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BOOK REVIEW
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Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism

by Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjosen and James Steinhoff, London, Pluto Press, 2019, 210 pp., £16.99, ISBN: 9780745338606

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Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism, written by Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjosen, and James Steinhoff, offers a salient probe to re-examine the complex development of artificial intelligence. Contrary to the naive approach, which treats AI as a neutral and independent technological/scientific development, the study considers it a phenomenon penetrating various economic, social, and cultural structures and potentially transforming them radically. It cultivates a comprehensive and profound approach to grasping the overlooked aspects of the knotty and vibrant relationship between AI and social processes by drawing and reinterpreting critical concepts of Marxist theory, such as surplus value, labour power, relations of production and surplus-population. Furthermore, as its title underscores, aside from the implications of the current and limited AIs, the book also makes room for the authors' staid and rigorous assumptions about what shape it will take in the future and how it will relate to the metabolism of capitalism.

The work encloses the introduction, conclusion, and three substantive chapters. The introduction covers a detailed overview of the main arguments of the study and a scattering of some other key leftist theories and stances on AI that the authors engage in polemic and dialogue throughout the book. The chapter mentions two prominent positions on AI, one of them is "minimalist," believing that the transformative power and social effects of AI are overstated; the other is "maximalist," the approach that attaches great importance to the impact of AI and asserts that it will be considered as a transitional tool from capitalism to socialism (pp. 4-8). However, instead of seeking an intermediate course to reconcile these two threads, the authors have sought to ameliorate a perspective that undermines their conventional and reductionist premises that there is a direct relationship between technological development and social change. They accentuate the significance of designing a more dynamic analysis that spotlights AI as a reflection of class struggle, commodification, and inter-capitalist competition, by referencing the pieces of Marx, who underlined that mechanization and automation could create a range of historical contingents that are both repressive and emancipatory (pp. 15-21).

The first chapter sheds light on the complex interactions between hegemonic actors who want to manipulate and control the blossoming of AI and their near-future ambitions. It fundamentally argues that the expansion of the AI sector in the 2010s, which emerged in the 1980s but catered to a minimal scope, is related to the drive of machine intelligence monopoly and oligopoly companies to acquire "a whole new level of automation that gives capital unprecedented independence from labour" (p. 32). Moreover, state actors seeking to attain an edge over rival nations in terms of national security (pp. 39-42) and other small entrepreneurs and firms are also among the active agencies of such development. In addition, the study summons the neglected category of *the general means of production* that Marx operates to portray the technologies, institutions, and practices that carve out the

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framework/infrastructure within which capitalist production occurs in a particular time and place (pp. 46-52). According to the authors, it is possible to encounter indicators that AI will articulate the general production conditions as a result of the actions of these actors and will replace the production infrastructure of the post-Fordist era.

The second chapter is devoted to revealing the manifold relationship between AI and employment issues by challenging the stereotypical view that market mechanisms can solve the unemployment problem independently. In contrast to the optimistic ideas of autonomist Marxist theorists who proclaim that capital is always doomed to human labour, the book puts forward the detrimental facets of the ever-expanding current AI industry for the proletariat. Except for a few AI experts and qualified technical workers with relatively high wages and comfortable workspaces, big tech's considerable investments have begun to lead to more fluctuating employment patterns in favour of labour-repressed capital (pp. 75-79). By the same token, the programmers paradoxically produce AIs algorithms that can replace them after a particular time. What is more, the authors touch upon not only the quantitative consequences of AI on employment but also its overshadowed qualitative dimensions. For instance, on the one hand, following the basic requirements of the spatial organization of capital (pp. 80-81), the expansion of AI can have different supportive functions such as financial circulation, panoptic surveillance, and job training; on the other hand, it can reproduce gendered and racialized structural inequalities (pp. 93-97).

The third chapter drags us into a fictional future scenario dominated by artificial general intelligence (AGI), which has the ability to perform various tasks with its flexible reasoning skills in unfamiliar domains. Even though Marx's anthropocentric assumptions, which hold that only human labour is the creator of value, are no longer valid due to the shreds of evidence of contemporary ethology, the way in which he forms his argument has some vital points to examine the ontological status of AGI labour (pp. 115-118). What Marx evaluates as the hallmarks of human practices, such as creativity, ability to learn, adaptability, and imagination, may become characteristics of AGI in the long run. Thus, AGI could undermine the undisputed and omnipotent position of homo sapiens by becoming the subject of capitalist proletarianization from the form of fixed capital (pp. 135-138). In the conclusion part, the authors speculatively discuss the possibilities of communist AIs technology as an alternative to its capitalist counterpart. Contrary to the theses of the left-wing accelerationists and post-capitalists, they suggest that current/future AI's capability to dope out complex economic planning problems can be misleading to consider as a contributory tool for a direct transition to socialism. Namely, they believe that communist AI could be materialized by assembling new collective property regulations and radical political agendas that facilitate the incorporation of the proletariat and subordinated groups into AI production and regulation processes rather than liberal prescriptions that combine universal basic income and AI or other human essentialist reforms.

Given the book's crucial contributions, one of the robust points is its masterful blending of explanatory concepts and approaches from Marxist critique with AI studies. Although there are diversified studies on cybernetic capitalism and digital labour in the literature, the aforementioned soundness side acquires even more value because there are few critical research centres around AI. Another key contribution is that it can offer more prudential speculative assumptions, in contrast to some of the relatively reductionist and generalizing theories and understandings with which it polemicizes. Even though the authors acknowledge that pessimistic outcomes may be more conceivable, they figure out that various actors' practices of resistance and domination will shape the future relationship between AI and capitalism. Therefore, the study demystifies that the possible outcomes cannot be divided into emancipatory and oppressive for the people.

Moreover, the book's strengths are not limited only to the content. The fact that science-fiction books are considered fruitful sources for the future imaginations of people in a specific historical period, rather than just as vulgar examples of popular culture, has made the book more potent in

terms of method and source usage. However, it is also feasible to plead that it has some minor limitations. For example, it could have delivered more profound and detailed arguments for the impact of AI on climate issues, which it noted in the last chapter. Nevertheless, I believe this does not harm the weight of its insightful arguments.

Consequently, *Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism* is an intellectual project that expands our understanding of artificial intelligence's current and possible future economic and social impacts coalesced into capitalist logic through a critical lens. Thus, it can be regarded as a guidebook not only for the relevant academic circle but also for laypeople who want to glance at this widespread issue in light of more resounding and nuanced perspectives.

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