

TRANSHUMANISM and THE POST OBJECT ECONOMY:

PART1

A QUOTIENT OF EMPATHY

Jim Prentice jimprentice@optusnet.com.au 03-2013 CRAFT www.crafters-circle.com Issue 3
Transhumanism

INTRODUCTION

Production of the people, for the people, by the people is our future. At least that's one idea with support in high places. It means that in the not- too distant- future, we may literally design ourselves. This will be our principal economic activity. In the way that we produce manufactured goods, and increasingly services and knowledge, it will be us instead who will be produced as post-humans, according to Transhumanism ¹.

The processes of production imply not subjects – people with individuality, but rather objects as in production of 'widgets' but then to reclaim our humanity we need to look beyond such 'objects' thus the term 'post object'. However to highlight this deep contention within that implication I call this human producing society a post – object economy. The production of a subject is what Transhumanists hope for, I think. I say 'I think' because they do not explore this contention well, especially at the societal level.

Exploring the coming Post Object Economy

What Transhumanism implies, this essay places in the contexts of; society, values, community and democracy, cultural and intellectual conflicts. This placement in context includes material about our current identities, and common risks. It is possible neither actual subject nor a liveable society emerges from the Transhumanist ideas, if we will search in the essay for possible meeting points between contemporary views of the good , democratic, risk limited society, and explore Transhumanist implications.

This contention about subjects or objects retains a central theme. Subjects are people who are living, feeling, and thinking and further described by complex other descriptions of a life, lived in a context. We are not objects in normal parlance. This is not some simple dispute about the meaning of words – but rather in here I think lays the central problem or contradiction in Transhumanism.

I suggest that a post object economy will deliver us not only opportunities but also conflict. Such a society lends itself to secrecy and authoritarianism, utopianism, exclusivism and cultural demolition of the democratic tradition and almost unequalled risk of "technical" failure. Yet our society faces obstacles from many directions. The assessment of Transhumanism, I attempt by looking at where our society faces sustained stress and criticism in terms of its democratic character and the

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<https://www.google.com.au/search?q=singularity+university&aq=f&og=singularity+university&aqs=chrome.0.57j0l3j62l2.9221&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8S>.

likelihood of it leading us to a better life. This better life I place within current broad cultural debates about rationality and its failings. Transhumanism may be both a final straw and/or possible solution.

We already face profound risks in climate, resources and population which Transhumanism might address or exacerbate. How does Transhumanism apply itself to future risk now evident in our societies say of overpopulation, of poverty, of democratic participation, of the Nation State and its discontents? Risk here relates to its own and those emerging in the environment with resource depletion, population increases and with climate change. The Transhumanist project currently emerges following conventional but inevitably risky technological innovations. We cannot let these innovations slip under the radar as we have before – I discuss some examples in this essay. We are barely aware of how quickly science takes us to new places and technology.

Once used to a technology, our fears tend to wash away. First we were unsure of the device - now we can't do without it. I think this is naive in the extreme in regards to the Transhumanist project. Where does Transhumanism align with or address such problems of contemporaneous society, ecology or is it a mesmeric transformation of everything...in a nano second perhaps? Implications and consequences, I think are not well considered.

Yet we produce extraordinary objects like spacecraft and smart phones able to diagnose our blood. These are objects we surround ourselves with and some such enhancements end inside us like heart pacemakers or antibiotics. Why shouldn't we redesign ourselves? I want to show it looks that these contentions carries more than a debate about our purely material character. Although, I might add to emphasise the difficulties in the Transhumanist project , new 'human materials' may emerge. These appearing indefinitely presumably –like the finding of dark matter has for astronomy recently.

Subject object dimensions flow in many directions to; self, society, to the limits of technology and its implementation and risk, and the problem of the unknown. Such are central elements to this idea of such a post-object society emerging without adequate consideration. It encourages my view that Transhumanism is evidence of forward thinking or the strategies of leading edges of a global corporate class planning future strategy, where negotiation is a minor element – naturally. Yet the future is frightening anyway. Transhumanism might yet prove the antidote administered near the precipice of climate, overpopulation, depleted democratic faiths and depleted resources. My task then, in this article, and indeed one this issue of CRAFT likewise commits to, is to cast, against these risks, both, the intricacies of deep democracy and the complicated and the now vastly extended inheritance in sciences and technologies of microscopy and miniaturisation in Transhumanism. The aim is to find what changes in both democracy and Transhumanism we might consider and so to apply them to my life and that of my community.

How can Transhumanism then, meet these criticisms and opportunities?

In our heuritic or active response, we must demand public scrutiny, build open discussion and resist the deeply confronting intention to marry human and machine until it meets our satisfaction – if it can. This essay hopes to not only provide some of the concepts and tools of resistance to this project of Transhumanism but also place it in a context indicating where it may help us should it meet such criticisms.

Generally, I see Transhumanism as skirting the major questions about self, society and democracy highly relevant to this project of our transformation. We need to assess Transhumanism on many levels not only inclusive of, but also beyond the functionality of such newly augmented beings. I adopt a holistic approach to that broader assessment. Therefore one way of seeing the tensions in the Transhumanist project is to see its inevitable consequences as a new economy and society, a post object one, which produces subjects.

My conclusions about the accommodation between enlivened and more risk averse democracy and Transhumanism remain weak on optimism but I intend an engagement of ideas and praxis between unlikely allies, which nevertheless I hope is fruitful and hopeful.

Post-humans, we might call each other soon, fondly or not. If it sounds extraordinary then I share your natural resistance and reticence. If it sounds plausible in certain circumstances, I with many, with many reservations, agree. This essay sets out a road map of plausibility, one that I am also seeking to follow on a personal level, which is critical, doubtful but still open. It's a map whose contours are society, the individual and culture and especially democracy. I believe democracy should be taken seriously.

Readers Note: References for all of Dr Jim Prentice's articles are included in one document under the tile 'references'.