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**The Accelerated University:
Academic Alliances and the
Militarisation of Thought**

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The Accelerated University: Academic Alliances and the Militarisation of Thought

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It is ... our humanist ethos itself, that works most efficiently in the direction of un-differentiation ... and of mono-thought. This regime has at least some positive aspect however, insofar as it offers us the chance to call into question [its] basic elements.

Jean Baudrillard, 'The Final Solution' (26).

The promise does not come over and above the critique, as a post-face at the end. The promise inspires the critique in the first place. ... I am using the term ... in the sense of the promise that here I am, that what I am doing, I am doing here, in this text here, saying performatively what I am saying.

Jacques Derrida, 'Nietzsche and the Machine' (225).

Cries calling for the demise of the university abound, in particular in Europe and North America. Typically, those who utter these cries, seek to renew the "original" concept of the university through seeking salvation outside its institutional walls with whatever or whomever represents alterity through mobility and tele-communication. Examples here are the European anti-Bologna "new university" projects like *Edu-Factory*, the various "autonomous" virtual universities, and the collaboration with local and international activists and so-called non-Western academics. Of particular interest here is the formation of various extra-academic "activist-research" networks and conferences, examples of which are *Facoltà di Fuga* (the Faculty of Escape), *Mobilized Investigation*, *Rete Ricercatori Precari* (the Precarious Researchers Network), *Investigació* (Research), and *Glocal Research Space*. Characteristically, these projects organise events that seek to set up dialogues between "non-Western" activists and academics, and carve out many spaces for web-based participation. Initiators of these projects often conceptualise their positions as allying more closely to alter-globalist activism – positions which thus are supposed to effectively leave and combat neo-liberalism, as well as the elitist university space and its typical method of scientific objectification. In this paper, I will elaborate on how such cries for the university's demise, as well as the conceptualisation of its current situation as one of crisis, which segue into a problematic nostalgia for the "original" university of thought, truth, and justice, are themselves complicit in the militaristic techno-

acceleration that ground neo-liberalism. Typical also to the playing out of such nostalgia is the repetition of the humanist opposition between doing and thinking, which in fact in terms of their mode of production become increasingly indistinguishable. These projects thus appear as *symptoms* of acceleration. Moreover, I will argue that this acceleration renders increasingly certain groups and individuals targets of military-academic scrutiny and violence. While this increase in objectification that runs through the contemporary prostheses of the subject certainly spells disaster – in particular for certain (life) forms of alterity –, I suggest that the coming of such an event is precisely carried by the humanist promise of transcendence and justice that speeds up institutions like the university. I therefore claim that acceleration announces the promise of the coming of radical alterity, and that it is precisely through the eschatological performance of this promise – arguably a repetition of the Christian “faith” in the apocalypse – that this paper and its mode of production may become the potential object of its own scrutiny.

I would argue that this complicity of projects like *Edu-Factory* and *Facoltà di Fuga* in technological acceleration should primarily be understood in terms of what I will henceforth call speed-elitism. I extrapolate the idea of speed-elitism largely from the works of John Armitage on the discursive and technocratic machinery underlying current neo-liberal capitalism. In ‘Dromoeconomics: Towards a Political Economy of Speed,’ Armitage and Phil Graham suggest that due to the capitalist need for the production of excess, there is a strong relationship between the forces of communication and trade, and the logic of speed. They connect the logic of speed more specifically to the powers of war and militarisation. In line with Virilio’s argument in *Speed and Politics*, they argue that all these areas – war, communication, and trade – are connected, because all these forces mutually enforce one another through the technological usurpation and control of space (and territory), and through the compression and regulation of time. Eventually, Armitage and Graham suggest that ‘circulation has become an essential process of capitalism, an end in itself’ (118) and therefore any form of cultural production increasingly finds itself tied-up in this logic. So neo-liberal capitalism is a system within which the most intimate and fundamental aspects of human social life – in particular, forms of thought and language – get to be formally subsumed under capital.

In ‘Resisting the Neoliberal Discourse of Technology,’ Armitage elaborates on this theme of circulation by pointing out that the current mode of late-capitalism relies on the continuous extension and validation of the infrastructure and the neutral or optimistic discourses of the new information technologies. Discourses that typically get repeated in favour of the emerging speed-elite are those of connection, instantaneity, liberation, multiplicity and boundary overcoming, which often go hand in hand with the celebration of highly mediated spaces for action and communication between allied groups. Such discourses however, Armitage says, suppress the violent colonial and patriarchal history of those technological spaces and the subsequent unevenness of any such alliance. More severely, they foster an oppressive sort of imaginary “unity of struggles” through the myth of “truly” allowing for radical difference and multiplicity within that space.

The increasing convergence of the humanities and applied sciences within the contemporary university, and hence the integration of critical thinking and military research, is clearly present in Jacques Derrida’s *Eyes of the University*. Derrida here concludes that ‘never before has so-called basic research been so deeply committed to ends that are at the same time military ends.’ (143) But the relationship between new technologies and the subject’s *perception* and incorporation of otherness that Armitage alludes to, is best illustrated through Derrida’s ‘Archive Fever’ and ‘Monolingualism of the Other.’ Derrida’s concerns are here with the link between how thought is situated in technologies

of communication, like language; and how authority, and by extension (academic and activist) empowerment, works. Derrida both uses and critiques psychoanalysis in ‘Archive Fever,’ by showing that if psychoanalysis shows how archiving and memory work by repression, its own authority must likewise be constructed on repressing the violence of its own repression: this is after all what makes possible an “objective” interpretation of symptoms by the analyst. If at the base of this repression, as Freud claimed, is the death drive, then our current ubiquitous “archive fever” must mean that there is lots of death drive at work: violence, repression, and repetition. The speed of iteration through technologies of archiving results in the sensation that “origins” slip away, as everything becomes copies of copies. This leaves humanity in a permanent state of nostalgia for lost origins which inspires current (humanist, Islamic, and Christian) fundamentalisms. The very nostalgia for a fundamentally “original” university is, I claim, part of this recourse to fundamentalisms inspired by technologies of acceleration.

The slip that Freud makes from machine as metaphor for memory into equating machine with memory, allows Derrida to conclude that the archiving machine is in fact internal to the psyche. In short, we think and remember through our machines – the machine is not external to the subject, but a *prosthesis* at the origin. It is the fantasy that machines are outside and discreet from us, that allows for the notion of the autonomous subject, as for its perception of otherness. A nostalgic desire for the “original” university thus invokes the desire to connect with the subject’s other, in order to overcome the subject’s sense of lack. The effect is the occurrence of a form of neo-colonisation through the discourses, institutions, and technologies of the humanist subject. Alliances and connections are thus increasingly made with that or (aspects of) those [what?] or whom can already be thought, understood, perceived or recognised by machines of perception. In this sense, the status of radical alterity assigned to various forms of “non-Western” or networked alter-globalist activism by these new university projects, is instead one of relative alterity in service of the speed-elite. Indeed, the military acronym for the current technologies of near instantaneity has shifted from C3I to C4ISTAR: Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance. It may also be useful here to remember once again that the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ArpaNet) – the predecessor of the current Internet – was largely developed in Western universities from military monies. This shift to C4ISTAR then signifies a more aggressive and ubiquitous involvement of new technologies in the stratification of contemporary society, its individuals, and various forms of exchange. It also signifies the ongoing faith in the supposed transparency of such forms of communication, even though such faith is increasingly a delusion brought about by the *circular logic* of such a system of knowing.

The notion of the speed-elite and its relation to how many new university projects figure in this global restructuring through acceleration, agrees well with Bill Readings’ work on the contemporary university. In *The University in Ruins*, Readings argues that the shift from the “university of reason and culture” to the present-day “university of excellence” means that the centre of power in effect has shifted elsewhere. To read power structures as the sum total of a nation’s ideological state apparatuses, as Louis Althusser would have it, says Readings, therefore no longer makes sense. In other words, it would not suffice to critique the university simply as an institution that functions as the nurturer of national culture and the cultured elites for the nation-state. Readings points out that it is telling that strong oppositional critiques of the university seem to become possible precisely at the moment where its centralising power and knowledge have vacated its premises. More importantly however, says Readings, is that the function of the university of excellence, one that successfully transforms it into yet another trans-