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Editorial introduction

Speculative Technologies: Further Dreams of Technical Reason

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Abstract
Speculative technologies emerge at the intersection of imagination and scientific knowledge. The second part of this special collection provides further testimony to this. If the dream of reason gives rise to monsters, the dream of technical reason gave birth to the perpetuum mobile along with the mechanical and artistic obsessions or compulsions that came with it. It stretches all the way to the right software app that will select a soulmate to cyberfeminist theories that seek to break through ways of thinking that foreclose technological horizons. As in the first part of this special issue (the September 2024 issue of *Technology and Language*), speculative technologies serve as provocations and inspirations, pointing to new possibilities, alternate horizons, and different worlds beyond our current reality. They are not just products of speculation; they are also generators, drivers, and focalizers of speculation, instruments of subjunctivity, heralding an aesthetic transformation of society. The thirteen papers (plus several essays about Kafka's killing machine) collected in this two-part special issue examine speculative technologies through historical reconstruction, philosophical reflection, cultural-technology assessment, museological engagement, and literary experiments.

Keywords: Speculative technologies; Imagined futures; Alternative worlds

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Редакторская заметка

Спекулятивные технологии: Дальнейшие мечты о техническом разуме

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Аннотация
Спекулятивные технологии возникают на стыке воображения и научных знаний. Вторая часть этой специальной подборки статей еще раз подтверждает это. Если сновидения разума порождают чудовищ, то видения о техническом разуме породили вечный двигатель вместе с сопутствующими механическими и художественными одержимостями или внушениями. Это простирается до правильного программного обеспечении, которое подберет родственную душу, до киберфеминистских теорий, стремящихся преодолеть стереотипы мышления, которые закрывают технологические горизонты. Как и в первой части этого тематического выпуска (“Technology and Language” от сентября 2024 года), спекулятивные технологии служат провокацией и источником вдохновения, указывая на новые возможности, альтернативные горизонты и другие миры, выходящие за рамки нашей нынешней реальности. Они не просто продукты спекуляций; они также являются генераторами, движущими силами и средоточиями спекуляций, инструментами сослагательного наклонения, предвещающими эстетическую трансформацию общества. В тринадцати статьях (плюс несколько эссе о машине для убийств Кафки), собранных в тематическом выпуске, состоящем из двух частей, рассматриваются спекулятивные технологии с помощью исторической реконструкции, философских размышлений, оценки культурных техник, музееведческого взаим одействия и литературных экспериментов.

Ключевые слова: Спекулятивные технологии; Воображаемое будущее; Альтернативные миры

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We offer our readers the second block on the topic of speculative technologies (Kotomina & Milburn, 2024). It consists of six articles that offer options for understanding the historical and modern experience of interaction between people and technical objects. The authors write about both the destruction and the preservation of stereotypes regarding technologies. They qualify expectations from technical innovations as justified and unjustified and express a whole range of positions – from skeptical, ironic, and detached to didactic and visionary.

Mikhail Kulagin and Mikhail Zimirev analyze the public response to the attempt of Soviet cyberneticists Viktor Pekelis and Aksey Berg to develop a computer algorithm for finding a romantic partner in the USSR in the late 1960s. The authors found that despite the enthusiasm associated with the use of the latest technical solutions to combat loneliness, the inertia of accepted family norms and gender orders turned out to be stronger. The technological design of the "cybersvaha" and its epistemic framework served to conserve traditional notions of the family (Kulagin & Zimirev, 2025). Anna Kotomina's analysis of the case of the perpetual motion machine project, as known from the diaries of Nikolai Chernyshevsky, also exhibits the persistence of expectations from technical progress in several generations of the Russian middle class "intelligentsia." In his student project, Chernyshevsky expressed hopes that are were typically expressed in his cultural environment. This included the belief that the social order could be improved through the use of free energy generated by a perpetual motion machine (Kotomina, 2025). In the article by Alla Mitrofanova (2025), we find a conceptual approach to indicate directions for going beyond narrowly conceived framings and discussions of gender, bringing to fruition a theoretical perspective that allows for a more comprehensive formulation of scientific tasks and the organization of practices. The author reflects on a revision of the concepts of early cyberfeminism in the 90s and their continuation in the works of contemporary researchers, writers, and data analysts. These three articles are united by a desire for a retrospective critique of stereotypes regarding technology in societies. These authors consider unrealized (or not yet realized) projects as a starting point for their reflections.

Joachim Kalka (2025) offers a panorama of attempts to build a perpetual motion machine from the 18th to the 20th centuries, as reflected in the works of Johann Ernst Elias Beßler, Paul Scheerbart, Leonid Leonov, or Georg Christoph Lichtenberg. Kalka offers a close reading of the peculiar obsession to gain something from nothing, an obsession that reappears in a different guise also in contemporary emerging technologies. In their analysis of one form of contemporary technology, Aramo Álvarez, Mercedes Villalba, and Joseph Dumit assess the capacities of large language models (LLMs) to contribute to practices of affirmative co-speculation. The authors criticize the established practices of treating LLMs as reliable if not oracular tools, insisting instead on the need for deeper appreciation of the technical dimensions of LLMs, which act as repositories of unactualized but potential patterns of thought and language. These patterns become manifest by addressing not only what has been excluded or made invisible, but also what

might yet become possible when seen from another direction. To this end, the authors present a variety of ways to approach LLMs as instruments of speculation, advocating for evolving our human relationships with LLMs in new ways (Álvarez, Villalba, & Dumit, 2025). Polina Kolozaridi (2025) also stresses that a human plot or a dream precedes any technical object. Like Álvarez, Villalba, and Dumit, her article addresses human interaction with digital objects. She analyzes the instructions and interfaces of digital humanities projects to understand their attitudes toward users. Her observations lead to the conclusion that these projects primarily mediate an institutional agenda rather than provoke affirmative co-speculations, making room for new user roles and possibilities. These three articles shift the focus from the study of speculative projects to observations on the design process, and come to conclusions that can be seen as an attempt to rationalize our not always conscious attitudes toward technical and digital objects. At the critical juncture of Enlightenment and technological modernization, the discussion of speculative technologies does not end but suggests a new beginning.

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