

# Thinking fast, and faster

The world is changing at dizzying speed – but for some thinkers, not quickly enough. Is accelerationism a dangerous fringe philosophy or does it speak to our troubled times?

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alf a century ago, in the great hippie year of 1967, an acclaimed young American science fiction writer, Roger Zelazny, published his third novel. In many ways, *Lord of Light* was of its time, shaggy with imported Hindu mythology and cosmic dialogue. Yet there were also glints of something more forward-looking and political. One plot strand concerned a group of revolutionaries who wanted to take their society “to a higher level” by suddenly transforming its attitude to technology. Zelazny called them the Accelerationists.

He and the book are largely forgotten now. But as the more enduring sci-fi novelist JG Ballard said in 1971, “what the writers of modern science fiction invent today, you and I will do tomorrow”. Over the past five decades, and especially over the past few years, much of the world has got faster. Working patterns, political cycles, everyday technologies, communication habits and devices, the re-development of cities, the acquisition and disposal of possessions – all of these have accelerated. Meanwhile, over the same half century, almost entirely unnoticed by the media or mainstream academia, accelerationism has gradually solidified from a fictional device into an actual intellectual movement: a new way of thinking about the contemporary world and its potential.

Accelerationists argue that technology, particularly computer technology, and capitalism, particularly the most aggressive, global variety, should be massively sped up and intensified – either because this is the best way forward for humanity, or because there is no alternative. Accelerationists favour automation. They favour the further merging of the digital and the human. They often favour the deregulation of business, and drastically scaled-back government. They believe that people should stop deluding themselves that economic and technological progress can be controlled. They often believe that social and political upheaval has a value in itself.

Accelerationism, therefore, goes against conservatism, traditional socialism, social democracy, environmentalism, protectionism, populism, nationalism, localism and all the other ideologies that have sought to moderate or reverse the already hugely disruptive, seemingly runaway pace of change in the modern world.