

Transhumanism?

Apocalypse Soon?

John Zerzan

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Transhumanism, which rarely rates a mention in the media, suddenly had a brief moment of infamy recently due to the reported interest in it by the late, evil, child sex trafficker, Jeffrey Epstein.

Transhumanism claims that by utilizing technology it can artificially enhance the human body, and, if pursued far enough, will solve everything including victory over death, as futurist Ray Kurzweil and others promise. It involves a headlong leap of faith, viewing advanced technology as a transcendent breakthrough. Bio-ethicist Amy Michelle Debaets termed transhumanism “the Rapture of the geeks.”

There are grounds for imagining transhumanism becoming much more mainstream. For one thing, we live in desperate times, in an ever more technological world. It is already apparent that technology now makes claims and promises that political ideology once provided. The political has faded hugely, so people turn elsewhere for help with their lives, present and future.

Technology has stepped into this vacuum with full force, and shows no signs of diminishing in its impact. Transhumanism is an extreme outgrowth, but certainly shares roots with the idea that technology is linked to human betterment. Transhumanism derives from the projections of Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment. The Brave New World of techno-science will banish superstition and intolerance. It will save us.

Luciana Parisi, who writes about technology in culture, aesthetics and politics, notes that this new approach that began half a millennium ago, was comprised of tools, but involved much more, amounting to a “new means of governance.”

Now, transhumanism points to a technological singularity, a point when technology reaches a plateau of such qualitative power defined by development of artificial general intelligence that it creates a “runaway reaction” of self-improvement cycles so as to Fix Everything. With that threshold, technology defines all and overcomes any problems.

Never mind the fact that as technology has raced forward since its earliest development, almost everything has gotten worse: rising suicide rates, more chronic illness, declining lifespans, for example. Not everything should be seen in the light of over-arching technology, but it does proclaim itself to really have all the answers. We are arguably closing in on cyborg status, already somewhat transhuman in a prosthetic life-world. More and more, we depend on implants, drugs, and the rest of high-tech engineering.

Politically, transhumanism tends toward libertarianism, but there is at least one leftist version, which is Fully Automated Luxury Communism(!) put forth in a manifesto by Aaron Bastani, from Britain’s Novara Media. FALC, which announces it is “beyond work, scarcity and capitalism,” is very optimistic regarding the technological miracles of the techno-future, with most of the same delusions and huge blind spots as transhumanism in general.

Setting the stage for transhumanist advance on a more basic level is the sense that a tech future is inevitable, inescapable. McKenzie Wark, author of *A Hacker Manifesto and Gamer Theory*, advocates a cyborg future for us all, noting that “the time for extracting ourselves from techno-modernity as a radical act has passed”—as if she ever questioned techno-modernity, radically or otherwise.

In the August 2019 edition of *The Atlantic*, war criminal Henry Kissinger and two co-authors announced, “The Metamorphosis,” the “unstoppable” artificial intelligence/algorithm revolution that we must adjust to. Similarly, in a conversation with Donna Haraway, Professor Emerita in the History of Consciousness Department at U-C, Santa Cruz, counseled me to play the game and not oppose it.

There seems to be a strange emptiness regarding the promises of Savior Technology. It claims to free us from so much, even death, but what it is for is not on offer except as a merely technological transaction.

How much is deeply missing when technology is the be-all and end-all of existence, the measure of every so-called advance?

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