

# ALCHORISMA: Arthur Guillard reading list

## 1. Alchemical worldview as a proto-cybernetic thinking

On the first feedback loop control system, invented by lesser-known and “non-savant” alchemist Cornelis Drebbel. The alchemical oven, the Athanor, embodied a lot of elements of the alchemical worldview and prefigures cybernetic conceptions of systems and control. But it is informed by a much more animistic conception of nature! Something to consider, beyond the parallels of hermetic encrypting of recipes and modern programming.

<http://nautil.us/issue/20/creativity/the-vulgar-mechanic-and-his-magical-oven-rp>

Excerpt:

“By the time Cornelis Drebbel built an oven with a simple thermostat, one of the first manmade feedback mechanisms in history, in the 1620s, he was regarded in Europe as a magisterial, if not mad, inventor.[...] One modern scholar says Shakespeare used Drebbel as a model for Prospero, his noble sorcerer, who rules the mysterious island in *The Tempest*.[...]”

That’s remarkable about Drebbel today, other than the fact the bewitching Dutch genius is so little known, is how much he has to teach us about the birth and progress of science. He built his oven at a time when a “vital” worldview, in which inanimate objects contain living energy, forged a prelude to the mechanical age.[...]

“Drebbel’s circulating oven,” as historians of science now call it, included an early thermometer with a heat scale. It regulated itself with a feedback-control device that is a progenitor of the ubiquitous systems that regulate the air we breathe in homes, offices, trains, planes, and automobiles. His oven is one of the earliest devices that gave human control away to a machine and thus can be seen as a forerunner of the smart machine, the self-deciding automaton, the thinking robot...Drebbel’s achievement was astonishing: Informed by a piece of ancient plumbing, he invented an iconic first feedback device. His thermostat provided a seminal example for feedback-control devices of the 18th century, when inventors came up with all manner of float valves, pressure regulators, and centrifugal governors to manage steam engines. Today, feedback loops and automatic control are greatly amplified by the recursive power of digital logic and computers.[...]

Bert Hall, a retired historian of technology at the University of Toronto, compares Drebbel to Issac Newton. “Alchemical types of the period like Newton—the great magus—want everything to make sense; they want absolutes,” Hall says. “There can’t be anything extraneous. That’s one of the differences between pre-modern and modern thinking.” “As Above, So Below,” summarizes the alchemical belief that everything in the macrocosm of the universe is related to everything in the microcosm of humanity. This was the philosophy that guided Drebbel as he forged his furnace. [...]

It’s an ironic tale because Drebbel’s oven also embodies a vitalist spiritual philosophy. He was a master craftsman, but strictly mechanical inventions weren’t his goal. Drebbel always claimed to have drawn his wisdom from nature, declaring that he never read Latin or the classical authors, or enriched his writing with ancient wisdom. He regarded inventions like his oven as public demonstrations of the elemental forces of nature—earth, water, air, fire.[...]

## 2. Myth-fiction as an algorithm making itself real

This is an excerpt explaining the concept of Hyperstition. The term was coined by Nick Land (sulphurous figure, his recent works being properly Neo-reactionary), Mark Fisher and Anna Greenspan in the Cybernetic Culture Research Institute in the University of Warwick. It is somehow a mashup term between Hyper, Hype and Superstition. Hyperstition are fictions that penetrate culture and make themselves real and “Just because it’s not ‘real’ now, doesn’t mean it won’t be real at some point in the future. And once it’s real, in a sense, it’s always been” (CCRU.net). Gibson’s concept of the Cyberspace could be a simple example, first coined in his SF book “Neuromancer”, it has been embraced by the Silicon valley, being a dream of a large number of engineers working towards its realization with VR and AR. There is quite an extravagant cultural theory on how these fictions are practically infiltrating culture through feedback systems, but the Open Call’s example of the Whanganui river being legally give a person’s status could be seen through that lens. Myth-fiction as algorithm making itself real to help non-human people.

Original CCRU text: [http://xenopraxis.net/readings/ccru\\_lemuriantimewar.pdf](http://xenopraxis.net/readings/ccru_lemuriantimewar.pdf)

William Burrows original text that inspired them, specifically focusing of the figure of the Lemurs of Madagascar being considered ghosts: <http://www.williamflew.com/omni103a.html>

Excerpt of “Accelerationism, Hyperstition and Myth-Science” by the great Simon O’Sullivan. A clear introduction on hyperstition in the context of capitalistic narrative of Accelerationism that Land ended up embracing later in his career

[https://www.academia.edu/19888801/Accelerationism\\_Hyperstition\\_and\\_Myth-Science](https://www.academia.edu/19888801/Accelerationism_Hyperstition_and_Myth-Science)

### 1. Accelerationism and Hyperstition

*The future must be cracked open once again, unfastening our horizons towards the universal possibilities of the Outside.*

Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams

I want to begin this brief exploration of accelerationism and hyperstition, in relation to what I call (following Sun Ra and Mike Kelly) “myth-science”,<sup>1</sup> with a long quote from the essay ‘Escape Velocities’ by Alex Williams – one of the co-authors of the “Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics” (MAP) (Srnicek and Williams, 2014a) – that offers some proposals on what form an accelerationist aesthetics make take:

...as regards political accelerationism, what becomes crucial is the ability of a reconstituted Left to not simply operate inside the hegemonic coordinates of the possible as established by our current socioeconomic setup. To do so requires the ability to direct preexisting and at present inchoate desires for post-capitalism towards coherent visions of the future. Necessarily, given the experimental nature of such a reconstitution, much of the initial labor must be around the composition of powerful visions able to reorient populist desire away from the libidinal dead end which seeks to identify modernity as such with neoliberalism, and modernizing measures as intrinsically synonymous with neoliberalizing ones (for example, privatization, marketization, and outsourcing). This is to invoke the idea, initially coined by Land’s Cybernetic Cultural Research Unit, of *hyperstition* – narratives able to effectuate their own reality through the workings of feedback loops, generating new sociopolitical attractors. This is the aesthetic side of the task of

This is Williams' second proposal. The first, which I will return to, involves 'processes of epistemic conceptual navigation'; the third is the 'design of interfaces of control'; and the fourth and final proposal is for 'a blueprint for action in complex systems' (Williams, 2013, 9-11). Although these four are brought together under the rubric of aesthetics, we might, tentatively, also identify the different disciplinary regime each operates within: Art (the second; the long quote above), Philosophy (the first), and the last two is Design, broadly construed.

Two aspects are worth highlighting in terms of the second and more art orientated proposal for hyperstitional practices (as Williams defines them): the first is the operation of temporal feedback loops that allow a fiction to become real (for Williams this is a utopian function of an accelerationist aesthetics that helps bring about its own visions and predictions). The second is the positing of sociopolitical attractors that are generated through this process, but also, we might say, generative of it. Again, these are the different visions – but also narratives – that might contribute towards a politics of transformation (however this is understood), as well as being an outcome of this process.

To further deepen this definition we can turn to two sources. The first of these, what we might call the ur-source of accelerationist ideas on fiction, is, as Williams himself remarks, the Cybernetic culture research unit (Ccrü) set up by Sadie Plant, and then 'led' by Nick Land after her departure from academia. Here, hyperstition, as laid out on the Ccrü website, involves four inter-connected characteristics:

1. Element of effective culture that makes itself real.
2. Fictional quantity functional as a time-traveling device.
3. Coincidence intensifier.
4. Call to the Old Ones. (Ccrü website)

The first and second of these are the pre-cursors to Williams second proposal for an accelerationist aesthetics. Hyperstition, in Ccrü's definition is a fiction that makes itself real through time-travelling feedback loops: it operates as a future vision thrown back to engineer its own history. Coincidence, the third characteristic, might be said to be a secondary effect of this process (insofar as coincidence is suggestive of alternative narratives, connections through time, or what Jung calls synchronicity).

The second "source" definition, more developed and hermetic, is from the Hyperstition website, from the page "Polytics: Elements of Hyperstition". Here hyperstition involves three aspects "interlocked in a productive circuit of simultaneous, mutually stimulating tasks". Here they are in full:

1. Numogram. Rigorous systematic unfolding of the Decimal Labyrinth and all its implexes (Zones, Currents, Gates, Lemurs, Pandemonium Matrix, Book of Paths...) and echoes (Atlantean Cross, Decadology...). The methodical excavation of the occult abstract cartography intrinsic to decimal numeracy (and thus globally "oecumenic") constitutes the first great task of hyperstition.
2. Mythos. Comprehensive attribution of all signal (discoveries, theories, problems and approaches) to artificial agencies, allegiances, cultures and continentities. The proliferation of "carriers" ("Who says this?") – multiplying perspectives and narrative fragments – produces a coherent but inherently disintegrated hyperstitional mythos while effecting a positive destruction of identity, authority and credibility.

3. Unbelief. Pragmatic skepticism or constructive escape from integrated thinking and all its forms of imposed unity (religious dogma, political ideology, scientific law, common sense...). Each vortical sub-cycle of hyperstitional production announces itself through a communion with “the Thing” coinciding with a “mystical consummation of uncertainty” or “attainment of positive unbelief”. (Hyperstition website)

### 3. Towards a Non-secular Anthropocene

A very inspiring journal published by the Aarhus University Research group on the Anthropocene (AURA). [http://anthropocene.au.dk/fileadmin/Anthropocene/MORE\\_THAN\\_HUMAN\\_vol.3.pdf](http://anthropocene.au.dk/fileadmin/Anthropocene/MORE_THAN_HUMAN_vol.3.pdf)

Excerpts from the introduction:

“The third volume of the More-than-Human working paper series published by AURA – explore the uncanny valleys of the Anthropocene. They do so by asking whether we can align the rising strangeness of the nonhumans that the natural sciences study with the study of uncanny more-than-humans worlds – of ghosts, gods, spirits, specters, and other magical beings – that anthropologists conventionally study. “More-than-human” points, after all, both to the realm of the natural and to that of the supernatural. Might their meeting be understood through the lens of the unnatural, the uncanny? [...]

Climate change is the perhaps most evident example of a humancaused but also uncannily run-away process. Consider, for instance, the uncanny rift between familiar experiences of weather and the statistics of climate. The hemispheric scale of the heat meant that it began, eerily, to point to more than itself. In early July, a group of leading climate scientists hypothesized that positive feedback loops between changing climate, ocean currents, and other Earth systems could cause cascading effects that would catapult Earth into a “hothouse” state well before current predictions.[...]

Natural events have increasingly become “unnatural” by default, uncannily monstrous rather than homey and seemingly maternal (Stengers 2015). Take, the 2011 tsunami and nuclear power disaster in Japan, a disaster both natural and thoroughly unnatural (Bestor 2013). As a result, “nature” takes on the uncanny characteristics of those forms of the supernatural that never had a proper place of their own in the modern West: spirits, monsters, ghosts (Bubandt and van Beek 2011).[...]

The indestructibility of tardigrades, beings also known as “water bears”, has made them prime candidates for optomechanical experiments that seek to establish where the mind-bending laws of quantum mechanics end and the physical laws of “classical reality” begin. Dutch scientists plan to place a tardigrade on a millimeter-size silicon nitride membrane. Using a laser beam, the researchers hope to bring the membrane into an oscillation pattern that is so fast that it, and the tardigrade on it, will be pushed into a quantum superposition – a condition of being where the tardigrade would be nowhere and everywhere on the oscillation curve at the same time (Folger 2018). The tardigrade in a quantum superposition would cease to “be there” in any classical physical or common-sensical way. It would be the first biological entity to be scientifically induced into a ghostly state of pure potentiality. The possibility of a scientifically produced ghost-tardigrade begs the question: what are we, in turn, to make of the reality of magic in the face of such technology?[...]

There is, so it seems to us, an absence of sustained, empirical exploration of the ephemeral, spiritual, magical qualities of the nonhuman agency that has come to take center stage in the Anthropocene. “

**Hope you enjoy 😊**