MARXIST TRANSHUMANISM OR TRANSHUMANIST MARXISM?

CALL FOR PAPERS

For a Special Issue of: ***New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry***

Guest editors: **James Steinhoff** and **Atle Mikkola Kjøsen**

In this special issue call, *New Proposals* asks authors to explore how Marxism and Transhumanism might be brought into conjunction. Could there be a transhumanist Marxism or a Marxist transhumanism?

Transhumanism is defined by its proponents as an "*intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities*" (Humanity+ n.d.). While this description says nothing about politics, transhumanism has been deeply pro-capital due to its popularization in the 1990s via techno-libertarian "extropianism" (More 1990). Because of this, the promethean project of improving the human condition by technological means tends to be joined with, and confused for, capital accumulation. Some of the most radical transhumanist thinkers have tended to assume to continued functioning of capital amid cataclysmic socio-technological change. For example, although transhumanist luminary Ray Kurzweil argues that the coming technological singularity (the moment when machines exceed human capacities in all respects) will irreversibly transform every aspect of human life, and even "death itself," he still expects there to be a need for "business models" (2005, 7). Today, transhumanism is tacitly represented in the operations of venture capitalists and the giant tech capitals. DeepMind, acquired by Google in 2014, seeks to "solve intelligence" by creating AI with generalized learning abilities and Elon Musk's Neuralink aims to provide a seamless machine connection to the human brain.

However, transhumanism is not inherently incompatible with Marxist thought and communism. While transhumanism today appears to be a capitalist project, its historical lineage can be traced back to early twentieth century socialist thinkers such as Alexander Bogdanov, J. B. S Haldane, and J. D. Bernal (Bostrom 2005; Stambler 2010; Hughes 2012). Marx himself has many, what we might call "high modernist" moments in which he argues for overcoming human and natural limits, and advocates the socialized use of technology to achieve freedom from necessity for all humans. This high modernist Marx can be read as expressing a

transhumanist impulse toward technologically augmenting the human condition (Steinhoff 2014). With a few exceptions (Armesilla Conde 2018), Marxists have shown little interest in transhumanism, other than as an object of critique (Rechtenwald 2013; Noonan 2016). One exception to this are the left accelerationists/postcapitalism theorists, who draw on transhumanist motifs, such as cyborg augmentation, terraforming and full automation (Srnicek and Williams 2015; Mason 2016; Bastani 2019). Left accelerationism has, however, picked up transhumanist motifs while dropping the capital/labour antagonism central to Marxist thought, glossing over much of the difficult question of how exactly capital is supposed to come to an end. We suggest that left accelerationism forgets its Marxist roots as it is blinded by transhumanist futures.

We argue that the issues central to transhumanism should not be the purview solely of representatives of capital like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel, nor of the left accelerationists. Instead, Marxist thought should seriously engage with transhumanism in order to "decouple it from its blindly capitalist trajectory, reflect on Marx's own high modernist tendencies, and delineate a social project to embrace or escape" (Dyer-Witheford, Kjosen & Steinhoff, 2019, 161). Therefore we ask how a Marxist transhumanism or a transhumanist Marxism might be possible.

For this special issue of *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry* we are interested in contributions that engage transhumanism and Marxism with one another. We are not interested in Marxist dismissals of transhumanism. That is not to say that we do not welcome Marxist critiques of transhumanism. We are, however, seeking critiques which take at least some elements of the theory and/or practice of transhumanism seriously from within a Marxist framework.

Possible topics include:

- Syntheses of transhumanism and Marxism
- Transhumanism and value theory (e.g. engagement with core concepts like social form, labour-power, the working day, surplus-value etc.)
- Critically engaging with and/or embracing the high modernist moments in Marx's thought
- Staking out a communist approach to transhumanism and/or the singularity (e.g. a communist version of Kurzweil's intelligence explosion)
- Engaging with the transhumanist kernel in left-accelerationist thought from a Marxist perspective
- Engaging with transhumanist projects or technologies from a Marxist perspective (e.g. radical life extension, terraforming, morphological freedom, space exploration, genetic modification,

- nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, intelligence augmentation, brain emulation)
- Connecting transhumanism to the history of Marxist thought and socialist societies (e.g. Soviet space endeavours, central planning)

Please send abstracts of no more than 500 words in length, plus a short biography, to Dr. James Steinhoff (jsteinh@uw.edu) and Dr. Atle Mikkola Kjøsen (atlemk@gmail.com) by **February 29th, 2020**. Please put "New Proposals special issue" in the subject line. Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by March 31st, 2020. Full-length papers are 5,000 - 10,000 words.

Timeline:

29 February - deadline for submitting abstract and biography.

31 March - notifications of acceptance

1 August - deadline for submission of full-length (5,000 to 10,000 words) paper for peer review

15 November - submission of final revised paper

Early 2021 - papers published.

Please note that acceptance of an abstract does not guarantee publication. All submissions will be peer reviewed once papers are submitted.

References

Armesilla Conde, Santiago Javier. 2018. Is a Marxist Transhumanism possible? Eikasía – Revista de Filosofía 82, 47-86.

Bastani, Aaron. 2019. Fully automated luxury communism. Verso Books.

Bostrom, Nick. 2005. "A history of transhumanist thought". Journal of Evolution & Technology 14:1.

Dyer-Witheford, Nick, Kjosen, Atle Mikkola and Steinhoff, James. 2019. Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism. London: Pluto Press.

Hughes, James J. 2012. "The Politics of Transhumanism and the Techno-Millennial Imagination, 1626–2030". Zygon 47:4, 757-776.

Humanity+. n.d.. "What is transhumanism?" https://whatistranshumanism.org/

Kurzweil, Ray. 2005. The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology. Penguin.

Mason, Paul. 2016. Postcapitalism: A guide to our future. Macmillan.

More, Max. 1990. "Transhumanism: Towards a futurist philosophy." Extropy 6:6, 11.

Noonan, Jeff. 2016. "The Debate on Immortality: Posthumanist Science vs. Critical Philosophy". The European Legacy 21:1, 38-51.

Rechtanwald, Michael. 2013. "The Singularity and Socialism." Insurgent Notes. http://insurgentnotes.com/2013/10/the-singularity-and-socialism/

Srnicek, Nick, and Alex Williams. 2015. Inventing the future: Postcapitalism and a world without work. Verso Books.

Stambler, Ilia. 2010. "Life extension – a conservative enterprise? Some fin-de-siècle and early twentieth-century precursors of transhumanism. '' Journal of Evolution & Technology 21:1, 13-26.

Steinhoff, James. 2014. "Transhumanism and Marxism: Philosophical Connections". Journal of Evolution & Technology 24:2, 1-16.

student feature articles, or for book reviews, commentaries or reflections of 5,000 words or less. If you have any questions please contact us. We fundamentally support the principles of full open access in academic publishing. It does cost money to do this, even as we rely upon a lot of good will, volunteer labour, and self-exploitation to get the publication out the door. Any support or assistance is always appreciated!

Special issue editors:

Dr. James Steinhoff is a UW Data Science Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Washington. He researches the artificial intelligence industry, data science labour, Marxist theory and automation. He is author of the forthcoming book *Automation and Autonomy: Labour, Capital and Machines in the Artificial Intelligence Industry* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) and co-author of *Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism* (Pluto Press 2019). .

Dr. Atle Mikkola Kjøsen is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario. He researches Marxist value theory, media theory, logistics, artificial intelligence, androids, and post-singularity capitalism. With Nick Dyer-Witheford and James Steinhoff, he is co-author of *Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism (*Pluto Press 2019).

Relevant Papers on Marxism and Transhumanism by Glenn Rikowski:

Marxist Education Across the Generations: a Dialogue on Education, Time and Transhumanism (with Derek Ford) (2019)
https://www.academia.edu/40309329/Marxist_Education_Across_the_Generations_a_Dialogue_on_Education_Time_and_Transhumanism

Capitorg: Education and the Constitution of the Human in Contemporary Society (2011)
https://www.academia.edu/5985145/Capitorg_Education_and_the_Constitution_of_the_Human_in_Contemporary_Society

Alien Life: Marx and the Future of the Human (2003)
https://www.academia.edu/10986589/Alien_Life_Marx_and_the_Future_of_the_Human

Education, Capital and the Transhuman (2002)
https://www.academia.edu/9033532/Education_Capital_and_the_Transhuman

Marx and the Future of the Human (2000)
https://www.academia.edu/6043714/Marx_and_the_Future_of_the_Human

END
Posted here by **Glenn Rikowski**
Glenn Rikowski @ Academia:
http://independent.academia.edu/GlennRikowski
Ruth Rikowski @ Academia: http://lsbu.academia.edu/RuthRikowski
Glenn Rikowski @ ResearchGate:
http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Glenn_Rikowski