

Human Satellites and Creative Extension

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This is a response to Lyudmila A. Markova's engaging piece on "The Humanisation of the Surrounding World and the Technisation of Humans." She notes at the start that "several interesting topics" (49) have recently been posted on SERRC, which she says are interdependent and which "cannot be considered without referring to the others" (49). I agree with her on this, though I would like to have (or to still see) included cybernetics and systems theory as well, even though their reputation is not always stellar in some contexts.

On the issue of human rights for animals, I guess I'm just not Singerian enough or 'species egalitarian' in a Darwinian sense. Markova states her position, saying "I believe that it is impossible to spread human laws into the animal world" (51). She notes that this is a disagreement with Steve Fuller's position of extending (i.e. stretching out) rights to animals, though I'm not sure if this is the case or not. Her position is that "Human rights should not be considered desirable for all animals." But this can be challenged if the boundaries between humans and animals disappear, or if they are re-imagined, closer for example to an Indigenous worldview where humans and animals are traditionally more symbiotic. I'd be pleased to hear more about Fuller's current position on this, as I had thought in *The New Sociological Imagination (NSI)*; see also Sandstrom 2008) that he had taken a stance opposed to Singer's accusation of 'speciesism,' the Darwinisation and biological reductionism of some human-social thought, wherein humanity is considered as a kind of 'endangered species.'

Fuller has an intriguing concept duo that he uses to describe some of the more extreme deep ecology literature: 'zoocentric misanthropy' (2006). However, what does 'misanthropy' mean the way Fuller uses it if he is now suggesting the lines between human and non-human are blurrier than they once appeared, at least according to the anthropic worldview's background context that human beings are created *imago Dei*? Is zoocentrism giving way to technocentrism in the technisation of humanity?

Can a non-human somehow 'become' a human, whether (other) animal or machine? In other words, what is a 'candidate person' or 'candidate being'? The only way I could see anything like this is if the categories 'human' and 'person' lose their historical meaning in the anthropic worldview and slip into a karmic worldview, again to use Fuller's chosen terms in *NSI*. Of course the opposite has always been thought possible, that a human being could become non-human or at least become 'inhumane,' which carries a slightly different meaning. In social epistemology, the term 'dehumanisation' enters the conversation as well, along animalistic or mechanistic lines.

"We do not need to make a monkey similar to a human" (50), says Markova. Thus, to flip the Darwinian paradigm on its head, and much of the emotive iconography that goes with it, we also do not need to make a human similar to a monkey, which Darwin did and many others still do 150 years later. What I find refreshing in Markova's language, is that several times she uses the term 'creation' and speaks of 'creators' and 'authors,' but she

is not doing this in the USAmerican ‘creationist’ context. Thus, Markova asks the challenging vertical question, which Fuller seems to advocate also in his writings on Intelligent Design theory: “Can we understand everything as if it was created and as if it has an author” (49)? This seems to be part of a broader discourse between science, philosophy and theology/worldview, in which Fuller’s work plays a significant role in a proactionary way.

In regard to “The Possibility of the Mind’s Existence Outside the Human Body” (50), this is where I see the dilemma as largely semantic, at least in one respect. If cognition is not just “all inside the head,” as Theiner noted in our interview, then is what’s outside the head, just a different kind of ‘head,’ or something else entirely? There are ideas like the ‘Global Brain’ that are being pushed by cyberneticians, network theorists, media ecologists, Gaia theorists and various others, sometimes linked with parapsychology, the ‘noosphere,’ etc. I think the key here is to be found in interdisciplinary approaches that escape from the silos that have been created in the late-modern Academy, especially the (largely western) notion that ‘natural’ is fundamental and scientific while ‘social’ is derivative and merely artistic. But the question remains: Would that something then still be ‘human’ or would it not then become something else by definition?

Markova notes her agreement with Fuller, which I share, “that our natural biological makeup is not a foundation of humanity” (52) citing Fuller’s words with strong implications against scientism to the effect that “the secret to what makes us ‘human’ is not going to be found in our biology” (“Crediting People: An Exchange”, 2014).

What then is this secret? Let me make a bold suggestion to encourage conversation.

What if we are all satellites? This requires a type of M-dimensional thinking that the ‘globalisation’ era enables. We all ‘revolve’ (contra ‘evolve’) around the Earth in our own ways; at least our thoughts (and our spirits, if one includes that language) extend continually from place-to-place and from person-to-person, if not as often or widespread our bodies. And additionally, our thoughts (and spirits) are now able to cover vast periods of time, e.g. the Big History perspective, redefining the limits of physical human bodies and shared knowledge.

This move distinguishes itself from the ‘collective intelligence’ approach in that satellites are all also still ‘individual’ entities, even when taken within a global-universal orbital setting. That is, unless all of the human satellites are being mechanically controlled or programmed by a single Mother ship, rather than as a spaceship Earth as McLuhan called it, on which we are not passengers, but crew. My view of humans-as-satellites reflects McLuhan’s (1970) provocative statement:

When we put satellites around the planet Darwinian nature ended. The earth became an artform subject to the same programming as media networks and their environments. The entire evolutionary process shifted at the moment of Sputnik, from biology to technology. Evolution became not an involuntary response of organisms to new conditions but part of the consensus of human consciousness.

This conceptualisation also coincides with Markova's observation, and notably also Teilhard de Chardin's, that as creations we are "as a unique and autonomous entity with its own properties and rights" (49-50). The notion of humans-as-satellites would seem to fit with Markova's idea that the "[t]races of human thinking" (52) can be found both in the created world and in [human-made] machines; traces of satellites as traces of creation, so to speak. And the tracing out-/in- seems to be consistent with both art and science as ways of knowing and being, as with Markova's suggestion of the "human environment as a thinking world" and of Fuller's view of biology as "divine technology" within the anthropic worldview.

In any case, let me not presume to speak either for Markova or Fuller, but rather simply to offer it here as a contribution to SERRC's project of international and interdisciplinary dialogue, inviting your thoughts to what might seem as a fantastically inappropriate conjecture.

I'll only briefly address Markova's section on the social and political relations among humans, although the comments about multiculturalism reach me necessarily as a Canadian citizen (cf. Canada's Constitution Act, 1982 and Multiculturalism Act, 1988), with her view that it means "cultures lose their specificity" (51). Perhaps there would be much gained from a Quebec and Russia dialogue on this topic. It may be worthwhile to highlight a striking passage in light of the recent Winter Olympics in Russia that might give people pause in the sense of living in a global village. She writes that "Outside their home, people are guests and obligated to obey local laws and customs" (51). As all of the satellites converged on Sochi for 17 days after the typical long lead-up, it seems clear that quite a few, at least from a handful of countries, wanted to be treated as owners of the local laws and customs too.

Additionally, she also says that "When we enter the world of animals, we are their guests" (52) which brings her back on-side with animal or environmental rights people, or at least with people who may not wish to promote animalistic (or mechanistic) dehumanisation, but who prefer a kind of animal elevation (including but not limited to the 'animal' in us) while nevertheless strongly preserving the dignity and uniqueness of our 'common' human condition. In the future, will this thinking shift to how we become guests when entering the world of machines?

McLuhan discusses the human condition, saying that "Since Sputnik and the satellites, the planet is enclosed in a manmade environment that ends 'Nature' and turns the globe into a repertory theater to be programmed" (1970). Yet perhaps it is a 'nature' reevaluated with a new sociological imagination that is now called for above the biological reductionism of late-modern ideology. Can we 'humanise' the surrounding world by imagining ourselves as satellites or would that be yet another example of the technisation of humans? Markova's paper helpfully points out several fascinating features of this question, drawing on Fuller's work and the Extended Mind Thesis in the context of a reinvigorated, probing social epistemology.

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