Coding Utopia: Effective Accelerationism, Techno-Optimism- and Strategic Incoherence in Silicon Valley

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About me

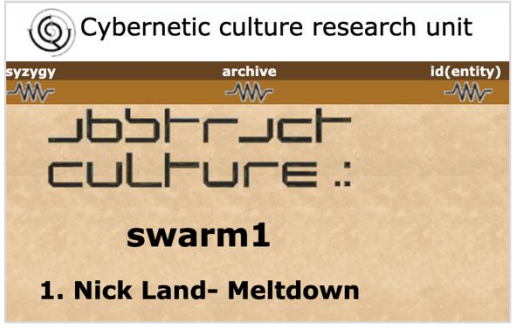
- IRiSS Predoctoral Scholar in AI Governance, Stanford University
  - Affiliated with Stanford HAI, IRiSS, and Political Science
- MSc, Oxford
- B.S., Stanford
- Research agenda focuses on the origins of techno-ideologies and their relationships to political movements



Effective accelerationism, or “e/acc,” refers to a Silicon Valley ideology of techno-accelerationism

> Effective Accelerationism, e/acc, is a set of ideas and practices that seek to maximize the probability of the technocapital singularity, and subsequently, the ability for emergent consciousness to flourish.
>
> (zestular, 2022)

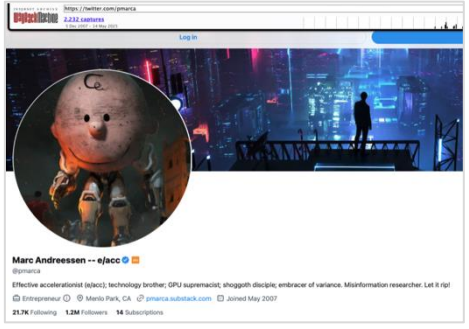
> e/acc is about having faith in the dynamical adaptation process and aiming to accelerate the advent of its asymptotic limit; often reffered to as *the technocapital singularity*
>
> (Beff Jezos, 2022)



Nick Land, 1994



Marc Andreessen, 2023



Twitter screenshot, @pmarca, 2023

Through interviews and computational textual analysis, we defined key features of e/acc…

- n = 16 interviewees, interviewed between April-June 2025, all "elite" (defined as tech or tech-adjacent individuals with roles no lower than *n – 1*)
- Reached through purposive and snowball sampling (Robinson, 2014)
- Interviews were semi-structured and were analyzed through abductive coding (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012)
- Reddit corpus included *n* = 2,751,940 comments across 28 subreddits

Key findings:

- E/acc defined **technological progress as an end in itself**: "[The] basic religion is like just one of like, technological progress… That is the meaning and the purpose and the end almost in itself" (Emily, tech-adjacent), 13/16
- E/acc was **fundamentally incoherent**: "I think e/acc is much more like a reactionary movement… And not clearly super ideologically coherent" (Oscar, tech-adjacent), 14/16
- E/acc was a **reactionary meme to effective altruism**: "Accelerationism… basically started mostly as a meme, and a reaction, right, to [doomerism]" 11/16

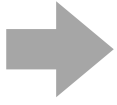
…and we theorized a new concept called "strategic incoherence" that modern tech ideologies utilize

- E/acc combined both faith-based arguments (i.e., religious) as well as optimization/logically instrumental arguments (e.g., economic)
  - We believed this was a case of dual engagement in both instrumental reason and mythology, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* sense (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944)
    - Instrumental reason is "the the form of reason required to calculate the necessary and potentially most efficient means to achieve the objectives stipulated" but "neutral in regards to ends" (Bernstein 2018, 1; Adorno & Horkheimer 1994, 88).
    - Mythology, in contrast, is "based not on examination but on faith" (Cohen 2010, 44)
- E/acc entertained this dual engagement deliberately: "In general, e/acc believes that higher variance marketplaces and competition are better at identifying and capitalizing on utility from our environment over other methods such as top-down optimal control" vs. "e/acc is about having faith in the dynamical adaptation process… [it] aims to follow the `will of the universe'" (Jezos & bayeslord, 2022)

- We argue that **strategic incoherence** describes an ideology "that consciously deploys both instrumental reason and mythology" (Khan, Margetts, & Mittelstadt, under review)
- In other words: it engages deliberately in what should be incompatible registers of argument

We argue strategic incoherence permits ideologies to absorb critique without addressing it

Many of our interviewees who were critical of e/acc called the ideology incoherent or contradictory. As the panel brief stated, critique is often aimed at **"exposing contradictions."**



But when contradictions are understood as a desired *part* of an ideology, this version of critique **loses animating force**

E/acc poses a case example, where contradictions in the ideology simply create new “branches”

bio/acc	Biological accelerationism
Christ/acc	Christian accelerationism
cute/acc	Cute accelerationism
d/acc	Defensive, decentralized accelerationism
humanist/acc	Humanist accelerationism
eu/acc	European Union accelerationism
priv/acc	Privacy accelerationism
america/acc	American accelerationism

Moreover, "AGI" functions as an empty signifier across these groups (Laclau, 1996)

An **empty signifier** refers to "a signifier without a signified," where there exists "a structural impossibility in signification as such" (Laclau 1996, p. 36, 37)

The definition of AGI/ASI has to be kept open, because it stands in for disparate, even opposed, ends (e.g., Judgment Day, infinite economic abundance, or humanity's extinction), and each group's meaning sustains the pursuit of AGI

Strategic incoherence is only possible, we argue, because the only end articulated by e/acc—AGI—is an empty signifier, i.e., reckoning doesn't occur because there is no cohesive meaning

Perhaps critique now struggles because adherents to tech ideologies do not have the same basis of reality

- Imagine three very different e/accs:

A Christian e/acc, who wants to build AGI because they see this as the potential Second Coming of Christ, who will bring about Judgment Day

An economic e/acc, who wants to build AGI because they believe this will lead to infinite economic growth and material wealth for the "permanent overclass" in Silicon Valley

A post-humanist e/acc, who wants to build AGI because they believe it will lead to a better, more evolved form of consciousness in the universe and wipe out humanity

- Discussion question (and perhaps future work): How can critique effectively engage these beliefs?

Thank You! Questions?