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Technology

Theses for an ecosocialist critique of artificial intelligence

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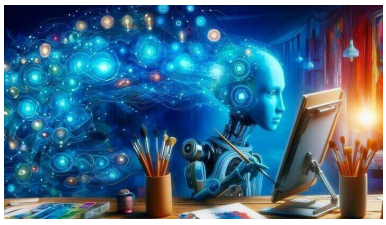

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This text focuses on generative AI. The formulation in theses (unevenly developed) is not intended to establish certainties, but to facilitate debate by the conciseness of the presentation.

Intelligence and human intelligence

1. *What we call intelligence is what makes it possible to grasp difference, to apprehend the new, to anticipate the possible in the course of the events that punctuate time.*

2. Intelligence is a product emerging from the non-linear evolution of life.

Nature makes leaps. Inert things are not intelligent. Symbiotic organizations of plants and fungi communicate and adapt to events without anticipation or awareness. Intelligence as defined here appears in the animal kingdom where it presents various forms and degrees. In unicellular organisms and organisms without brains, it is conflated with the "survival instinct" (survival mechanisms).

3. *Human intelligence combines a great capacity for abstraction from a small number of data, sophisticated communication, thought, and a developed spiritual life that is expressed in complex symbolic realizations, both individual and collective.*

4. Homo sapiens identify from very early childhood the regularities and symmetries in what surrounds them, and therefore also what is rare or unusual. Absent in other primates, this ability is the basis of our species' ability to classify objects by reason and to penetrate their mechanisms by science.

5. Without human society, without a communicating and collaborating body, there is no reflective intelligence, no spiritual life, no consciousness.

The characteristics of our intelligence result both from physical traits (brain volume and structure, bipedalism, hand specialization, phonatory apparatus) and from the fact that *Homo sapiens* is a social mammal. The young of our species can only survive through prolonged parental care, we communicate through complex syntactic language, and our social relationship with the rest of nature is mediated by work, carried out with the help of tools. These traits give *Homo sapiens* multiple intelligences and a great adaptability, which is decisive for understanding the ontogenetic development of humanity.

6. *Mind, thought and consciousness depend on the development/functioning of the brain but also on that of the body in general.*

Mind, thought and consciousness cannot be located in a specific area of the brain. These properties are, so to speak, secreted in the process of individuation by which humans develop physically, psychically and collectively.

7. *Human intelligence is not only social but also ecosystemic.*

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The ability of young humans to identify and classify forms, regularities and exceptions is shaped by climate, seasons and biotopes. Our intelligence is enriched by the exceptional diversity of terrestrial fauna and flora and the complexity of their relationships with the physical world.

8. *Intelligence necessarily combines reason and emotion, the knowledge of what is, the remembrance of what is no more, and desire for what could be.*

Emotion – etymologically “that which sets in motion”, “that which makes one come out of oneself” – is that which arises from the tension between the self and otherness; the desired world and the world as it is; the project and its implementation; the existing and the absent. It is the foundation of ethics and is therefore much more than a supplement to the soul of reason: an essential part of our intelligence. Without emotion, without empathy, without ethics, reason would be dangerously pathological.

9. *The forms of human intelligence are historically and ecologically varied.*

In the social production of their existence, humans develop knowledge, techniques and modes of production. They transform society, nature and their metabolism with it, and thus also the conditions under which they communicate and collaborate – and consequently their intelligence. *Homo sapiens* probably did not think in the same way before and after the invention of writing, their artistic creations were not identical before and after the steam engine, their symbolic universes differ in the Arctic tundra, in the tropical forest, in the megacities of iron and concrete.

AI, intelligence, machinery and capitalism

10. *The breakthrough of AI accelerates the destructiveness of capitalist progress.*

The rise of capitalism is punctuated by scientific advances. Leaps forward in knowledge have developed the means of production, extended exchanges, opened horizons. But this progress is contradictory. By reducing intelligence to reason, and reason to the calculation of profits, Capital mutilates both. The law of value renders reason absurd and drives emotion into “the icy waters of selfish calculation.” The implementation of AI accelerates these trends: it intensifies the destruction of community ties and biodiversity, thereby impoverishing the social and ecosystem sources of intelligence. While reflecting more extensive knowledge than ever before, it restricts the fields of investigation of science and encourages feedback loops in research.

11. *Despite its prowess, AI is not and cannot be intelligent.*

AI research is advancing the understanding of how the brain works. The mastery of language by artificial neural networks, in particular, is a major scientific breakthrough. But AI doesn't think, doesn't dream, doesn't imagine. It “speaks” without seeing (knowing) what it is talking about, because it has no world. The future it projects is inferred from what has dominated the past in statistics. Its inventory capacities are both dizzying and partial because its data (our data, which it appropriates!) is limited to the share of collective human knowledge circulating on the Internet.

12. *AI is human, not “artificial.” It exacerbates capitalist extractivism, its instrumental reason and the subsumption of labour.*

Algorithms are in the hands of capitalist-engineers who seek to maximize profit. Thanks to their monopoly situation and their global influence, the digital giants are evading the equalization of the rate of profit. It is this mechanism of capturing value created by work that allows them to accumulate gigantic rents. These are rooted in the characteristic

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mechanisms of the system: the (over)exploitation of labour power (particularly in the extraction and refining of rare earths made available by nature), and the gratuitous monopolization of accumulated human knowledge. The masters of tech aspire to absolute power that has similarities to that of the ruling class under the old regime, but digital capitalism is not feudalism.

13. *Marx's critique of the machine is decisive for understanding AI.*

For Marx, the machine reduces proletarians to a series of gestures useful to capitalist valorisation. Their know-how is reduced to smithereens, their alienated work “extinguishes” their creativity; it becomes the accessory of the machine; it has taken their place, they lose their dignity. When the machine is automatic, the appropriation of living labour by dead labour becomes the fact of the productive process; machinery thus gives Capital its most adequate form. From then on, the collective intelligence appropriated by the capitalist—objectified labour—completely dominates living labour; The machine appears both as a “hostile force” and as the prerequisite for production. From formal, the subsumption of labour to capital becomes real. This Marxian critique of machinery applies perfectly to AI.

14. *The danger does not lie in the fact that the machine would risk becoming “smarter” than us – “superintelligent”. It lies in the fact that AI is the “hostile force” par excellence, pure instrumental reason, objectified capitalist inhumanity. To increase one's power is to increase the power of that which dominates us and drags us towards the abyss.*

AI, long waves and exploitation of labour

15. *In the face of work, AI “embodies” the logic of capital better than the capitalists themselves.*

In a non-capitalist world, other AIs could relieve humanity of tedious and repetitive tasks. In education, in health, in ecosystem care, for example, specific AIs would allow living work to focus on social and ecological interactions, enriching them in a human logic of “care”. In the real capitalist world, however, “care” – cancer detection, weather forecasting, etc. – is subordinate to profit. AI is set to extract surplus value to the last drop, automatically, without truce or rest. It substitutes even more dead work for living work, extends real subsumption to administrative and service tasks, and dries up creative professions. Algorithms are perfecting the Taylorist logic of work control: the worker's activity, gestures, location, succession of operations, working and travel times can be controlled, evaluated and rewarded (and above all sanctioned) remotely, directly. Far from lightening work, AI makes it more intense and denser.

16. *Promises of a new golden age by AI are without serious foundation. No technology can lead capitalism out of the contradictions of value production.*

Projections of increased productivity through the implementation of AI currently range between 0.07 and 0.7% per year for ten years. This is not enough to feed a long wave of growth. AI does not revive accumulation, it sharpens systemic contradictions. We go back to Marx again: machinery implies an enormous fixed capital that “no longer orients itself towards immediate value” but towards “production for production’s sake”; The depreciation of machines therefore requires that the circulating fraction be oriented towards “consumption for consumption's sake”. However, the capital gain must be realized regularly, for a sufficient period of time. After forty years of wage austerity and in a world of powers fighting for hegemony, this is where the problem lies: who can guarantee the sustainable sale of the goods promoted by billions of smartphones? In line with the intuitions of Ernest Mandel, the severity of the systemic eco-social crisis and the classical contradictions of value production probably exclude any new long wave of capitalist expansion.

17. *It is not the revival of employment that will be on the agenda of AI, but the deepening of social and environmental*

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plunder.

Unlike previous technological revolutions, the job losses caused by AI are unlikely to be compensated for by the development of new equivalent functions. As the enormous development of the fixed part of capital tends to lower the rate of profit, capital resorts to the well-known counter-tendencies: increased plundering of free natural resources and underpaid labour power. The dematerialization of the economy is a myth. In reality, the breakthrough of AI is accompanied by a growing material brutality in the imperialist appropriation of ecosystems and in the cruellest superexploitation of proletarians (platform capitalism, child labour, zero-hour contracts, etc.). All these mechanisms accentuate at the same time colonial inequalities and ableist, racist and gender discrimination.

18. *AI is inflating a new bubble of fictitious capital and reinforcing the trend towards militarization.*

The astronomical sums that a handful of oligopolies are investing in the development of AI reflect the unprecedented plethora of money capital, the weight of finance in contemporary capital, and its very high degree of concentration/centralization. But the fetishism of technology combined with specific intra-oligopolistic competition blinds investors. In themselves, their investments do not provide any solution to the problem of valorisation. AI does not have the expected results, is too expensive, customers prefer human contact, etc. AI is thus inflating a new bubble of fictitious capital. Sooner or later, to soften the shock, technological capital will impose the use and payment of what is now presented as a wonderful free service. But this will not be enough. The AI rush has everything it takes to trigger another major financial crisis and accelerate the tendency of crisis-ridden capital to invest in weapons production as a lifeline.

Global Inequality, Civilization and “Technofascism”

19. *AI is deepening the gap between imperialist metropolises and peripheral countries.*

Only the powerful monopolies of the most developed capitalist countries can mobilise the enormous amounts of capital needed for AI infrastructure. Its frenetic development is already an additional factor in deepening the inequalities between the most developed capitalist countries (in particular the United States and China) and the low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This division stimulates the mechanisms of the crudest imperialist-colonial domination and encourages the imperialist powers to further harden their barbaric management of migratory flows.

20. *From a general social perspective, generalist AI degrades intelligence, creativity, empathy, ethics and public health (including mental health) – especially that of children.*

Communication and collaboration are inseparable. Today, algorithms are taking over the former as steam engines yesterday took over the latter. The toxic tendencies that result from this extend beyond the sphere of work. In society in general, contact with the always different other, human and non-human, is in competition with the association of the same in a narcissistic bubble; the machine replaces the confidante; the hyper-solicitation of information gnaws the wings of wandering thought; the joyful quest for truth is replaced by a sad addiction to virtual realities and their lies; The hope of a different future is lost in the statistical compilation of an objectified past.

21. *By helping Capital to subsume labour as never before, AI helps it to subsume society as a whole like never before.*

In the sphere of reproduction, through “social” networks, AI multiplies the possibilities of realizing the surplus value produced by the exploitation of labour. It accelerates the circulation of goods and intensifies the consumerist

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subjugation of minds. The machinery of the industrial revolution disqualified the know-how of the producers by dispossessing them of the control of the labour process. AI disqualifies, so to speak, “savoir-vivre” – the formation of desires and consciousness. Free access to the machine that seems to speak, understand, even sympathize, creates emotional dependencies that will later be exchanged. The subsumption of work is added to the subsumption of life.

22. *Through its inability to distinguish between truth and falsehood, AI promotes supremacy, the law of the strongest, the elimination of the weak, the end that justifies the means in the struggle of all against all.*

Children acquire the notion of truth through socialization and language learning. Since AI is neither living nor social, the notion of morality is foreign to it – alien. The machine is said to be “self-learning”, but it cannot discard on its own the gigantic masses of data corrupted by lies, hatred and perversion. Thousands of underpaid “click proletarians” are responsible for instilling “values” in it. These stem from the worldview of their employers. No wonder AI helps suicidal people commit suicide, scammers help swindle, rapists rape. It “lies”, “cheats”, “tricks”, and “prevents her from being disconnected""... just like its creators.

23. *AI is the perfect instrument in the service of a rogue capitalism that finds its political expression assumed in a bigoted, racist, machismo, LGBT-phobic, colonial, anti-ecological and neo-Malthusian “technofascism”.*

Generalist AI is promoting the rise of the far right fuelled by more than forty years of neoliberalism. Fascists use it to manipulate the masses via social media and rig elections. Authoritarian powers use it to control populations at an unprecedented point in history. (Increasingly less) democratic governments use it to track down migrants and file opponents. AI has an unparalleled ability to get individuals to change their minds. The generation of images and texts is a formidable means of indoctrination that solicits the cerebral mechanisms of “rigid thinking2. Some neuroscience researchers believe that these mechanisms lead to epigenetic changes, which can be transmitted over several generations (a possibility glimpsed by Darwin). If this is true, AI has the potential to bring humanity back under the yoke of irrational beliefs in the long term.

AI, ecology and cataclysm

24. *AI accelerates the social-ecological catastrophe, climate catastrophe in particular. Its development precipitates the crossing of “tipping points”.*

In 2023, U.S. data centres consumed 17 billion litres of water, and this figure is expected to more than double by 2028. Worldwide, 8,000 data centres consumed 460 TWh of electricity per year in 2024, to which 160 to 590 TWh (compared to 2022) should be added in 2026 – i.e. the annual consumption of Sweden and Germany respectively. CO2 emissions from these infrastructures will triple between 2020 and 2035, according to the IEA (International Energy Agency). The extraction of rare earths needed by AI generates 13 billion tonnes of waste per year, and some studies project more than a hundred times more by 2050. The poor in poor countries are hit hardest by these effects, either directly through mining and the depletion of water resources pumped by offshore data centres, or indirectly through biodiversity loss and extreme weather events.

25. *AI increases the risks – inherent in capitalist competition – of major technological disasters.*

AI has become the primary issue in competition between tech monopolies closely intertwined with the states in struggle, mainly China and the United States. As a result, the race for AI is immediately a race for its military applications. Research is opaque and derogates from the scientific practice of “organized scepticism”. This configuration promotes secrecy which increases the dangers. The self-insertion of an even more powerful AI into many systems could interrupt basic services, produce dangerous viruses, trigger a nuclear attack, without us

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knowing exactly how... The inability of the capitalist system to stop the climate shift (perfectly documented by science) shows that these scenarios are not science fiction.

Avenues for a necessary elaboration

26. *A public initiative is essential to identify risks and take immediate measures to protect society from the effects of AI.*

– A broad democratic debate, duly informed by scientific expertise independent of capitalist interests, should pronounce on the social utility of AI and in particular discuss the following problems and provisions:
– AI research and development must be taken out of the hands of capitalist groups and subjected to the procedures of the scientific community;
– full transparency on the design of models, the training of algorithms and the technical methodologies used by companies;
– ban on AI in the field of artistic and literary creation. Cracking down on data piracy;
– protection of cooperative initiatives for the use of digital technologies (Wikipedia, etc.) against AI competition and AI hacking;
– faced with the risk of dehumanizing social relations through the use of AI, maintaining and extending employment in the fields of “care” (education, health, assistance to early childhood and the elderly, prevention of violence against women, etc.); ensuring that public counters are maintained in the administrations;
– banning the applications of AI in the military and police domains;
– prohibition of racist, macho and LGBT-phobic content;
– removal of access to social networks for children under the age of sixteen; education about technologies and their risks;
– reform of school curricula with the aim of developing cooperation, a sense of belonging to nature and respect for the living.

27. *AI confronts the world of work with the need for an international, radically anti-colonial combative trade unionism that articulates struggles at all levels of the value chain and puts workers’ control back on the agenda.*

The power of Big Tech rentier capitalism is based on the super-exploitation of millions of workers and children in mining, rare earth refining and the electronics industry. The consequent struggle against these rapacious monopolies and their technofascist project requires the unification of workers at all levels of the value chain. Recognition of trade unions and freedom of association everywhere. Obligation to consult workers on the introduction of AI at work. Trade union veto. Workers' control over the evolution of the workload, in quantity and quality. Against layoffs due to the introduction of AI in companies, reduction of working hours without loss of salary.

28. *A moratorium on the construction of data centres and other heavy AI infrastructure is essential. Any further progress must be made conditional on the adoption of a comprehensive ecological and social strategy, including: a strategy to reduce social inequalities, the sustainable management of resources (water, minerals), the restoration of massacred ecosystems, as well as a precise plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in line with the objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement.*

29. *Develop a counterculture in the face of AI. In social movements, implement collective practices to resist the degradation of social relations and the debate of ideas by AI.*

The formation of a collective intelligence cannot do without collective action decided and evaluated democratically during “face-to-face”" exchanges, allowing verbal and non-verbal expression. Social networks are not a place for

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debate. The left must combat the fascination with “talking machines”, consciously work to ban the use of smartphones from its meetings and rehabilitate printed publications aimed at the exchange of points of view and in-depth analyses.

30. *Another kind of digital, public and democratic, is possible.*

As part of an essential redistribution of wealth, local, regional and national authorities must have the means to provide free public messaging, data storage and social network infrastructure under democratic control, with protection of user data and development of AI by domain.

31. *Fighting capitalism in the age of AI reinforces the need for a radical refoundation of the left.*

The breakthrough of AI casts a harsh light on the disarray of the left. It reinforces the need to purge Marxism, and the left in general, of productivism, instrumentalist ideologies (“the end justifies the means”), the cult of progress and the idea of “technological neutrality”. The global grip of Big Tech from Silicon Valley, Shenzhen and other imperialist centres underscores the absurdity of campism: the break with capital can only be conceived in the internationalist perspective of a revolution to be pursued permanently until the global abolition of capitalism. Beyond Marxism, it is also a question for the left of breaking with post-modern conceptions such as “actor-network theory”: fully taking into account the dangerous consequences of the alien nature of AI presupposes abandoning the idea that technical devices that function as prostheses of human activity, because they have a social effect, should be considered as social actors. It is humans who forge their history, not machines.

32. *The threats of AI underscore the urgency of a revolutionary, ecosocialist break with the civilization of capitalist growth.*

The threats of AI do not stem solely from capitalism. Whatever the relations of production, neural networks will remain structurally incapable of distinguishing truth from falsehood and of projecting a different future. Replacing capitalist property with collective ownership, in and of itself, would not be enough to bring the ecological footprint of AI back to the limits of terrestrial sustainability. The idea that AI would act as a miracle cure for the market to solve the terrible problems created by the market is magic, not reason. The only perspective compatible with human dignity and with the survival of the species is the ecosocialist degrowth of global material production, planned in social justice, aiming at a world economy of satisfaction of real needs democratically determined in respect of ecosystems, their limits and their fragile, irreplaceable beauty.

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