

LEFT ACCELERATIONISM AS A MESSIANISM. A DIALOGUE BETWEEN LEFT ACCELERATIONISM AND THE MESSIANIC TURN TO SAINT PAUL

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Abstract

In this article, I propose that Left Accelerationism is better characterized as a *messianism* rather than as a variant of *accelerationism*. To argue for this claim, I establish a dialogue between Left Accelerationism and the messianic turn to Saint Paul in the 1990s by authors such as Agamben, Badiou, and Žižek. I suggest that the crucial analogy between both currents lies in the notion of the exception, to which Van der Heiden's recent work on Saint Paul has recently drawn the attention. The Pauline principle of the spirit introduces an exception that does not follow from the immanent laws of the world, yet it transforms *this* world. Accordingly, the exception allows the philosophers of the messianic turn to Paul to navigate between immanence and transcendence. Similarly, Left Accelerationism proposes to reorient the immanent, accelerative dynamics of capitalism towards a post-capitalist society, but these dynamics can only be repurposed from an "outside". This leads Left Accelerationism to an impasse and an indefinite postponement of the post-capitalist horizon. Finally, I sketch some directions towards a Marxist critique of accelerationism and/or messianism.

Keywords: Accelerationism, Messianism, Saint Paul, Marxism, Deleuze

Andalucía no es una arcadia a la que regresar
Sino un horizonte que perseguir
Yo no quiero volver a ser lo que fuimos
Reivindico volver a ser lo que somos

Califato ¼

1. *Introduction*

Left Accelerationism emerged in the 2010s as a response to an accumulation of global crises – financial, climatic – that was met in the West with only a further intensification of neoliberal and austerity policies. Faced with the apparent lack of an imaginable alternative to capitalism¹, its goal was to reimagine a future where the best technologies of capitalism would be preserved but split from a capitalist logic, so that technology could serve human flourishing rather than capitalist profit. Its proponents suggested that the technoscientific infrastructure of capitalism was not to be destroyed or rejected – in contrast to what they saw as a prejudice of leftist “folk politics” –, but “accelerated” or repurposed toward human emancipation. However, despite its self-identification as an *accelerationism*, I suggest that Left Accelerationism is better characterized as a *messianism* in which, rather than accelerated, the advent of a new (“post-capitalist”) era is announced, yet its temporal horizon is indefinitely postponed.

To substantiate this claim, I establish a dialogue between Left Accelerationism and the philosophical turn to Saint Paul in the 1990s, in which authors such as Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, or Slavoj Žižek reappraised the revolutionary potential of Paul’s letters. The novelty of this messianic turn to Paul resided in its distancing from a nihilist reading of Paul à la Nietzsche²: while the latter considered that Paul merely

¹ Cfr. M. FISHER, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Zero Books, London 2009.

² Cfr. F. NIETZSCHE, *The Anti-Christ: A Curse on Christianity*, in *The Anti-*

rejected our world in favour of an afterlife, these authors found in Paul a transformation of *this* world in light of the messianic event. The messianic event constitutes an exception that does not follow from present order of the world, but one that nevertheless transforms *this* world, in a characteristically Pauline dialectic of exception between immanence and transcendence³. I propose that Left Accelerationism also relies on a similar notion of the exception, which is captured by left accelerationism's appeal to an "Outside" of capitalism.

Earlier attempts to establish a dialogue between accelerationism and Pauline messianism have centred around the figure of the *katechon* (the "restrainer") in 2 Thess 2⁴. Although the *katechon* represents an important and fruitful link between the Pauline epistles and the accelerationist impulse, the discussion around this figure usually concerns the eschatological and apocalyptic aspect of Paul. Since Left Accelerationism emerges as an attempt to rehabilitate human agency in contradistinction to the earlier nihilist, anti-humanist, apocalyptic, teleological accelerationism of Nick Land – for whom acceleration was the effect of a technological singularity retroactively disassembling human culture from the future⁵ –, I prefer to focus my discussion on the motif of the exception and show that a dialogue between accelerationism and

Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings, ed. by A. Ridley, J. Norman, trans. by J. Norman, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, pp. 1-67.

³ G.J. VAN DER HEIDEN, *Het uitschot en de geest: Paulus onder filosofen*, Vantilt, Nijmegen 2018, trans. by J. Kok as *The Outcast and the Spirit*, forthcoming.

⁴ Cfr. S. PROZOROV, *Like a Thief in the Night: Agamben, Hobbes and the Messianic Transvaluation of Security*, in «Security Dialogue», XLVIII, 6 (2017), pp. 473-487; A. GALINDO HERVÁS, *Delay or Accelerate the End? Messianism, Accelerationism, and Presentism*, in «International Journal of Philosophy and Theology», LXXVII, 4-5 (2016), pp. 307-323

⁵ Cfr. N. LAND, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, ed. by R. MacKay, R. Brassier, Urbanomic, Falmouth 2012.

messianism is possible even beyond the *katechon*. In fact, in my view, the difference between Left Accelerationism and Nick Land illustrates the distinction between a *messianism* and an *eschatological apocalypticism*, respectively.

To establish this dialogue, I will first outline the Left Accelerationist program and its deflated use of the term “accelerationism” to merely capture a certain progressive attitude towards capitalist technology, in contrast to an immanent insistence in deterritorialization, as Deleuze and Guattari originally suggested. I will explain how, while taking Deleuze and Guattari’s dynamic of deterritorialization-reterritorialization as its point of departure, Left Accelerationism (henceforth, “L/Acc”) attempts to rehabilitate human agency via the reference to a Promethean program inspired in Marx. This leads to a number of tensions which ultimately leave the left accelerationist program with an impasse, rather than an “accelerationist” strategy. Second, I will turn to Gert-Jan Van der Heiden’s recent exposition of a specifically Pauline dialectic of exception and give an overview of the messianic turn to Paul in the 1990s. Despite the lack of an explicit dialogue between both currents, L/Acc and the messianic turn to Paul developed similar intuitions in response to the problem of a new beginning in a historical conjuncture that seemed to offer no alternative to capitalism. In the concluding section, I will explicate these analogies and briefly sketch some possible paths towards a Marxist critique of both currents.

2. Left Accelerationism and the quest for the Outside

In *#Accelerate#*: *The Accelerationist Reader*, which remains the most successful attempt to elaborate a genealogy of accelerationism up to date, Robin MacKay and Armen Avanessian summarize accelerationism as «the insistence that the only radical political response to capitalism is not to protest, disrupt, or critique, nor to await its demise at the hands of its own contradictions, but to accelerate its uprooting,

alienating, decoding, abstractive tendencies»⁶. The first part of this attempt to define accelerationism – an almost impossible task: their definition is already partial toward the leftist variant – refers to L/Acc’s self-identification in opposition to what it would derisively designate as a leftist “folk politics” of complacent rituals, devoid of any strategical ambition⁷. The second, i.e., the reference to capitalism’s collapse under its own contradictions, alludes the confusions around L/Acc that arose partly from Benjamin Noys’ original coinage of the term “accelerationism” in 2010 to capture a certain tendency toward a “*la politique du pire*” of post-May ’68 French philosophy.

With a critical intent, Noys had defined the term as the idea according to which «if capitalism generates its own forces of dissolution then the necessity is to radicalise capitalism itself: the worse the better»⁸. Noys had three particular works in mind: namely, Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, Lyotard’s *Libidinal Economy*, and Baudrillard’s *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, whose radical “affirmationism” of capitalism’s own “forces of dissolution” seemed to him to unintentionally and ironically «reinstate the most teleological forms of Marxism»⁹ by ultimately eliminating the need for a revolutionary subject. Deleuze and Guattari, for instance, thought that capitalism takes reterritorialization to an unprecedented degree, a massive “decoding” of “flows of desire” that insistently destabilizes the “socius”, pushing it towards its own “schizophrenic” limits; that is why capitalism needs a compensatory movement of “reterritorialization” in order to recodify in its own terms

⁶ R. MACKAY, A. AVANESSIAN, *Introduction*, in *#Accelerate#: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by R. MacKay, A. Avanessian, Urbanomic, Falmouth 2014, p. 4.

⁷ A. WILLIAMS, N. SRNICEK, *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, in *#Accelerate#: The Accelerationist Reader*, cit., p. 354.

⁸ B. NOYS, *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2010, p. 5.

⁹ ID., *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*, Zero Books, Hampshire 2014, p. 9.

the flows that it had previously decoded. It would then seem that a further insistence in deterritorialization could eventually break through the limits of capitalism, where a compensatory reterritorialization would no longer be possible:

But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? To withdraw from the world market [...]? 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 yet 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 yet¹⁰.

This wager on a fully affirmative strategy – the affirmation of capitalism’s own forces of dissolution as producing its own collapse – seemed to Noys to eliminate the “destructive” moment of negation of the status quo via revolutionary praxis, and its corresponding forms of subjectivity and agency. In this way, this strategy would risk coming too close to a teleological radicalization of the Marxist idea that capitalism is like the “sorcerer” who conjures up forces that escape its own control¹¹, i.e., that capitalism’s intensification of class antagonism sets the stage for its own collapse, but where the practical moment of revolutionary struggle, now replaced by capitalism’s own automatic development, would no longer be necessary.

¹⁰ G. DELEUZE, F. GUATTARI, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by R. Hurley, M. Seem, H.R. Lane, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1983, pp. 239-240.

¹¹ K. MARX, F. ENGELS, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marxists Internet Archive 2010, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>, 19/10/2022, 10:25, p. 17.

Since L/Acc chose to identify as both Marxist and accelerationist, a popular characterization – a “strawman”¹², allegedly – amongst its critics therefore has it that L/Acc is about accelerating *capitalism*¹³ – or alternatively, about intensifying the contradictions of capitalism – to the point of its automatic collapse; in other words, that L/Acc is a teleological Marxism. However, proponents of L/Acc insist that they have never held this position. While the authors of the *Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics* do claim that «If any system has been associated with ideas of acceleration it is capitalism»¹⁴, “acceleration” here does not exactly refer to capitalism intensifying its own internal contradictions, but is rather loosely used as a synonym for technological progress: L/Acc detects an emancipatory potential in the unprecedented technological development brought about by capitalism’s competitive dynamics, potentially enabling, for instance, a drastic reduction of working hours. In this sense, they see technological development as at once a product of capitalism and a means that could be strategically reoriented toward its own overcoming – and as such, something that must be “accelerated”, without necessarily having to claim that what they want to accelerate is capitalism’s internal contradictions or its “worst” aspects. Nevertheless, the authors of the *Manifesto* also distinguish L/Acc from a “techno-utopianism” in which technological development would on its own bring

¹² P. WOLFENDALE, *So, Accelerationism, what’s all that about?*, Deontologistics 2018, <https://deontologistics.co/2018/02/18/ofta-so-accelerationism-whats-all-that-about/>, 13/10/2022, 15:36.

¹³ This confusion owes to Nick Land’s earlier writings on accelerationism, which radicalized Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence in deterritorialization by directly identifying deterritorialization with capitalism. Cfr. N. LAND, *A quick-and-dirty introduction to accelerationism*, available at *Obsolete Capitalism* 2017, <http://obsoletecapitalism.blogspot.com/2017/05/nick-land-quick-and-dirty-introduction.html>, 18/12/2022, 17:54.

¹⁴ A. WILLIAMS, N. SRNICEK, *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, cit., p. 351.

about a “post-capitalist” society: «Never believe that technology will be sufficient to save us. Necessary, yes, but never sufficient without socio-political action»¹⁵. Left to its own automatic development, capitalism will never actualize the revolutionary potential of the technologies that it has unleashed, but rather, it will continue to direct them towards its own purposes – such as the «progressive elimination of the work-life distinction»¹⁶ instead of “less work”, or the monopolisation under patents of inventions from which a large part of the world population could have benefitted. Taking their cue from Deleuze and Guattari, L/Acc recognizes that «what capitalist speed deterritorializes with one hand, it reterritorializes with the other»¹⁷, acknowledging the need for a political strategy that manages to interrupt this cycle.

Left accelerationists thus reiterate that «as Marx was aware, capitalism cannot be identified as the agent of true acceleration»¹⁸. Indeed, their distinctive observation with respect to earlier accelerationisms is precisely that «Capitalism *has begun* to constrain the productive forces of technology [...] rather than a world of space travel, future shock, and revolutionary technological potential, we exist in a time where the only thing which develops is marginally better consumer gadgetry»¹⁹ (my italics). If capitalism revolutionized older modes of production, it has now become «a system that holds back progress»²⁰: what is to be “accelerated” is therefore not the former, but the latter, by questioning «the supposedly intrinsic link between these transformative forces and the axiomatics of exchange value and capital accumulation»²¹. To “accelerate” is to create a split between technological development and

¹⁵ Ivi., p. 356.

¹⁶ Ivi., p. 354.

¹⁷ Ivi., p. 352.

¹⁸ Ivi., p. 354.

¹⁹ Ivi., p. 355.

²⁰ Ivi., p. 361.

²¹ R. MACKAY, A. AVANESSIAN, *Introduction*, cit., p. 4.

capitalism, which are otherwise in a reciprocal relation to the advantage of the latter's indefinite continuity. The idea is summarized in the *Manifesto* as follows: «Accelerationists want to unleash latent productive forces. In this project, the material platform of neoliberalism does not need to be destroyed. It needs to be repurposed towards common ends. The existing infrastructure is not a capitalist stage to be smashed, but a springboard to launch towards post-capitalism»²².

It should be clear by now that the meaning of what it is to be an “accelerationist” is deflated to merely capture a certain progressive attitude towards the technologies bequeathed by capitalism, which L/Acc argues should be strategically appropriated and redirected towards a “post-capitalist planning”, rather than rejected. An «accelerationist Left must become literate in these technical fields»²³, in opposition to what they see as the predicament of a contemporary Left that has abandoned all aspirations to a “strategic efficacy”:

We believe the most important division in today's Left is between those that hold to a folk politics of localism, direct action, and relentless horizontalism, and those that outline what must become called an accelerationist politics at ease with a modernity of abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology. The former remains content with establishing small and temporary spaces of non-capitalist social relations, eschewing the real problems entailed in facing foes which are intrinsically non-local, abstract, and rooted deep in our everyday infrastructure. [...] By contrast, an accelerationist politics seeks to preserve the gains of late capitalism while going further than its value system, governance structures, and mass pathologies will allow²⁴.

²² A. WILLIAMS, N. SRNICEK, *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, cit., p. 355.

²³ Ivi., p. 357.

²⁴ Ivi., p. 354.

In line with this deflated meaning of “acceleration”, the latter is further distinguished from “speed”: «We may be moving fast, but only within a strictly defined set of capitalist parameters that themselves never waver. We experience only the increasing speed of a local horizon, a simple brain-dead onrush rather than an acceleration which is also *navigational*, an experimental process of discovery within a universal *space of possibility*»²⁵ (my italics).

In this brief diagnosis of the contemporary predicament, two meanings of “acceleration” reveal themselves: on the one hand, a *temporal* acceleration that is already at work and which consists in the mere speed at which capitalism feeds on itself, with human societies remaining passively subjected to its immanent, accelerative feedback loops, and on the other, one which appropriates acceleration and makes of it a *navigational* political project, thereby presupposing the possibility of a human collective agency engaged in a political praxis that is strategically oriented towards a common goal. In the first case, we have an acceleration that is its own finality, where an increase in speed does not in principle yield any novel results, since every deterritorialization is always accompanied by a compensatory reterritorialization. In the second, we have a teleological horizon – “post-capitalism” – that transcends or remains exterior to this immanent acceleration, since it would not automatically follow from a further insistence in it.

At this point, certain tensions within the left accelerationist project begin to appear. Crucially, a temporal, descriptive concept of “acceleration” is contrasted with a prescriptive acceleration with spatial connotations²⁶, where the proper means would be explored in an imaginative space outside of capitalism in order to intervene in an other-wise

²⁵ Ivi., p. 352.

²⁶ I owe the making explicit of this distinction to Abraham Cordero, in his thesis *Aceleracionismo, tragedia y sentido*, University of Barcelona, Barcelona 2019, unpublished.

automatic, a-teleological, self-engendering acceleration. Since the first corresponds to the Deleuzian, immanent dynamic of deterritorialization-reterritorialization, which L/Acc takes as its descriptive point of departure, the whole of the left accelerationist project will consist in figuring out how to redress or “repurpose” this dynamic – presently embedded in capitalism’s technological infra-structure – towards the prescriptive, desired post-capitalist goal.

The second, prescriptive, navigational acceleration would then correspond to L/Acc’s efforts to enable human collective agency and political praxis against this immanentist dynamic. This is the “Promethean”, Marxist-inspired branch of L/Acc that would invite humankind to an ambitious reappropriation of its own future: as defined by Ray Brassier, «Prometheanism is simply the claim that there is no reason to assume a predetermined limit to what we can achieve or to the ways in which we can transform ourselves and our world»²⁷.

Therefore, in contrast to an immanent, affirmationist accelerationist strategy such as the one proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, which, from L/Acc’s perspective, would only yield “more of the same” – since capitalism’s technological infra-structure is presently coded according to «the axiomatics of exchange value and capital accumulation»²⁸ –, L/Acc postulates an “outside” of capitalism, and that in two senses: first, in the already mentioned sense of there being a post-capitalist horizon that would not automatically follow from the already existing, immanent acceleration, and towards which an accelerationist politics would be oriented; second, as there being an exploratory dimension – similar to Reza Negarestani’s allusion to a “space of reasons”²⁹ – that would also be exterior to that immanent order, but one within which, nevertheless,

²⁷ R. BRASSIER, *Prometheanism and its Critics*, in *#Accelerate#: The Accelerationist Reader*, cit., p. 470.

²⁸ R. MACKAY, A. AVANESSIAN, *Introduction*, cit., p. 4.

²⁹ R. NEGARESTANI, *The Labor of the Inhuman*, in *#Accelerate#: The Accelerationist Reader*, cit., pp. 425-466.

the means would be navigated in order to intervene *in* the latter – splitting capitalism’s technological infrastructure from the axiomatics of capitalist profit – and reorient it or “repurpose” it towards the post-capitalist goal. However, on the one hand, by postulating such an exploratory outside, L/Acc betrays Deleuze and Guattari, for whom the accelerationist strategy consisted in a fully affirmative, immanent insistence in deterritorialization. The same applies to the attempt to introduce a goal into acceleration³⁰.

On the other hand, the Promethean branch of L/Acc which aims to enable that exploratory outside begins from the Marxist rejection of a pre-given, essential human nature and is closely associated with transhumanist ideals. However, as Paddy Gordon notes, the tendency of transhumanism towards technological determinism and the ahistoricism of the transhuman subject often lead L/Acc to an abandonment of dialectical materialism³¹. With its cherry-picked, heavy reliance on Marx’s *Fragment on Machines*³², in which Marx suggests that the development of capitalist machinery leads to a transformation of the human subject, L/Acc often leaps into a form of teleological and technological determinism, where if the technological infrastructure of capitalism is properly decoded, redesigned, and repurposed, it will transform human

³⁰ As already mentioned, Deleuze and Guattari did hope that an insistence in deterritorialization could eventually break through the limits of capitalism and generate a “new earth”, but this “new earth” is distinguished from a representational, teleological horizon. The insistence in deterritorialization requires «not assigning it a goal. We’ll never go too far with the deterritorialization, the decoding of flows. For the new earth [...] is not to be found in the neurotic or perverse reterritorializations that arrest the process or assign it goals» (G. DELEUZE, F. GUATTARI, *Anti-Oedipus*, cit., p. 382).

³¹ P. GORDON, *Left Accelerationism, Transhumanism and the Dialectic: Three Manifestos*, in «New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry», XII, 1 (2021), pp. 140-154.

³² K. MARX, *Fragment on Machines*, in *#Accelerate#*: *The Accelerationist Reader*, cit., pp. 51-66.

societies according to the desired, post-capitalist goal. In this way, agency is granted to the technological infrastructure instead of the material activity of human subjects, betraying the Marxist, historical materialist insight that human societies are as much a product of industry as the latter is a product of them, or, as Marx and Engels put it, that «circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances»³³. Where L/Acc claims that “men are a product of circumstances”, it does so deterministically, and where it claims that “circumstances are a product of men”, it does so ahistorically: if political praxis and agency is anywhere to be found, it is only in that exploratory dimension *outside* of the existing relations of production of capitalism. Hence, rather than dialectics, L/Acc gives us a dualism. The result is that L/Acc’s reference to Marxism ends up being rather rhetorical and limited, for instance, to the appeals to «reconstitute various forms of class power»³⁴.

Therefore, in its attempt to elaborate a Marxist accelerationism, L/Acc betrays both Marx and Deleuze. The immanent, self-accelerative dynamic of deterritorialization-reterritorialization that is taken as a point of departure clashes with the prescription of an exploratory acceleration that would “repurpose” the former from without, and nowhere is it clear how this exploratory outside is to be enabled and how it could intervene in a temporal, immanent, a-teleological acceleration to which it remains exterior. The whole of the left accelerationist project remains stuck in the task of figuring out how to enable this exploratory space outside of the existing relations of production. The result is that, rather than an “accelerationist” program, we are left with a quietism, or at least, with an uncertain, indefinitely deferred temporal horizon, or an impasse consisting in the announcement of a post-capitalist future whose

³³ K. MARX, F. ENGELS, *The German Ideology*, Prometheus Books, Amherst 1998, p. 62.

³⁴ A. WILLIAMS, N. SRNICEK, *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, cit., p. 360.

material conditions of possibility do not exist in the present, but must be enabled from an elsewhere.

In the following section, I will illustrate how the messianic turn to Saint Paul's letters in the 1990s by authors such as Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, and Slavoj Žižek developed similar intuitions, in order to eventually suggest that Left *Accelerationism* is, in fact, better characterized as a *messianism*.

3. *The exception in the messianic turn to Paul*

The 1990s were the occasion for a philosophical reappraisal of Saint Paul's letters. Next to the publication of two posthumous works on Saint Paul by Martin Heidegger³⁵ and Jacob Taubes³⁶, philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, and Slavoj Žižek initiated their “messianic” turn to Paul, who is considered the founder of Christianity. Why this turn to Paul outside of Biblical scholarship – namely, to Paul *as a philosopher*? And why would philosophers like Agamben, Badiou, and Žižek trace any political potential in the Pauline epistles, especially after Friedrich Nietzsche's earlier, merciless critique of Paul as a nihilist who rejected our world in favour of a “beyond”³⁷?

In *The Outcast and the Spirit*, Gert-Jan van der Heiden contextualizes this philosophical turn to Paul as partly a reaction of post-Kantian continental philosophy to the “postmodern” tendencies towards “particularism” and “relativism”. This is especially the case for Badiou and Žižek, who see in Paul the founder of a universalism that has strongly shaped militant discourses on emancipation and equality in the West.

³⁵ Cfr. M. HEIDEGGER, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. by M. Fritsch, J.A. Gosetti-Ferencei, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2010.

³⁶ Cfr. J. TAUBES, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. by D. Hollander, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2004.

³⁷ Cfr. F. NIETZSCHE, *The Anti-Christ*, cit.

While on the one hand, Badiou and Žižek see Paul as a Leninist whose foundational task for Christianity is analogous to the universal aspirations of communism³⁸, Agamben, on the other hand³⁹, reads Paul as an anarchist whose paradigm of “messianic time” renders the law “inoperative”, revealing «the substantial illegitimacy of each and every power»⁴⁰. However, the turn to Paul extends beyond the strictly political discourse in his letters and «also concerns basic ontological questions regarding history and temporality»⁴¹.

3.1 A “Pauline dialectic of exception”

Van der Heiden suggests that such post-Nietzschean, philosophical reappraisals of Paul were partly enabled by Taubes’ discovery that Paul’s historical reception has been strongly influenced by Marcion of Sinope⁴². Marcion radicalized a “Gnostic temptation” in Paul by establishing a variant of a Platonic dualism with two mutually exclusive gods and two corresponding realities, namely, the creator God from the Old Testament – the worldly God who is responsible for the imperfect order of creation – and the transcendent, true God, the father of Jesus Christ.

³⁸ A. BADIOU, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. by R. Brassier, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2003, p. 2; S. ŽIŽEK, *On Belief*, Routledge, London 2001, pp. 2-3; ID., *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 9.

³⁹ Agamben is critical of Badiou’s understanding of Pauline universalism and is instead interested in the Pauline notion of the “remnant” as that which prevents any identity from ever coinciding with itself, rendering the divisions of the law between identities inoperative. G. AGAMBEN, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. by P. Dailey, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2005, pp. 51-53.

⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 111.

⁴¹ G.J. VAN DER HEIDEN, *The Outcast and the Spirit*, cit., p. 4.

⁴² Cfr. J. TAUBES, *The Political Theology of Paul*, cit.

According to Van der Heiden, Nietzsche's reading of Paul falls within this Marcionite tradition, with Nietzsche radicalizing, in turn, a dualist reading of Paul into a nihilist one. However, Van der Heiden argues, this tradition has failed to appreciate in Paul a specific "Pauline dialectic of exception", one that navigates «between the Scylla of monism and the Charybdis of dualism»⁴³, or between immanence and transcendence, through the "messianic event" as an exception to the present order of the world, enabled by the Pauline "principle of the spirit (of God)". This principle does not follow from the immanent laws of the world and is therefore grounded on a transcendent plane, yet – *pace* Nietzsche – this principle transforms *this* world by introducing an exception into it through the messianic event, through which a new "mode of living, thinking and being" is inaugurated.

While dialectics always implies negativity and negation – hence Taubes' suggestion that Nietzsche does capture in Paul «a profound nihilism at work [...] toward the destruction of the Roman Empire»⁴⁴ –, these need not be equated with a nihilist rejection of the present order of the world or an invitation to "destroy" it. Rather, Van der Heiden suggests, negation in the Pauline dialectic is much closer to a Hegelian *Aufhebung*⁴⁵, where negativity is understood as a productive moment. Hegelian dialectics, in fact, follow «the Pauline paradigm of "death and resurrection"»⁴⁶: while Christ's death at the cross leaves us with an

⁴³ G.J. VAN DER HEIDEN, *The Outcast and the Spirit*, cit., p. 32.

⁴⁴ J. TAUBES, *The Political Theology of Paul*, cit., p. 72.

⁴⁵ Van der Heiden picks up Agamben's etymological insight that, in fact, Hegel's *Aufhebung* as a movement that implies both abolition and conservation is of Pauline origin; namely, it originates in the verb *katargein* that Paul uses in Romans 3:31, in the context of an antinomial struggle with the simultaneous need to abolish and preserve the law. According to Agamben, Luther translated *katargein* in that passage precisely as *Aufheben*. G. AGAMBEN, *The Time That Remains*, cit., pp. 99-101.

⁴⁶ G.J. VAN DER HEIDEN, *The Outcast and the Spirit*, cit., p. 111.

infinite «abyss of nothingness in which all being is engulfed»⁴⁷, this is only a moment – the “speculative Good Friday” – towards the negation of death itself, represented by the resurrection. The negation of finitude is itself negated, from which an infinity arises that is no longer a nihilist, all-engulfing abyss, but «the spring of eternal movement»⁴⁸. This proximity between a Hegelian and a Pauline dialectic makes sense when we consider, on the one hand, Hegel as a modern heir of Stoicism, particularly when it comes to the notion of a “world spirit” or *Weltgeist*, which, Van der Heiden argues, can be interpreted as a modern derivation of the Stoic concept of *pneuma*, and on the other, the “spirit of the world” in passages such as 1 Cor 2:12, which also seems to be a Pauline appropriation of the same concept⁴⁹. In Stoicism, *pneuma* is the cyclic, self-organizing principle of the cosmos in different degrees of complexity.

However, in 1 Cor 2:12, Paul is in fact establishing a distinction between a “spirit of the world” and a “spirit of God”, one which seems to imply an opposition or a dualism rather than a Stoic monism of gradations. The same applies to the Pauline distinction between *sarx* (flesh) and *pneuma* (spirit) throughout the epistles, which seems to bring Paul back to a Platonic or a Gnostic dualism⁵⁰. There is a specific dialectic at work in Paul, Van der Heiden argues; one that does neither entirely fit

⁴⁷ G.W.F. HEGEL, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. by W. Cerf, H.S. Harris, SUNY Press, Albany 1977, p. 190.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ For a discussion on Paul’s Stoic background, cfr. T. ENGBERG-PEDERSEN, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010.

⁵⁰ Nevertheless, as Van der Heiden notes, rather than an ontological dualism, this distinction corresponds to two modes of living, either in conformity to the old order of the world or according to the one inaugurated by the principle of the spirit, respectively. Badiou makes a similar point, where *sarx* and *pneuma* correspond to two “subjective paths”. Cfr. G.J. VAN DER HEIDEN, *The Outcast and the Spirit*, cit., pp. 42, 199; A. BADIOU, *Saint Paul*, cit., p. 68.

the Stoic or Hegelian monism of a world spirit⁵¹, nor the Marcionite, ontological dualism that would become the pretext for Nietzsche's accusation of nihilism. In the first case, there is little room for the exception and for a genuine *transformation*, since every negation is understood as a necessary moment in the automatic, rational self-development of the world spirit; Christ's resurrection, for instance, would already be implicitly included in Christ's death, which would fail to appreciate its quality as a miracle and an exception to the present laws of the world. Paul therefore rejects the "immanentism" whereby «a principle is present in reality itself that causes the process of transformation»⁵²; yet the second, dualist interpretation confuses dialectics with nihilism:

Paul does not wish to leave this world, but he does contemplate that the existing order of this world is characterized by a fundamental bankruptcy [...] Yet, this does not mean that creation should be destroyed but rather that creation eagerly looks out for the principle of the spirit, that is, to a principle that can transform this futility and meaninglessness, and *elevate creation itself to a higher, pneumatic meaning*. [...] Paul's pneumatic interpretation and the principle of transformation [...] are not anchored in a *necessary* development. The principle of the spirit (of God) is no purely immanent or rational one that naturally occurs and unfolds in the world. Paul's pneumatic principle is not the principle of the spirit of the world, but rather that of the spirit of God. This latter principle brings something new and something different into play that does not allow itself to be understood from the existing world order and its intrinsic possibilities or potentialities. The pneumatic principle is active in the world, according to Paul, but is anchored and grounded in an event – that of the coming of the Messiah – that

⁵¹ Taubes insists in the distinction between the Pauline *pneuma* and the Hegelian *Weltgeist*. J. TAUBES, *The Political Theology of Paul*, cit., pp. 41-43.

⁵² G.J. VAN DER HEIDEN, *The Outcast and the Spirit*, cit., p. 46.

does not belong to the world and through which the working power of this principle really *began* for the first time⁵³.

All of this being said, what do we then make of the seemingly apocalyptic passages in Paul in which he, for instance, announces that “time is short” (1 Cor 7:29) and that the “present form” of the world is “passing away” (1 Cor 7:31)? Or of such an apparently nihilistic passage as is 1 Cor 1:27-28, in which God chooses the “foolish” and “weak” in the world in order to “nullify” or “abolish” what is?

Van der Heiden agrees with Critchley that there is an important “meontology”⁵⁴, i.e., a «doctrine of non-beings [...] that are not simply nothing»⁵⁵, in Paul: these «non-beings [...] refer to that which *was not assigned a place in the current world order* or does not fit into this order»⁵⁶. However, this need not be interpreted in a nihilistic vein, where Paul would be claiming that the principle of the spirit will destroy – or “nullify”, or “abolish” – what is held as *being* in and by this world to avenge what is considered as “lowly” or as non-being⁵⁷. Rather, and following Agamben, the verb *katargeo* in 1 Cor 1:27-28, usually translated as “to nullify”, “to abolish”, or “to reduce to nothing”, is a technically Pauline term which means “to deactivate” or “to render inoperative”: *katargeo*, according to Agamben, is not the opposite of *poieo*, but of *energeo*⁵⁸, the same term that Aristotle uses for “act”. By deactivating or rendering inoperative what is actual in the present order of the world,

⁵³ Ivi., p. 43-45.

⁵⁴ Cfr. S. CRITCHLEY, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*, Verso, London 2012, pp. 177ff.

⁵⁵ G.J. VAN DER HEIDEN, *The Outcast and the Spirit*, cit., p. 85.

⁵⁶ Ivi., p. 81.

⁵⁷ Badiou argues that, although Paul does make concessions to this apocalyptic rhetoric, the passages in which “justice” is understood in these eschatological terms are occasional. A. BADIOU, *Saint Paul*, cit., p. 95.

⁵⁸ G. AGAMBEN, *The Time That Remains*, cit., pp. 95-97.

the principle of the spirit allows a space of possibilities or potentialities that remained inhibited in and by that order to appear: «The suspension of a given reality does not open an empty space of the purely unreal or the mere non-being but *a well-defined space of possibilities that have not been actualized in a given reality* [...] actuality is rich in possibilities that are and remain unactualized»⁵⁹. Nevertheless, the Pauline idiosyncrasy with respect to the Aristotelian notion of potentiality is that a reference to a transcendent principle of the spirit is necessary: since these non-beings are “weak” and “foolish”, “despised” by the “strong” and “wise” to whom the present order of the world is favourable⁶⁰, the immanent conditions that would allow them to thrive remain inhibited by the present order of the world, which must first be deactivated⁶¹.

⁵⁹ G.J. VAN DER HEIDEN, *The Outcast and the Spirit*, cit., p. 85.

⁶⁰ Van der Heiden points to Saint Paul’s identification with the Corinthians, with the “outcasts” and with the “scum of the world” (1 Cor 4:13). Nevertheless, he suggests that these meontological passages should not be read *only* from a socio-political perspective, since neither Paul nor ancient culture more generally establish a strong separation between ethics, politics, and ontology. Cfr. *ivi.*, p. 80.

⁶¹ Agamben uses 2 Cor 12:9, in which Paul claims that «power is made perfect in weakness», to support his anarchist elaboration of an ontology of potentiality or possibility: “messianic power” does not lie in the exhaustion of potentiality into actuality, but in potentiality remaining in weakness; G. AGAMBEN, *The Time That Remains*, cit., p. 97. In this sense, Galindo Hervás speaks about Agamben’s “unpolitical messianism”, since politics would consist in the actualization of certain potentialities and the exclusion of others; A. GALINDO HERVÁS, *Mesianismo impolítico*, in «ISEGORÍA: Revista de Filosofía Moral y Política», 39 (2008), pp. 239-250.

3.2 *The messianic turn to Paul*

The notion of the “exception” would allow to make sense of the contemporary relevance of the Pauline epistles: with the announcement of the messianic event – an event that does not follow from the existing order of the world –, Paul is seen by the philosophers of this messianic turn as «the announcer of a new beginning leading to a transformation of reality»⁶², a beginning that «cannot be understood in terms of possibilities of change and transformation intrinsic to the order and dynamics of the world itself»⁶³. Van der Heiden translates this centrality of the notion of the exception into the historical context of the 1990s:

With some of the philosophical reflections on Paul, and in particular of those scholars that work extensively with Badiou and Agamben, this focus on the proclamation of the new should be seen against the backdrop of a political reality that does not seem to allow any alternative. While in Paul’s time, the Roman empire determined this reality, authors such as Badiou and Agamben translate it in the political constellation that took shape in the nineties. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, it seemed the Western world had but one political-economic option left: that of capitalism. As bankrupt as communism was towards the end, it was still an alternative to the political reality to be found on the western side of the Wall. Today, capitalism and neoliberalism still seem to be the only option, tempting Žižek to posit that it is easier for us to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Especially in a world order that offers no alternative and in which history seems to be at its end, Badiou and Žižek turn to Paul as the one who knows how to herald a new beginning in a given socio-political and historical status quo⁶⁴.

⁶² G.J. VAN DER HEIDEN, *The Outcast and the Spirit*, cit., p. 18.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ivi.*, pp. 22-23.

Badiou, for instance, denounces the contemporary complicity of Western democracy and capitalism in preserving each other by making truth relative to the cultural and historical identity of subjects. He attributes this development to the «senescent collapse of the USSR [...] [which] provisionally suspended fear, unleashed empty abstraction, debased thought in general»⁶⁵, leaving universality to be instantiated only by the “false universality” of “monetary abstraction”, which «has absolutely no difficulty accommodating the kaleidoscope of communitarianisms»⁶⁶.

The configuration of a capitalist world-market «imposes the rule of an abstract homogenization. Everything that circulates falls under the unity of a count, while inversely, only what lets itself be counted in this way can circulate»⁶⁷. In Western parliamentary politics, this translates into «a process of fragmentation into closed identities, and the culturalist and relativist ideology that accompanies this fragmentation»⁶⁸: capitalist abstraction and the instantiation of particulars under the paradigm of identity «are in a relation of reciprocal maintenance and mirroring»⁶⁹. Similarly, Žižek defends the need for a Leninist “politics of Truth” in order to break with the “liberal-democratic hegemony”, i.e., an «intervention [that] changes the coordinates of the situation»⁷⁰ rather than settling for pragmatic compromises within the existing coordinates, in opposition to a “marginalist Leftist attitude” that retreats once it must assume the “cruel” consequences of a consistent implementation of its discourse. Both Žižek and Agamben are interested in the problematic of transgression as always already dependent upon the law, i.e., in how the law *creates* transgression, and in the case of Žižek, even

⁶⁵ A. BADIOU, *Saint Paul*, cit. p. 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Ivi., pp. 9-10.

⁶⁸ Ivi., p. 10.

⁶⁹ Ivi., p. 13.

⁷⁰ S. ŽIŽEK, *On Belief*, cit., p. 3.

solicits it, making such thing as a “genuine transgression” impossible. Finally, Agamben seeks a principle that can render the mutual interdependence of the law and the state of exception inoperative⁷¹, thereby allowing a latent, messianic state of “tendential lawlessness” to reveal itself⁷².

What all these analyses have in common is the search for an exception to the present order of the world, one that seems to demand a reference to something exterior to this order in order to interrupt its immanent dynamics of self-preservation. However, the crux of the problem lies in that, in its hegemony, the present order of the world – in this case, liberal democracy and capitalism – not only defines the very coordinates of this exteriority, but feeds on it, incorporating any transgression to expand the coverage of the law. In effect, this is not far from what Deleuze and Guattari described as the dynamic of deterritorialization-reterritorialization, whereby any decoded flows are recoded by capitalism in a “nearchaic” guise⁷³. A standard and often-quoted example of this is so-called “rainbow capitalism”, where large corporations exploit an LGBTQ+ rhetoric in their marketing strategies, undermining earlier, more radical hopes that the LGBTQ+ struggle would present a threat to the capitalist mode of production by dismantling the family unit on which it supposedly relied. Insofar as all these authors are preoccupied with this dynamic, they all effectively participate in the “TINA”⁷⁴ paradigm, characteristic of the 1990s and its proclamation of the “end of history”.

For Badiou, the “event” is the paradigm of the exception: as a contingent occurrence that does not follow from a law and that irrupts only in a particular time and place, it «breaks with the axiomatic principle that

⁷¹ Cfr. G. AGAMBEN, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by D. Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1998.

⁷² ID., *The Time That Remains*, cit., pp. 108-111.

⁷³ G. DELEUZE, F. GUATTARI, *Anti-Oedipus*, cit., p. 257.

⁷⁴ “There Is No Alternative”.

governs the situation and organizes its repetitive series»⁷⁵. Since an event is «of the order of what occurs, it is singular»⁷⁶, yet its singularity is not linked to cultural or historical particularities, nor can the event be appropriated by “pre-constituted subsets”, because the event’s interruption of the law enables a new connection between truth and subject, who «does not pre-exist the event he declares»⁷⁷. Truth consists in declaring the event, and whoever declares it becomes subjectivated through their conviction in its truth and the militant fidelity with which they declare it. The event is a singularity, but a “universalizable singularity”: «It is offered to all, or addressed to everyone, without a condition of belonging being able to limit this offer, or this address»⁷⁸.

Paul’s announcement of the resurrection – for Badiou, the paradigmatic messianic *event* – gives us precisely the “formal conditions” of such a “universalizable singularity”: it is an event in the wake of which the cultural restrictions of Mosaic law are suspended, and «There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female» (Gal 3:28), but only those subjects who deliver their militant fidelity to declaring the event, and who thereby become Christians. Nevertheless, in order to avoid the insight that the resurrection is already implicit in the death of Christ, which would fail to do justice to the “superabundance of grace” and the “evental” quality of the resurrection, Badiou insists in an “anti-dialectic” reading of Paul, where grace «is not a “moment” of the Absolute. It is affirmation without preliminary negation»⁷⁹.

Žižek, on the other hand, offers a more dialectical reading: he speaks of a “perverse core of Christianity” in relation to those moments – such as the Fall, Judas’ betrayal, and Jesus’ death on the Cross – where God

⁷⁵ A. BADIOU, *Saint Paul*, cit., p. 11.

⁷⁶ Ivi., p. 14.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Ivi., p. 66.

seems to test the faith of men only to then offer salvation. Paul, according to Žižek, detects in Mosaic law a similar «dialectic of the law and its transgression [...] on how Law engenders sin, that is, the desire to transgress it»⁸⁰. For Žižek, «the only way to avoid such a perverse reading is to insist on the absolute *identity* of the two gestures: God does not first push us into Sin in order to create the need for Salvation, and then offer Himself as the Redeemer from the trouble into which He got us in the first place; it is not that the Fall is followed by Redemption: the Fall is *identical* to Redemption, it is “in itself” already Redemption»⁸¹. Paul’s critique of Mosaic law in Romans indeed overcomes this perverse, antagonistic relationship between faith and the law: rather than abolishing Mosaic law in favour of faith, Christianity, in fact, brings the law to fulfilment.

Agamben agrees that the Pauline “deactivation” of Mosaic law in fact fulfils the law, but because it leaves the law in a state of potentiality, hence restoring faith. He draws attention to a specifically Pauline formula which describes the effect of the messianic “calling” upon worldly vocations and which defines “messianic life”. This formula is to «remain in the calling in the form of the *as not*»⁸², and the relevant Pauline passage is the following: «[...] that even those having wives may be as not [*hos me*] having, and those weeping as not weeping, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not possessing, and those using the world as not using it up. For passing away is the figure of this world»⁸³. The *as not* [*hos me*] defines the messianic *klesis* or “vocation” as «the revocation of every vocation»⁸⁴. This is not the nihilist replacement of our worldly vocation for another vocation in the “beyond”:

⁸⁰ S. ŽIŽEK, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, cit., p. 56.

⁸¹ Ivi., p. 118.

⁸² G. AGAMBEN, *The Time That Remains*, cit., p. 26.

⁸³ 1 Cor 7:29-31, trans. by G. Agamben in ivi., p. 23.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

«No, the vocation calls the vocation itself, as though it were an urgency that works it from within and hollows it out, nullifying it in the very gesture of maintaining and dwelling in it»⁸⁵. Paul says «Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called»⁸⁶: the worldly vocation is set against itself and revoked “from within”. Through this gesture, the dialectic of law and transgression is suspended.

4. Conclusion

In its quest for an outside of capitalism, L/Acc is in need of an exception, one that cannot follow from the immanent order of capitalist acceleration, yet one that repurposes *this* very order towards post-capitalism. Similarly, the Pauline exception originates in the principle of the spirit, yet it transforms *this* world. Both L/Acc and the messianic turn to Paul seek an alternative to immanentism, since they both ultimately accept that, despite a profound crisis in the present order of the world, its negation is always already captured by and recodified in terms of its present laws.

This is because both L/Acc and the messianic turn to Paul participate in the TINA paradigm: while the latter takes place amidst the proclamation of the “end of history” in the 1990s, the former emerges amidst an intensification of neoliberalism following the 2008 financial crisis, which drives its concern with what Mark Fisher identified as “capitalist realism”, i.e., «the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it»⁸⁷. Hence the interest of the messianic turn to Paul in Paul’s proclamation of a “new beginning”: Paul’s foundation of Christianity amidst the political hegemony of the

⁸⁵ Ivi., p. 24.

⁸⁶ 1 Cor 7:20, trans. by G. Agamben in Ivi., p. 13.

⁸⁷ M. FISHER, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, cit., p. 2.

Roman Empire provides a valuable example for the contemporary predicament. Moreover, both L/Acc and the messianic turn to Paul share a rejection of nihilism to the extent that they both articulate their universalist strategies – perhaps with the exception of Agamben – against the background of a “postmodern”, nostalgic Left that longs for a return to “Paradise”. Moreover, in the case of L/Acc, there is a twofold opposition to nihilism, whose second facet is its departure from the earlier nihilist, teleological, apocalyptic anti-humanism of Nick Land’s accelerationism⁸⁸. To summarize, both L/Acc and the messianic turn to Paul seek an alternative to either a Hegelian immanentism of the world spirit and a dualist nihilism that rejects *this* world in favour of a “beyond”; as a consequence, they all develop similar intuitions. The Pauline dialectic of exception explicated by Van der Heiden provides a useful yardstick against which to measure their positions according to whether they are, for instance, more or less dualistic or dialectical.

Although an exhaustive Marxist critique of both L/Acc and the messianic turn to Paul has been out of the scope of this article, let me briefly sketch some of its possible directions on the occasion of Paul’s meontology. It has been argued that there is a meontology in Paul, i.e., a doctrine of potentialities that remain inhibited in and by the present order of the world and that can only appear through the intervention of a transcendent principle of the spirit that suspends the immanent laws of the world. In their claim that the technological infrastructure of capitalism is pregnant with possibilities that remain inhibited by the axiomatics of capitalist accumulation, and that rather than rejected or destroyed, this technological infrastructure must be “repurposed”, one could also see in L/Acc a meontology. Nevertheless, if the claim were simply that given a certain stage of development the capitalist forces and relations of production already contain the potential for its own overcoming, L/Acc would not really deviate from a Marxist analysis, and an analogy with

⁸⁸ Cfr. N. LAND, *Fanged Noumena*, cit.

Pauline meontology as simply a doctrine of potentialities would be superfluous. But where *L/Acc* *does* crucially deviate from Marxism and inclines toward an analogy with a Pauline dialectic of exception is in the suggestion that, given the immanent dynamic of deterritorialization-reterritorialization, this potential can only be actualized once reterritorialization is deactivated from an *outside*.

This outside is «a universal space of possibility»⁸⁹, in contradistinction to the limited space of possibilities offered by the existing relations of production. Contrary to a Marxist dialectical insight, this is to claim that while post-capitalism is a latent possibility in the existing technological infrastructure, this possibility can only be actualized from outside of the existing productive relations, which ultimately amounts to claiming that the possibility of capitalism's overcoming is not contained within the existing relations of production, but must itself be enabled from a space that transcends them. The whole of the left accelerationist project will then consist in a second-order theoretical effort to enable this space, i.e., to enable the *possibility* of capitalism's overcoming, leading to an impasse rather than revolutionary "acceleration".

By contrast, Marxist dialectics understands that the proletariat becomes collectively organized and self-conscious as a class through the *immanent* critique of the abstractions that govern the material reproduction of its life, i.e., the "critique of political economy", and by this, it gives shape to the objective possibilities for revolution, in a unity of theory and praxis⁹⁰. Instead of engaging in an immanent critique of the capitalist mode of production by which to give shape to the objective possibilities for its overcoming that are *presently* contained in its relations of production – and which, in turn, are the result of the development of

⁸⁹ A. WILLIAMS, N. SRNICEK, *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, cit., p. 352.

⁹⁰ Cfr. G. LUKÁCS, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by R. Livingstone, The MIT Press, Cambridge 1971.

earlier modes of production –, L/Acc hopes that these potentialities will be handed down from the idea of the “future”, i.e., a theoretical abstraction. In Marxism, theory is a moment of revolutionary praxis, whereas by ruling out the possibility of immanent critique, L/Acc ultimately reduces the theoretical moment to an idealistic effort «to generate a new left global hegemony»⁹¹ which relies on the capacities of collective “imagination” to rehabilitate «the idea of the future»⁹². As such, L/Acc represents another idealistic, utopian inversion of historical materialism, where the “future” as an abstract ideal is imposed upon the material forces and relations of production of capitalism which, once repurposed according to this ideal, will almost deterministically lead to a post-capitalist society. Rather than a Marxist dialectics, this brings L/Acc closer to a Pauline dialectic, over which the spectre of dualism still looms⁹³. Similarly, in their interest in the motifs of grace and the principle of spirit, the authors of the messianic turn to Paul must navigate the risk of ahistoricism.

⁹¹ Ivi., p. 357.

⁹² Ivi., p. 362.

⁹³ To the analogies between L/Acc and Saint Paul one could add, as Galindo Hervás has done, that accelerationism is a secularized messianism: «in the Christian perspective the shortening of time is a divine grace and modern acceleration changes the subject of the action: from God to man. In other words, the apocalyptic shortening of time is a divine gift and revolutionary acceleration is a human task», A. GALINDO HERVÁS, *Delay or accelerate the end?*, cit. Nevertheless, I have shown that even human agency is ultimately undermined in L/Acc. Moreover, I have refrained from characterizing accelerationism as a “secularized” messianism throughout this paper because I believe that this term is of little use in the context of a discussion on Saint Paul, since the Pauline dialectic is already a dialectic between the secular and the divine. Cfr. W.S. GOLDSTEIN, *Messianism and Marxism: Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch’s dialectical theories of secularization*, in «Critical Sociology», XXVII, 2 (2001), pp. 246-281.