself variously: in a turn toward post-autonomia theories that shed light on the position of the cultural producer within a post-Fordist regime of labor; in the production of artifacts that engage reflexively with the conditions of production, display, and circulation in the art world; in recovery operations that target particular legacies, such as those of politicized Conceptual art and structuralist or essayistic filmmaking; in interventionist efforts that leave behind the commercial circuits of art presentation altogether and attempt to work in the social field itself. The common aim of all these efforts amounts to approaching concrete conditions soberly, to being analytical and measured. A *subtractive* logic is the general animating force: take away – subjective imprint, gratuitous ornament, traces of skill, commercial viability, ambivalent postures, ideological residue, and so forth – until a potent and

probing, if often flat-footed, proposal crystallizes.

Past the edges of the art world, however, where the condition of privilege doesn't haunt every gesture with the possibility of contradiction, less "sober" engagements with the social are awake and on the prowl. There may still be a line of thinking excited by subtraction and formal rigor, but it is pitted against a proliferation of delirious and maximalist redeployments of pop culture: salvage-punk fantasy literature that probes obliquely, through gasoline fumes and/or unapologetic and slimy monsters, points of resistance to late capitalism and residual anthropocentric nostalgia; hauntological sonic archeology that calls up utopian traces often muffled by electronic music, using the latter's digital methods of production; B movies that are jacked into the symptomatology of attention deficit disorders as a way to point to the incessant modulations that subjectivity suffers through in control societies; novels written and impossible buildings dreamt in code-language that has mutated like a virus and swallowed the antibodies deployed to eradicate it; soundings of the strange new territories – abyssal drops for a self now revealed as not actually there in the way we had thought – that neuroscience is carving open and sci-fi is mainlining onto its pages; board-game strategizing adjusted to new transnational networks and transformed, through the prism of "Total Design," into geopolitical planning for the future. The gleefully overloaded and hyperactive artifacts that result often feel less handicapped than art objects that are safely ensconced in cultural institutions when attempting to cognitively and affectively mapping the spaces and forces of transnational capitalism. Perhaps these hyperactive artifacts can even begin to map a hard-to-imagine Outside *beyond* transnational capitalism.

One of the strands that participates in this revved-up deployment of forms is what has been called "accelerationist aesthetics," even if the precise traits that establish its parameters and the full range of products that constitute it may still need to be determined. The name was suggested by Steven Shaviro in his book *Post-Cinematic Affect*. It derives from a political program – accelerationism – which comes down from the Deleuze and Guattari of *Anti-Oedipus* and the Lyotard of *Libidinal Economy*, and which finds its most virulent and seductive expression in the texts that British philosopher Nick Land began producing in the 1980s.

The term "accelerationism" was first coined by Benjamin Noys in his book *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*, as way to designate this

tendency and the political praxis it suggested. Shaviro, in turn, drew a distinction between an accelerationist politics or praxis, and an accelerationist aesthetics. As a politics, in the version that comes filtered through the writings of Nick Land, accelerationism has been taken to task by a number of theorists, including Ray Brassier, Alberto Toscano, Noys, and Shaviro himself. However, as it is being questioned and bashed, there is a parallel effort afoot to think accelerationism beyond the boundaries that were established for it by Land et al. Reza Negarestani, Alex Williams, Nick Snirneck, and Benjamin Singleton, among others, have been looking for ways around the shortfalls and blindsides of an early accelerationism, generating new ways to think through it, employing it less as a drive toward meltdown than a cunning practice through which to capture and redeploy existing energies and platforms in the service of a re-universalized left politics.

Although often disparaged as a political program, accelerationism, which early on performed its ideas most notably through carefully crafted theory-fictions, has always had a robust aesthetic side. It is here, in both a seductive performative dimension (which spills into the everyday experiential field) and in the affective range of these aesthetics – which ran for a time parallel to an emerging cyberpunk, a fertile moment in electronic music and Cronenbergian flesh-melts, and now begin to link up with interfacial skins, data avalanches, predictive modeling at substantial scale and the like – that we may find what sustains the desire to keep accelerationism around even if some remain weary of it (or one of its versions) as political theory or praxis.

Despite Shaviro's effort to define it, the notion of an accelerationist aesthetics remains an open problem, suggestively bubbling with, on the one hand, the potential to provoke innovative cartographic exercises that probe unprecedented social complexity and look for new liberatory programs that live up to it, and on the other hand, dark intimations that this aesthetics is indissoluble from the drive to deliberately exacerbate nihilistic meltdowns as the only response to being dragged by the vertiginous speeds of a runaway capitalism. It is working through the impasse between these two extremes – and, more often than not, assuming the first at the expense of the second – that fuels a number of the texts in this issue of *e-flux journal*. The essays respond to two sets of questions:

What constitutes an accelerationist aesthetics? Is it possible? Why would it matter? What should its scope be? And

whose interest would it serve?
Does such an aesthetics, if possible or desirable, have anything to offer an art production exhausted with sober formalisms and critique-based models that increasingly spin in place, taking ineffective aim at the very protocols and institutions that allow them to exist in the first place and that provide the infrastructure for their sustainability?

Bound to these questions is a desire to turn the horizon that currently sets the coordinates of what is deemed of importance or value in art production into a porous border from which we can, through pendular sweeps, reach out to adjacent neighborhoods of thought and production and bring back fertile material. The returns on a model deeply invested in critique, as it has been structured within the art world, seem to dwindle at an alarming rate in the face of social and economic relations that everywhere eat away at whatever autonomy the cultural field ever had, or ever dreamed of. The very space of possibility that this model once ushered in with such force seems to have been foreclosed upon. Surely there are efforts still articulating themselves out there, refusing the institution and its co-opting logic no less than the market and its logic, sounding potential alternatives or prefigurations of a different world. But, barring full conversion into activism, these interventionist art exercises seem increasingly pushed to the cusp of having to default on their promise.

The anxiety to shake things up, in light of the disaster of a vanishing critical dimension, has to boil over into something concrete at some point, and this, at least from where I'm standing, demands a lateral move *through* the horizon that currently determines the conditions in which art production is allowed to unfold. It demands probing expeditions into other spaces, into terrains from where the other side of what we are currently inside may begin to take shape. And it demands the sharpening of robust synthesizing conceptual tools to engage in fruitful cross-fades and appropriations. This issue of *e-flux journal* is one of these probing expeditions.

x

03/03

e-flux journal #46 — June 2013 Gean Moreno
Editorial – “Accelerationist Aesthetics”