

Capitalism's Failure of the Flesh: The Rise of the Robots

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Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

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Humankind, being an inherently tool-making species, has always been in a relationship with technology. Our tools, weapons, machines, and appliances are crucial to forging the cultural criteria of human life. At present, amid the technology created phantomscape of mass media's lurid — yet somehow sterile — imagery, one can feel as if one's mind is in danger of being churned to spittle.

On a personal note, an informal consensus has formed among my friends who share a passion for reading: We read far fewer books since the time we became enmeshed with the internet. Worse, we find the feelings of isolation that we have attempted to mitigate by an immersion in online activity, at best, provides only a palliative effect. Yet, in the manner of addiction — or a hopeless love affair — we are prone to trudge deeper into the psychical morass by further immersion into the very source that is exacerbating our feelings of unease and ennui.

Yet we insist on remaining mentally epoxied to electronic appliances, as the oceans of our technology besieged planet die, as the atmosphere is choked with heat-holding greenhouse gas emissions, and, as a result, exquisite, living things disappear forever.

Therefore, it is crucial to explore why we are so isolated from each other but so connected to our devices, and are married to the belief system that misinforms us, technology can and will lift us from our increasingly perilous predicament. When reality dictates, if the past remains prologue, a fetishising of technology will further enslave us in a de facto technodystopia. A reassessment, for numerous reasons, of the relationship between humankind and technology must come to pass.

Moreover, the reevaluation must include machines, at present and in the future, we have created in our own image. For example, those such as AI technologies, that on an increasing basis, will cause a significant number of the workforce to be rendered idle.

Of course, it is a given, bottomline obsessives that they are, capitalists crave to replace workers with an automated labor force. The parasitic breed has always viewed workers as flesh machines, of whom, they were inconvenienced by having to pay wages. Capitalism is, by its very nature, dehumanising. From the advent of the industrial/capitalist epoch, the system has inflicted mass alienation, societal atomisation, and anomie. Moreover, the vast wealth inequity inherent to the system allows the capitalist elite to own the political class — a mindless clutch of flunkies who might as well be robots programmed by the capitalist order to serve their agendas.

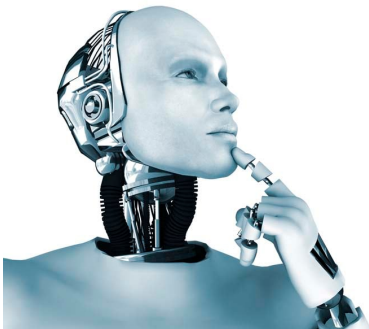
The question is, what effect will the nature of being rendered superfluous to the prevailing order have on the powerless masses — who have, up until now, been kept in line by

economic coercion, by meretricious, debt-incurring consumer bribes, and by mass media indoctrination and pop culture anaesthesia? Will consumers continue to insist that their mental chains are the very wings of freedom?

Yet the Age Of Mass Mechanisation carries the potential to bestow an era of liberty, artistic exploration, scientific inquiry, intellectual fervour, the pursuit of soul-making, and inspired leisure. Or the polar shift in cultural *raison d'être* might inflict a crisis of identity so harrowing that demagogues rise and despots promise to seed a new order but harvest the corpses of dissidents and outsiders.

A couple of weeks back, during a visit to a neighbourhood playground with my four year old, I had a conversation with an executive on voluntary leave from her management position at BMW (Bayerische Motoren Werke). She was grouching about a infestation of seaweed choking the beaches of the Florida Keys she had encountered on a recent excursion to the US. When I averred the phenomenon of the warming oceans of the planet, the progenitor of the exponential growth of the sea flora she had been troubled by, was caused, in large measure, by the very socio-economic-cultural dynamic that financed her trip to Florida in the first place...well, it put a crimp in the conversation.

It can be unsettling to be confronted with one's complicity in the ills of a system that, by its very nature, provides camouflage to its perpetrators — the big bosses, down to its functionaries, and foot soldiers. Soon, she, by a series of subtle moves, extricated herself from the conversation — and I cannot say I blame her. I myself experienced discomfort by the thought of the discomfort I inflicted on her. Therefore, as a general rule, under the tyranny of amiability, which is the rule of the day of the present order, one is tempted to avoid trespassing into the comfort zones that aid in enabling the status quo.



Yet we are faced with the following imperative: The system and its machines must begin to serve humanity, as opposed to what has been the case since the advent of the industrial/technological age: the mass of humanity serving the machine. Therefore, there must arrive a paradigmatic shift in metaphors and the ethos of the era e.g., a renunciation of the soul-decimating concept of human beings as flesh machines — who must, for the sake of monomaniacal profiteering, divorce themselves from human feeling, as well as, must forgo exploration, enthusiasm, and craft in the pursuit of expediency.

We do have a choice in the matter, all indications to the contrary. Yet, in the prevailing confusion regarding what ethos should guide our relationship to technology, we are confronted with phenomenon such as the situation chronicled in a recent article in [The Guardian](#). Headlined: “The Sex Robots Are Coming: seedy, sordid - but mainly just sad”

Regarding the supercilious nature of the headline, wouldn't it be more propitious for all concerned to ask and explore why, under the present order, men are so alienated, socially

awkward and lonely, as opposed to lapsing into all the predictable moral panic, wit-deficient snark, and supercilious value judgments these sorts of stories evoke?

Isn't being attracted to consumer goods what it is all about, identity-wise, under the present order? Don't customers demand that the de facto slaves of the service industry evince the demeanour of compliant androids? Isn't it a given that the underclass workforce, holders of service industry jobs, will soon be replaced by robots? Do we not worship and are ruled by the gospel of the cult of efficiency?

Withal, for the present order to be maintained, it is crucial for the general public to remain both alienated thus using consumerism as a palliative, and that includes the production and retailing of sexualised, simulacrum appliances that mimic sex partners and the psychical release valve of finger-wagging, easy virtue and shallow vitriol aimed at the poor sods who seek comfort from them.

Addendum: I'm much more mortified by robotics designed for surveillance and war than for one's designed for simulacrum sex. I'm simply beastly that way.

Robots can be programmed to simulate copulation but it is doubtful that machines can be tuned and tweaked to experience the manifold, complex states of being that define human consciousness and its innate ability for self expression, for example, the ability to express themselves by means of spontaneous generated metaphors. While it is true, AI technologies can mimic forms of poetic and artistic expression but, in any honest account of the processes they utilise, machines engage in the activity sans a depth of feeling, the facility to evince empathy and the ability to access imagination i.e., the phenomenon we human beings term soulfulness. Sans the ineffable quality of soul, AI entities, as is the case with our present information technology, will contribute the palliative, yet inherently alienating, effects inherent to our hyper-commodified era.

In contrast, writers/artists/activists must proceed to dangerous places. It is imperative that they descend into the danger zone known as the soul. The soul is not a realm inhabited by weightless beings radiating beatific light. Rather, it is a landscape of broken, wounded wanderers; inchoate longing; searing lamentation; the confabulations of imperfect memory; of rutting and rage; transgression; depression; fragmented language; and devouring darkness.

The reductionist metaphors inherent to the age of mechanisation — which limn human beings in mechanised, commodified terms — as opposed to the organic, unfolding pantheon composed of needs, longings and desires we are — inflicts not only alienation from our fellow human beings but from our essential natures. In our misery and confusion, we have bloated our bodies, maimed and poisoned the earth, and scoured the hours of our lives of meaning by the compulsive commodification of all things. Therefore it should not come as a surprise when alienated, lonely men become enamoured of glambots.

We have delivered insult after insult to the soul of the world, and yet it loves us with an abiding and bitter grace. The question remains, do we love it in turn, and deeply enough, to mount a resistance to the present order thus turn the tide against the love-bereft forces responsible for the wholesale destruction of both landscape and soulscape.

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