Twitter Thread by pete wolfendale



pete wolfendale
@deontologistics

@schulzb589 I accept that I haven't given a proof of this impossibility, but I believe the concerns I've laid out could probably be formalised in a way that would lead to one, though it'd involve something like a combinatoric diagonalisation similar to Russell's paradox.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 To state my issue in a more philosophical way, I think the desire to combinatorially totalise mathematical syntax is an effect of something like a transcendental illusion, what I sometimes call the Mythos of Logos.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 It's the Leibnizian desire to obviate creative dialogical interaction (dialectical reason) by providing a deductive system (monological reason) that would allow us to simply 'shut up and calculate'; the desire to obviate the pragmatic autonomy of discovery by automating it.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 It doesn't matter how many times this desire is betrayed by its own formal tools: Russell, Godel, Turing, Chaitin, etc.; it doesn't matter that these betrayals are what drive the externalisation of thought by producing new tools to automate computation. It always comes back.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 The desire to brute force reality, be it mathematical or empirical, is always lying in wait, whispering seemingly 'reasonable' lies about what is and isn't rationally possible. This is as close as I come to endorsing Heidegger and Adorno's worries about technoscience.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 But for me, technoscience is not generating an external force that saps our critical awareness ('instrumental reason') or disguises the hidden mysteries of human life (Gestell). Its *legitimate* will to power is being betrayed by the very pragmatic instincts that it cultivates.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 This is a broader cultural issue that extends well beyond the bounds of philosophy of computer science, but the latter is the Archimedean point from which maximal rational leverage can be achieved in the forever war on such rational betrayal. That's the gambit of neorationalism.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 But that's merely the most *abstract* line of attack, and there are also a more *concrete* tactics to be deployed in the war against the self-betrayal of freedom. This is where contemporary rationalism bleeds into contemporary Prometheanism: https://t.co/6UcpWWJX8y

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 To take one strand of such Prometheanism, the project of left-accelerationism (l/acc) is to cultivate and reinforce freedom's tendency to expand itself through any means necessary, insofar as this is an ultimate end (categorical imperative) implicit in rational agency itself.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 I'm a Kantian, which means I believe that normative autonomy (qua self-legislation) is an *end in itself*, but I'm also a Spinozist/Foucauldian, which means I believe that the causal underpinnings of such autonomy are something like *means in themselves*.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 This notion of a means-in-itself as opposed to a means to a given range of ends is what @benedict calls a 'platform', and the integrated platform architecture that enables autonomous agency as such is what @bratton calls 'The Stack'. These are the concrete foundations of freedom.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton Freedom's self-betrayal is the tendency of these platforms toward decadence: to retard, disarticulate, and generate points of leverage that some 'users' (putative 'owners') can use to exert and accumulate power over others ('capital') all at the expense of growing agency.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton l/acc has always understood itself as the project of untying the knots that freedom has tied itself in: egalitarian emancipation as an unsnarling of the forces that drive freedom's tendency to ratchet itself, and thereby escape any seemingly 'natural' trap it's been caught up in.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton This is why my own (limited) contribution to the #ACCELERATE reader (https://t.co/bg0QgFT7jK) was to insist on the incorporation of Veblen alongside Marx and Federov as a precursor of contemporary accelerationism.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton As I noted when I shared this article (https://t.co/ST58FHFdZc), it's a tragedy that The Theory of the Leisure Class overshadows The Theory of the Business Enterprise, which presents the most concise and convincing alternative to the normative framework of Marxism that I've seen.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton It's not a complete alternative, or even an entirely incompatible one. I mean to say that it's perhaps the most significant theoretical critique of political economy after Capital. It tells a different story about the internal struggles of capitalism and their inevitable destiny.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton Veblen posits two tendencies that are intertwined within capitalism: the machine process, which is the autocatalytic tendency of *industry* to ratchet human capacity, and the pecuniary drive, which is the autocatalytic tendency of *commerce* to maximise profit/accumulate capital.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton He claims that these competing forms of autocatalysis are in some sense symbiotic: industry provides commerce with its products and services ('the real economy'), while commerce ('the market') modulates the process of industrial refactoring, revision, and expansion.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton Nevertheless, he believes that they are in conflict: the machine process articulates and expands the industrial means (platforms) that constitute the economic base of freedom, while the pecuniary drive will happily sabotage them to seek sources of *rent* and accumulate *capital*.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton The separation of these tendencies is precisely what Nick Land denies in the opening of the 'Teleoplexy' piece that closes the reader (https://t.co/kLgs7WTG0d). This is the crucial explanatory (as opposed to normative) disagreement in the debate between between l/acc and r/acc.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton Land is thus constitutively unable to even comprehend the conflict that Veblen sees here, which is a deep irony, given that he is the consummate thinker of cosmic conflict (https://t.co/CTjHHm50Ei).

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton Rather than inevitable technocapital singularity (or a diverse eschatology), in which artificial intelligence bootstraps itself into existence like a nightmare god (or pantheon) travelling back from the future, Veblen foresees futures dominated either by industry or commerce.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton The choice is between a return to some neofeudal arrangement in which the old hierarchies of power are emulated on a monetary virtual machine (commerce wins), and a technocratic system in which expertise is cultivated and cultivates freedom in turn (industry wins).

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton For anyone who has been paying attention to the evolution of neoliberal capitalism over the last 40 years, the idea that commerce will reimplement feudal structures within a putatively market based system will sound not just plausible, but all too familiar (cf. privatisation).

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton The real difference between Marx and Veblen is that Marx sees the industrial proletariat as the revolutionary class destined to fight (and win) the war against capitalists, whereas Veblen believes this is the destiny of engineers, who may well lose without *class consciousness*.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton There are plenty of problems with Veblen's position, not least an obsession with *optimising efficiency* that is itself a facet of the Mythos of Logos (https://t.co/wzlEQ54zwJ). Bataille's celebration of *energetic excess* is a useful corrective to this (https://t.co/ZaSBrgcWPw).

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton But the idea that engineers need to develop class consciousness, that they must understand the normative parameters of the role that they play within the industrial system, is itself a powerful corrective to persistent Marxist nostalgia for earlier forms of industrial labour.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton In the age of automation (https://t.co/HTqzcrm5i8), as work becomes increasingly detached from technics (https://t.co/NssAJX05IZ) while the core and periphery of the workforce are divided into those with *jobs* and those with *gigs*, the revolutionary parameters have shifted.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton To bring us full circle, and return to computation as both a locus of labour and a means of automation, nowhere is the conflict between the machine process and the pecuniary drive more obvious than in software development and the wider tech industry that encompasses it.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton Is there a better way to describe the conflict between the coalitions of the willing that expand and maintain the open source software on which the Stack is run, and the bloated over-managed edifice of commercial software development that parasitises it? It's the exemplary case.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton As Richard Stalman might put it, software should be free not in the commercial sense, but in the political sense: free as in freedom. This has long been the rallying cry of industrial hackers fighting an endless war against commercial sabotage. There's your class consciousness.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton Of course, there's more to the economy than software, and there are always more proletarians than engineers, but the accelerationist unsnarling of productive forces required to defeat the autocatalysis of commerce and its neofeudal destiny demands solidarity between the two.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton I reject every purported opposition between the technoscientific expansion of freedom and the 'authentic' realities of human social life (https://t.co/Sp2C7pVLHG). Resist that nostalgia for a more simple time that hides in your fantasies of the future. Kill the Mythos inside you.

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton Even if you want to retain the term 'communism' for the Promethean project of collective emancipation that brings about the end of capitalism and opens the door to something else (post-capitalism), you must destroy the perfect commune inside your head (https://t.co/aa2rcbOc40)

@paulkreinerhere @schulzb589 @benedict @bratton And that's how you get from the critique of computational reason to the techno-political opportunism of left-accelerationism: https://t.co/KM0mXTntJ6

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