

Xenofeminism: A Framework to Hack the Human

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ABSTRACT: Out of the gusts of creative energy following the 2013 publication of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams' "#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics," the cyber-feminist collective, Laboria Cuboniks, published their own manifesto in 2015. Entitled "The Xenofeminist Manifesto: A Politics for Alienation," Laboria Cuboniks advocated, broadly speaking, the abolition of gender, increased technological intervention into the means of re-production, and, most controversially, an affirmation of alienation as intrinsically liberatory. Met with mostly positive responses, the Xenofeminist Manifesto spawned a series of workshops, talks, and accelerationist adjacent theorizing. That being said, residual issues of humanism and an open question about what "more alienation" actually means festered just below the surface. In response to recent articles critiquing Xenofeminism as misunderstanding Marxist-Transhumanism at best, and reifying white feminism at worst, the following article seeks to do three things. First, I aim to examine the neo-humanisms (be they trans- or post-humanism) that occupy our current era of technocapital acceleration while sketching out a critique that affirms the transhuman. Second, I attempt to trace the accelerationist lineage of Xenofeminism by looking at early Marx up to Deleuze and Guattari while noting that Xenofeminism can be read as a necessary outgrowth of accelerationism insofar as Xenofeminism seeks to deterritorialize gender as such. Third, I aim to respond to recent critiques levied against Xenofeminism that claim its affirmation of alienation is not only a naïve mis-reading of Marx, but a reification of oppression. While certainly not the last word, I hope this article spawns deeper intellectual theorizing about Xenofeminism and its implications.

KEYWORDS: Xenofeminism, Marxism, transhumanism, feminism, accelerationism

Phase 00: From the Future

The years 2013 and 2015 were turning points for what can, in lieu of a better term, be called the 'contemporary Left.' Expanding upon the works of Mark Fisher and the other 'members' of the CCRU (Cybernetic Culture Research Unit), Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams published "#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics" on *Critical Legal Thinking* in May 2013. Seen as a revival of the supposed Prometheism latent in Marx's *Grundrisse*, "#Accelerate" attracted a cult follow-

ing which led to numerous conferences around Europe, Urbanomic's publication of *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* in 2014, and Srnicek and Williams' expansion upon their initial work in 2015's *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*.

Adjacent to this sphere – and indeed, crisscrossed with accelerationist tendencies – the pseudonymous Laboria Cuboniks collective published "The Xenofeminist Manifesto: A Politics for Alienation"

in June 2015. Spawning its own series of blog posts, critical essays, and responses, the Xenofeminist project has been, by and large, relegated to the sidelines of contemporary accelerationist discourse. Following the publication of Helen Hester's *Xenofeminism* and Victoria Margree's *Neglected or Misunderstood: The Radical Feminism of Shulamith Firestone* in 2018, interest was reignited with Verso re-publishing *The Manifesto*, and various feminist thinkers attacking different aspects of Xenofeminism. From attacks on its affiliation with accelerationism – a 'tainted term' that Srnicek and Williams distanced themselves from – to its questionable usage of the 'xeno-' prefix, to its supposed ignorance of 'true' Marxist legacies, the Xenofeminist project was seen as at once too broad and too restrictive.

It is my contention, however, that Xenofeminism, conceived of as an *intentionally broad platform*, is one of the most radical (and positive) outbursts of energy from the Left in recent memory. Melding certain strains of gender-critical transhumanist thought with accelerationist politics derived from critical readings of Marx and Deleuze and Guattari, Xenofeminism represents a reboot of the cyberfeminism of the 1990s. With one eye on existing technologies and methods of biohacking and another on speculative, future technologies of gender liberation, Xenofeminism can be seen as an update of the legacy Marxist-Feminist operating system.

Despite the liberatory potential latent in Xenofeminism's code, apart from Laboria Cuboniks' manifesto and Helen Hester's recent book, there has been insufficient engagement with the future of Xenofeminism *as such*. While numerous reviews and 'long reads' have popped up in recent years, little theoretical work has been done as the members of Laboria Cuboniks continued along their own trajectories. Indeed, apart from spats within the Accelerationist Caves on Twitter, most of the critical engagement with Xenofeminism has taken the form of multiple criticisms published in 2019.

In the following paper, I seek to elaborate on what I take to be the truly radical nature of Xenofeminism and its location at the crux of Marxism and transhumanism, while pushing back against recent critiques. More specifically, I want to

explicate *what* Xenofeminism, in its broadest categorization, is and how it weaves together post-Marx/DeleuzoGuattarian Accelerationism with transhumanist ideas about technology and biohacking. To do this, I want to a) briefly look at the neo-humanisms of the technocene (be they trans- and post-human) and sketch what I will call a transhumanist alternative, b) attempt to trace the accelerationist lineage of Xenofeminism from the early Marxist-Feminists to the cyberfeminists to the accelerationists proper, and c) respond to recent critiques and allegations of naïve techno-utopianism at best, and a reification of white-feminism, at worst. While by no means exhaustive, I hope this quasi-genealogy can serve to reopen critical and productive discussions around Xenofeminism (and future feminisms, more generally).¹

Phase 01: One or Several Humanisms

Man is programmed to change his programming continuously. Roberto Esposito (2011, 82)

The concept of human must be unraveled. The inhuman must be invited in until the human ceases to be, dissolved through and in the Other. Mahimiko Umbral (2020)

It is far from an understatement to say that 'transhumanism' is a troubled concept. Indeed, what ought to be straightforward – that is to say, merely *defining* the word – proves exceedingly difficult once one

1 Writing about *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* raises difficult methodological questions as it itself was written by the pseudonymous collective called 'Laboria Cuboniks.' While the collective does, technically, consist of six bodies in Meatspace, its history has been troubled. Seemingly intended to be a pseudonym to outlast the bodies, the mask of Laboria Cuboniks has slipped and revealed the 'real' authors behind the text (if there are such things). While it is no secret who the members are, I am disinclined to list them (even if I cite their Laboria Cuboniks-independent work) as "each of the six members ... would likely emphasize different aspects of the manifesto, foregrounding some tendencies over others" (Hester 2018, 2). While I am required to stick to citational standards, the reader ought not take any one thing said by any given member that I cite as being the gospel of Laboria Cuboniks as such. Indeed, "an early, lightly held goal for the character of Laboria Cuboniks, too, was for it to be a mask that, in principle, anyone could take up, to speak from it rather than their own particularity" (Fraser 2020). While I have no intention of donning the mask any longer than necessary, the articulation of Xenofeminism that I advance, while textually based in the manifesto itself, ought not be reflective of anyone I choose to cite. In addition, however, I must express gratitude to two specific 'individuals.' I thank David Roden for his careful review of the first phase of this paper and Patricia Reed for humoring my questions and pointing me down new paths. I also thank my reviewer for catching my oversights. Anything positive that comes from this paper is due to their help, while the negatives reflect solely on myself.

dives into the transhumanist literature. Conflated with ‘posthumanism,’ deflated as ‘trans-*humanism*,’ ‘transhumanism’ refers at once to a normative position, as well as a description of various tendencies, as well as a potential ontology, as well as etc... For the purposes of this paper (and to irritate those already embroiled in the semantic squabbles), I will take a very specific understanding of transhumanism as a set of what can be called ‘Promethean tendencies’ and then attempt, by way of an acid bath of ‘postmodernism,’ to remove the human (and indeed, humanism) as traditionally understood to leave us with a transhumanism to which Xenofeminism can be seen as the corrupted heir.² Specifically, in this first phase, I will examine transhumanism as a humanism laced with Prometheanism while then moving on to efface the human as traditionally understood. To do so, we will first look at a brief history of the relationship between humanism and transhumanism, with the latter seen as an upgrade of the former, while also noting some critiques. We will then move on to let the bottom drop out of transhumanism as we attempt to undermine the conception of humanism implicit in our discussion.

>>00: Transhumanism and Prometheanism

Following a brief review of the relevant literature, there are at least four different uses of the term ‘transhumanism.’ Indeed, there is a normative definition, an historico-epistemological definition, a descriptive definition, and an implicitly ontological definition. Before going further, it is important to lay our cards on the table so as not to muddy the waters too much.

Normatively, transhumanism can be understood as “an ethical claim to the effect that technological enhancement of human capabilities is a desirable aim.” This normative dimension is echoed, among other places, in Nick Bostrom’s “Transhumanist Declaration” (Roden 2015, 9; Bostrom 2005a, 21).

2 Lest we leave the important unsaid, there are numerous critiques of attempts to move beyond the human as either implicitly reifying classical constructions of race (Jackson 2015) or smuggling in the liberal humanism such moves seek to avoid (Zaretsky *et al.* 2005). Unfortunately, I have neither the spatial nor theoretical bandwidth to engage sufficiently with these critiques. In lieu of a response by me (although I hope my formulation of transhumanism answers some issues), I would say that Badmington (2003) provides a launching point from which Dean (2017), among countless others, offer vital rejoinders.

Historico-epistemologically, transhumanism can be understood as an affirmation of “rational humanism, which emphasizes empirical science and critical reason – rather than revelation and religious authority – as ways of learning about the natural world and our place within it, and of providing a grounding for morality.” It is, in a word, Enlightenment reason *par excellence* (Bostrom 2005a, 2; More 2013, 4). *Descriptively*, transhumanism can be understood as both the view that “nature [is] a work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways” and that “current humanity need not be the endpoint of evolution.” Further, it is a “philosophy of life” that seeks “the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology” (Bostrom 2005b, 4; More 2013, 3). *Ontologically*, transhumanism can be understood as “man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature” while wishing “to preserve and extend capacities and characteristics that we associate with our contemporary understanding of the word ‘human’” (Huxley 2015, 15; Philbeck 2014, 175). There are, no doubt, other uses of the word.³

Underlying all the above uses of the word, however, is one guiding theme: a commitment to rational humanism (Bostrom 2005a, 2). Given that, a brief discussion of humanism is where we must start.

‘Humanism’ can, for our purposes, be understood according to David Roden’s self-admittedly crude definition:

A philosopher is a *humanist* if she believes that humans are importantly distinct from non-humans and supports this distinctiveness claim with a *philosophical anthropology*: an account of the central features of human existence and their relations to similar general aspects of *nonhuman* existence. (Roden 2015, 10-11)

Unpacking Roden’s definition, we can begin to think of humanism in terms of a commitment to the distinctiveness of an entity that satisfies some list of qualities pertaining to what it means *to be* a human. ‘Human’ is thus both an ontological category and a series of particulars. While there are many contend-

3 See Fukuyama (2004), for example.

ers for what the aforementioned qualities might be, it is most logical to go back to the individual who was, arguably, located at the genesis of Enlightenment humanist thought: René Descartes.

In his *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes, in setting out to describe methodological skepticism, begins by isolating the mental faculty he sees as being a universal human quality, a quality that is “naturally equal in men.” For him, “good sense” – that is to say, the ability to judge claims thereby “distinguishing the true from the false” – “is the best distributed thing in the world.” Indeed, this ability to reason is not merely the thing that “distinguishes us from the beasts,” but it is also “the only thing that makes us men” (Descartes 1985, 111-112). Such a conception of the human as a rational animal predated the Cartesian formulation in a myriad of different cultures but was reified and (re)made explicit in Sartrean existentialism (Brague 2017, 4-11). Despite nominally rejecting “the concept of the human,” Sartre, in *Existentialism*, acts to reify something common to all entities we call human: freedom. Indeed, this ‘condition,’ as Arendt would later pick up (Arendt 2018), consisted of humans “turn[ing] up, appear[ing] on the scene, and, only afterwards, def[ining]” themselves. As per the existentialist credo that ‘existence precedes essence,’ “man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” (Sartre 1947, 17, 18). The vital point to take away is that humans are able to change themselves. While metaphysical problems arise from this view (a few of which we will briefly discuss later), we must first expand upon the mutability of the human.

In Roberto Esposito’s recent analysis of Heidegger’s (in)famous rejoinder to Sartre, Esposito carves a nice path for us to follow by taking the previous line of humanistic thought and coupling it with philosophies of Becoming.⁴ While affirming an admittedly rather weird form of essentialism, Esposito continues and recapitulates the existentialist claim that we can make ourselves. As he puts it:

There is no ontological constraint, fixed character, or natural invariant that binds [the human] to a specific natural modality. He is not nothing, since

he can become anything, create himself again and again according to his own liking. Properly speaking, he is not even a being, but a becoming in perpetual change. (Esposito 2011, 79)

Following up on this, Esposito notes that humans are culturally bound, and any discussion of a “nature” must grapple with our relation to history.⁵ It is thus evident for him that humans remake themselves in the context of their cultural milieus (Esposito 2011, 82). Further, if there is to be any essential nature to the human, it must be a level of mutability. In response to any classical claims to identify the human with a *fixed* set of characteristics, a staple of early humanist thought, transhumanism upgrades our understanding by affirming another word we must discuss: ‘Prometheanism.’

First popularized in reference to supposedly anti-environmental movements that saw growth as unlimited, John Dryzek defined Prometheanism as both the ideology wherein one has “unlimited confidence in the ability of humans and their technologies to overcome any problems – including environmental problems” and the view that “matter is infinitely transformable, given enough energy.” Thus, for the Dryzekian view of Prometheanism, not only is technology unlimited, but we ought not have qualms about using technology to alter our environment (Dryzek 2013, 52, 60). While a logical, macro-level extension of the Prometheanism we will be talking about, the issues Dryzek raises around geo-engineering, for example, are far beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, we will be combining this usage of the term with Ray Brassier’s articulation in “Prometheanism and its Critics” where he defined the concept, simply enough, as “the claim that there is no reason to assume a predetermined limit to what we can achieve or to the ways in which we can transform ourselves and our world” (Brassier 2017, 470). Coupled with the technism of Dryzek’s usage, one would think Prometheanism is a recent idea, but that is not so. Rather, although not explicitly called such, the ideal has been latent for much of human history.

⁴ See Esposito’s book-length treatment of the subject for much greater detail (2008).

⁵ See also Steinhoff’s (2014) analysis of the deep connections between transhumanism and Marxism.

As Bostrom, tracing his history of transhumanism, notes: “The human desire to acquire new capacities is as ancient as our species itself. We have always sought to expand the boundaries of our existence, be it socially, geographically, or mentally.” From the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to efforts at fabricating an ‘elixir of life’ to the Renaissance Humanists, a rejection of the given – or rather, a recognition of the *contingency* of the given – marked human history. Picking up on this trend, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola sets forth the notion that God made humans so as to “not have a readymade form” (Bostrom 2005a, 1-2). Indeed, in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Pico, in recounting God speaking to Adam, says the following:

Oh Adam ... The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. ... We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine. (Pico 1956, 7-8; cited in Bostrom 2005a, 2)

Indeed, such trends continued and became an integral part of rational humanism despite critiques from both the Right and the Left (Bostrom 2005a, 1-4). The critiques, however, are relevant for our discussion insofar as they introduce an important philosophical theme Brassier runs with: disequilibrium. In recapitulating the Heideggerian lineage, Brassier reiterates the fundamental assumption behind humanism: humans are, supposedly, *qualitatively* different from non-humans. This difference between humans and non-humans *must* be a difference in kind as opposed to degree. If true, this is problematic for the Promethean project. If the difference between humans and non-humans is a difference in kind – that is to say, if we possess something above and beyond the materiality of non-

humans – then the techniques by which we intervene in the natural world might not work on ourselves. If we have an essence – or at the very least, something that makes us unique – we are thus “constituted by an other kind of difference,” a difference that places us in a different register than the empirical (Brassier 2017, 473). As such, technological intervention into our material conditions will, at best, prove to be impossible and at worst, existentially disastrous. As Jean-Pierre Dupuy, “a disciple of [Heidegger] and Arendt” notes,

The human condition is thus an inextricable mixture of things given and things made. This means that man, to a great extent, can shape that which shapes him, condition that which conditions him, while still respecting the fragile equilibrium between the given and the made. (Dupuy 2007, 246; cited in Brassier 2017, 474)

Such a call to respect the “fragile equilibrium” is what Brassier identifies as being “fundamental for the philosophical critique of Prometheism” (Brassier 2017, 474). Where Dupuy *et al.* call for us to respect the given, the Promethean decries the given by claiming that it too is made.⁶ While Brassier critiques specific aspects of Dupuy’s argument (namely questioning Dupuy’s claim that as we advance, we lose aspects of ourselves), it is more prudent for us to focus on the meta-level issues.

At this juncture, two issues arise, both of which concern the question of limits. On the one hand, we might ask ourselves, ‘is there an immutable given?’ Obviously, we are born into a world with a specific set of rules that we cannot choose beforehand, but does that fact imply that the rules are themselves immutable?⁷ In a word, are there *a priori* constraints on what we can do? On the other hand, behind the claim that humans are rational animals lies the assumption that we can know ourselves. If reason is the primary faculty of humans and a rational investigation of the human animal is conducted, it must be conducted in the first person (hence the structure of the Cartesian *meditations*). The subject cannot

⁶ While outside the scope of this paper, Brassier’s “Nominalism, Naturalism, and Materialism: Sellars’s Critical Ontology” (2014) might be of interest to readers.

⁷ Should one be interested in questions about the mutability of natural laws, I’d suggest Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude* (2008).

have unknown depths that defy reason, as all must be accessible to it. Specifically, “the human being,” in Descartes’ account, “is completely known, knowable, and present to the very being that is engaged in the meditation on what it means to be human” (Badmington 2003, 17). Thus, we must ask ourselves a twofold question: ‘Is it true that the self can be completely known? If not, does that pose a problem for Prometheism?’

While of profound importance, the first issue – namely, the question of an immutable given – cannot be answered here apart from saying that under the transhumanist-Promethean view, we hear a resounding ‘no.’ Accepting this answer, I must defer justification to those more qualified than I.⁸ We will instead operate on the assumption that the transhumanist-Prometheans are correct and there is, in fact, no *a priori* limit to what we can do. The second issue, however, must be taken up as it will lead directly into the problematization of the subject.

>>01: Fuzzy Subjects and Transhumanism

Our discussion thus far has obviously, and indeed, self-admittedly, been an extension of Enlightenment humanism conceived as the coherence of a rational and autonomous subject – or rather, *I* – as implied following the Cartesian *meditations*. While a useful historical edifice to think about transhumanism, our second issue posed above comes to the forefront. According to traditional understandings of subjectivity, the subject is not merely knowable and present to itself, as Badmington pointed out, but is also static. While perhaps lacking an essence, there is a human ontology. If, however, such a view is an antiquated notion (and indeed, I will argue that it is) and a knowable, static subject is merely an historical myth, might Prometheism run into problems reshaping an ever-changing subject?

In this section, I want to argue that traditional forms of humanist subjectivity are flawed, and, in

8 Brassier attempts to answer a critique levied by Arendt in the second half of his essay while David Roden takes us on a *tour de force* of the natural, metaphysical, transcendental, and phenomenological limits of what he calls “posthuman possibility space” (2015, 52-104) before going on to defend what he calls “speculative posthumanism” via his “disconnection thesis” (2015, 105-149). As noted, I will simply be taking the rejoinders for granted so as to focus on my part in this puzzle. For a slightly more in-depth, albeit still preliminary, discussion of human conditions vs. human nature in Arendt, see Heft (2020).

fact, the subject is properly thought of not as “a being, but a becoming in perpetual change” (Esposito 2011, 79). This perpetual change, I will argue, does not undermine the Promethean project so much as provides new avenues for self-creation. Thus, to problematize the concept of a static subject, we will bathe transhumanism in the most caustic of acids: ‘postmodernism.’⁹ Once bathed and dried off with some Derridean towels, the human, now wholly effaced, must take on a new status. As such, it seems necessary to refer to our once stable concept of ‘transhumanism’ as something new, a transhumanism with semantic vacancy: ‘transhumanism.’

To get there, it is necessary to start with the prime problematic: the subject. Indeed, as we saw above, the initially unspoken assumption behind humanism as such is the supposed coherence of a rational subject. More specifically, this rational subject, the subject that engages in meditation, philosophizes, *thinks*, has uninhibited access to itself. It is at this juncture that we infect the classical concept of a unified, coherent subject with all the fuzziness associated with our new drug, ‘postmodernism.’ Specifically, while the question of ‘what exactly is this “I” in “*cogito ergo sum*”?’ has been raised numerous times, I want to (rather arbitrarily) start our discussion of subjectivity with Foucault’s problematization of the subject via the ‘author function’ in “What is an Author?”¹⁰ Indeed, if we are to believe Foucault’s critique offers something useful, we ought to in turn be skeptical about the notion of a singular subject.

Foucault traces the birth of a singular, identifiable author – what he will call the ‘author function’ – to a very specific regime, the regime of appropriation.¹¹ Specifically, singular appropriation of a text to an author arose out of a regime of punishment

9 I place this word in single quotations so as to interrupt any flow this text might have and remind readers that this word, arguably, has no meaning and is merely used for its rhetorical potency.

10 Before being balked at for engaging in a performative contradiction for, on the one hand, denouncing the coherence of a static subject while, on the other, continuing to use proper names and personal pronouns, I recognize the contradiction and offer the following as the only justification for such action: I do it “out of habit, purely out of habit. ... Also because it’s nice to talk like everybody else, to say the sun rises, when everybody knows it’s only a manner of speaking” (Deleuze and Guattari 2014, 3).

11 We can see a genesis of this idea in Barthes’ “The Death of the Author” (1977).

where individual subjects were seen as static actors responsible for their texts. Thus, as Foucault notes, “texts, books, and discourses really began to have authors ... to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive.” For Foucault, the singular author was born out of a desire to ascribe responsibility to subjects (Foucault 1998, 211–212). While a more thorough genealogy would likely trace the idea of authorship back to the rise of centralized power amongst States, for Foucault, it is enough to add that not only was the author a literal *authority*, the name that gave credence to the truth value of what was written, but the author also served to solve apparent discrepancies within texts (Foucault 1998, 212, 215).¹²

Most importantly (at least for our purposes), however, is Foucault’s point that “discourses endowed with the author function possess [a] plurality of self.” In discussing a hypothetical mathematical treatise, Foucault argues that the *T* located within the text does not necessarily refer to a singular subject, but rather refers to a myriad of different subjects depending upon the context. Indeed, the *T* of “I conclude ... refers to an individual without an equivalent who, in a determined place and time, completed a certain task” whereas the *T* of “I suppose ... indicates an instance and a level of demonstration,” an impersonal *I* that could be taken up by any third party as they demonstrate the truth of the treatise. The multiplicity of the *T* does not stop there, however. There can always be another instantiation that serves as a justifier of the project, “one that speaks to tell the work’s meaning,” one who is situated within a cultural milieu and needs not say certain things (Foucault 1998, 215–216). By reverse engineering this account of the *I*, we can begin to see that within a supposedly singular subject – mathematician John Doe, author of *A Treatise on the function of i* – there are a multiplicity

of selves that arise depending upon what *part* of the text is being read. As Foucault notes, “the author function operates so as to effect the dispersion of these ... simultaneous selves” (Foucault 1998, 216).

I want to take this a step further, however. Not only does the author function disperse selves found within a text, but the implication can be extended to subjects more generally in any cultural context. As we exist in the world, we engage in a myriad of different situations that require us to don certain masks. My writing as a scholar takes a very different tone than conversations with my local bartender which, in turn, is a radically different persona than the one I adopt when discussing politics, for example. Further, with the proliferation of Internet personae, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish ‘who’ is acting. Indeed,

when one dons a mask, does one not *truly* become someone else? Does the Shaman who dons the ceremonial mask not become a God?¹³ Do churchgoers who are moved into mass not become a molar unit? Can we really say that *The Colbert Report*’s Stephen Colbert is *not actually* Stephen Colbert but rather a character played by the real, essential Stephen Colbert? I think not. As we don different masks, take on different social roles, ... we *really do* become those new subjectivities and they are not reducible down to a mere game a transcendent (or substantial) subject plays. (Heft 2018)

Placing all the above in contradistinction to the Cartesian subject, the subject that is at once unified and knowable, gives a new, entirely mutable conception of subjectivity that breaks with the tradition of Enlightenment humanism. Further, recapitulating Esposito, we can think of such a subject, a subject devoid of Being but full of Becoming, in terms of Derrida’s ‘semantic vacancy’ or ‘to-comeness.’

In *Rogues*, Derrida, recounting the lineage of democracy, invokes what he calls the ‘semantic vacancy’ within the concept. For him, democracy is always self-defining and in a constant state of self-revision. Indeed, it is something always to come, “a concept without concept” (Derrida 2005, 9, 32). To be clear, it’s not that there are no democracies; rather

¹² It is important to note that Foucault does adopt a weird variant of the descriptivist view of proper names when he asserts that “one cannot turn a proper name into a pure and simple reference. It has other than indicative functions ... it is the equivalent of a description” (Foucault 1998, 209, 210). While Foucault also makes a distinction between proper names and authorial names, his flirting with descriptivism would (rightly) frighten any post-Kripkeans (1990). While there is likely more going on in the author function than pure descriptivism, teasing that out is another project in itself. See Mole (2016).

¹³ See the introduction to Joseph Campbell’s *Masks of God* (1960, 21–29).

there are no *true* democracies as a true democracy is always indefinable and yet to come. It is in this sense that Derrida can say that despite our limited knowledge of this “concept without concept,” we have a “precomprehension,” we “already anticipate, even if only by a bit, ... what ‘democracy’ will have been *able* to signify, what it *ought*, in truth, to have meant” (Derrida 2005, 18). Our implicit understanding of an ever-changing concept is what we can, and indeed ought, to take to our discussion of humanism. Specifically, taking such an understanding of a possibility to come and applying the Promethean tendencies we’ve isolated in our half-drowned ‘transhumanism’ lead to what Roden calls “speculative posthumanism” or the claim that “*there could be posthumans*” (Roden 2015, 5).

Devoid of normative baggage, speculative posthumanism posits that there is some alternative possible way of Being (or Becoming) (Roden 2015, 5-6).¹⁴ Coupled with Derridean semantic vacancy and the mutability of the subject, it seems that such a posthuman can only always be “a concept without concept,” a void to be filled with content that is constantly changing. As Esposito notes, there is a fundamental shift in what *humanitas* can mean. It cannot be understood in a singular, myopic sense, but rather must refer “to every [entity] and the world in its entirety” (Esposito 2011, 82).¹⁵

Thus, taking the conception of transhumanism as a form of Prometheanism applied to the self, we can understand our washed concept in terms of a subject that is always to come but is never here: a trans~~humanism~~. Always overcoming previous limitations (trans-), our conception of the human is never complete (~~-humanism~~) and is always being built so as to include ever more possible/potential subjectivities. *Humanism becomes an empty set*. While it might be objected that under such a scenario, a scenario wherein there is no identifiably stable subject, any Prometheanism is doomed to fail since it

is working on a non-existent entity. This rejoinder, an attempt to answer the question posed above, seems foolhardy as it implies that *nothing* can be known about the subject. The effaced humanism of trans~~humanism~~ where the subject is always to come does not imply that certain aspects of the subject are unknowable, rather that there is no essential entity that can be exhausted. As will be seen in the next section where we will explore the Promethean tendencies in Marx while discussing their accelerationist heritages, Xenofeminism, with trans~~humanism~~ applied as the retroactive backdrop, retains both a commitment to a certain kind of rationalism while also affirming the inexhaustibility of the subject.

Phase 02: Xenofeminism for a Future-to-Come

Woman cannot exist ‘like man’; neither can the machine. As soon her mimicry earns her equality, she is already something, and somewhere, other than him.
Sadie Plant (1995, 63)

We are the virus of the new world disorder. We are the future cunt. VNS Matrix (1991)

‘Feminism,’ another word with a long history, most clearly saw its articulation in the push for women’s rights in the early-to-mid 20th century. Riding the tides of the events of May 1968 and the introduction of increasingly mediated forms of technological production into everyday life, early ‘cyber-feminisms’ took off with Shulamith Firestone applying dialectical materialism to the workings of sexism and advocating for technological intervention into the means of biological reproduction itself, a key locus of gender(ed) inequality (Firestone 1970). “Neglected or misunderstood,” Firestone’s legacy was picked up, either explicitly or implicitly, in the works of later cyber-feminists such as Donna Haraway in her “Cyborg Manifesto” (1991), the Australian artist collective, VNS Matrix, in the early 1990s with their “Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century,” co-founder of the CCRU, Sadie Plant, in her seminal 1998 book, *Zeros + Ones*, and Luciana Parisi’s *Abstract Sex* (2004), to name a few.

14 Given this understanding, it might not be too far off the mark to say that transhumanism as a form of Prometheanism that is self-defining implies speculative posthumanism. While sure to induce a hemorrhage, these ‘definitions’ can likely be blended with Philbeck’s (2014) articulations of the distinctions between trans- and post-humanism.

15 Esposito says “every man,” but it seems far more apt to explode the category so as to include a myriad of possible subjectivities.

All these works (and more) provided the ground upon which Xenofeminism was to grow. A complete genealogy of cyber-feminism (and its relation to Xenofeminism), a potentially Sisyphean task, will not be attempted here.¹⁶ Instead, I will take for granted many of the early works of cyber-feminism that, were it not for spatial and temporal constraints, would not be taken as such, and attempt a much humbler task in this section. Indeed, in this phase I will attempt to explain what Xenofeminism is (or, rather, *can be*) while pushing back against objections to its most contentious point: the affirmation of alienation. To do so, I will take one step back and look at what is arguably Xenofeminism's largest influence: accelerationism. Following that, I will attempt a definition of Xenofeminism while exploring it as a materialist feminism that, while highly mutable, has a few basic tenets. Concluding, I will look at recent critiques levied against Xenofeminism while ending with a re-articulation of its aspects I see as most salient today.

>>00: Marx's Machines are Accelerating

Portending the inevitable obsolescence of the human, a tendency met with fierce reactionary backlash, Marx's notes on machinery in the *Grundrisse* are particularly telling as to what he saw "not [as] an accidental moment of capital," but rather as a fundamental shift in the labour-labourer relationship. Indeed, as per Marx, the constructive forces of society – the "social brain" – is something that was/is increasingly becoming "absorbed into capital ... free of charge" (Marx 2017, 55-56). Such a subsumption of labour power not only emboldens capital as an "alien power," but qualitatively changes the way humans relate to machines. Where humans were previously the primary actors of production, at least nominally guiding the process forward, machinic integration and expansion changed workers into vessels; tools our tools could use. The human became a prosthesis of the machine as opposed to the historical operators of labour. As Marx famously put it:

The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself. (Marx 2017, 53-54)

Never one to let the human fully go, however, Marx laced his analysis with Promethean tendencies, asserting the newfound power of the new technosocial subject. Indeed, in one of his more prescient moments, Marx noted that the use of machines doesn't merely *save labour*, rather, "with the help of machinery, human labour performs actions and creates things which without it would be absolutely impossible" (Marx 1993, 389). Furthermore, while machinery changed labour power with one hand, it, as capital as such, changed social relations with the other.

Simplifying society into a binary set of class relations, capitalism broke old bonds of fellowship under the feudal era and created a system ruled by the iron law of exchange. Monetary relations took over religious, familial, and compatriotic relations, all while acting back upon themselves to help "[revolutionize] the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society" (Marx and Engels 1964, 62-63). Operating under a system of positive feedback, revolutions in production became the norm, followed by new social relations as humans had to adapt to the machinic environment in which they were living. "All fixed, fast-frozen relations ... are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify." Society, and consequently the subjects that made it up, began to change, and with their newfound power they could enact change back upon themselves (Marx and Engels 1964, 63).

It is this tendency, this breaking of social bonds, that Deleuze and Guattari pick up on and run with in *Anti-Oedipus*. Discussing what they call 'the process of deterritorialization,' they note that not only does capitalism break old bonds, but it acts as a quasi-liberatory force, freeing desire from social mores. As the feedback loop continues and social revolutions – be they macro or micro – happen at accelerating rates, capitalism pushes itself to its limit,

¹⁶ For some attempts at such a task, see Wajcman (2004), Evans (2014), Burrows and O'Sullivan (2019), >ect (2015), and Wilson (2015) among others.

a limit that it must constantly defer yet can also be exploited for revolutionary potential (Deleuze and Guattari 2009, 139-140). It is this exploitation that lies at the heart of what can crudely be called ‘Left-Accelerationism.’¹⁷ Indeed, in Deleuze and Guattari, such an expenditure of energy pushing capitalism to the limit, if not to go beyond it to further deterritorialize social flows, is what lies at the heart of their (in)famous string of questions: “what is the solution? Which is the revolutionary path? ... To withdraw from the world market ... Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization?” For them, a true revolution of subjectivity whereby subjects can continually remake themselves must occur not by “withdraw[ing] from the process, but [by] go[ing] further, to ‘accelerate the process.’” Drawing upon Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari insist that “in this matter, the truth is that we haven’t seen anything yet” (Deleuze and Guattari 2009, 239-240). Indeed, for Nietzsche, the deterritorialization of contingent social bonds whereby a new, stronger subject can emerge “is the great process that cannot be obstructed”; rather, “one should even hasten it” (Nietzsche 1968, 478).¹⁸

Applying these insights to the register of revolutionary political action, Srnicek and Williams birthed “#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics” which is itself an attempt to overcome what they deride as the “folk politics” of the legacy Left – politics of “localism, direct action, and relentless horizontalism” with a fear of engaging with large-scale, global

networks of power (Srnicek and Williams 2017, 354). Indeed, for Srnicek and Williams, the program (or rather, ‘platform’) laid out in the manifesto is one that seeks to “unleash latent productive forces” – that is to say, the aforementioned deterritorializing tendencies – in capitalism by retooling the hardware of neoliberalism and “repurpose[ing] [it] toward common ends” (Srnicek and Williams 2017, 355). Such a view, the legitimacy of which must be bracketed for the time being, implicitly embraces with it the Promethean tendencies discussed above. As contemporary network theory shows us, “technology and the social are intimately bound up with one another,” and thus if one wishes to effect change on the latter, one can utilize the former (Srnicek and Williams 2017, 356).¹⁹ Pushing this to the limit, the two thinkers advocate a renewed Prometheism of the Left whereby ‘anti-capitalist’ struggles appropriate the tools of hegemonic global capital in an attempt to ‘make the future.’

>>01: Xeno-genesis

In an ironic turn of phrase, Alexander Galloway, expanding upon accelerationism, laid down the term ‘brometheanism’ to refer both to Epimetheus and Prometheus, the two great brothers, as well as the apparent “macho techno-nihilism” latent in the Accelerationist Manifesto (Galloway 2017; Goh 2019). This turned out to be an accurate description, as gender has always been an integral part of the functioning of capitalism and yet is, more often than not, sidelined in discussions of accelerationism (Plant 1998, 107).²⁰ Indeed, “it was Helen Hester who noted that many of the seemingly masculinist claims in the [Accelerationist Manifesto] are rooted in unacknowledged feminist histories.”²¹ While Hester does attempt to bring the aforementioned histories to the fore in her 2018 book, *Xenofeminism*, – specifically the contributions of Shulamith Firestone – in this sub-section I want to look at Xenofeminism as the

17 For a brief introduction to Left-Accelerationism, see Steven Shavro’s “Introduction to Accelerationism” (2015, 1-24). It must also be noted that Left-Accelerationism is, of course, only one variant of Accelerationism as such. The two most common additional flavors – although the question of differences between all three is still very much up for debate – which will not be discussed here are Right-Accelerationism and Unconditional Accelerationism.

18 It must be noted that Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus* (the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*), take an arguably more conservative stance and ease off the gas by not only affirming that one must “keep enough of the [existent social] organism for it to reform each dawn,” but also by conceding that one ought not accelerate too quickly: “If you free [desire] with too violent an action, if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged toward catastrophe” (2014, 160-161). The tension between the unconditional imperative to accelerate the process in *Anti-Oedipus* and the cautionary notes in *A Thousand Plateaus* is a tension I am seeking to work out in a larger project.

19 For a primer on contemporary network theory, see Bruno Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993).

20 See also Alexandra Chace’s recent engagement with Xenofeminism (2020).

21 From a private conversation with Patricia Reed. Further citations from our conversation will be indexed by an asterisk following the quotation.

corrupted offspring of transhumanism and accelerationism with a focus on the deterritorialization of gender as such. Before continuing, however, it is time to provide a preliminary definition of Xenofeminism. To quote Hester, Xenofeminism

can to some extent be viewed as a labour of bricolage, synthesizing cyberfeminism, posthumanism, accelerationism, neorationalism, materialist feminism, and so on. ... [It] assembles, not a hybrid politics – which would suggest the prior existence of some impossible, un-hybridized state – but a politics without ‘the infection of purity’ ... a project for which the future remains open as a site of radical recomposition. (Hester 2018, 1)

A more succinct view, and one that retains reference to Hester’s articulation – indeed, one that I will forward throughout the rest of this paper – can be gleaned from the pages of the Xenofeminist Manifesto itself. While not explicitly stated as such, Xenofeminism can be thought of as the application of accelerated capitalism’s deterritorializing tendencies to gender as a social construct. Being “vehemently anti-naturalist” and “gender-abolitionist,” the Xenofeminist rallying cry is the spray-painted slogan, “Let a hundred sexes bloom!” (Cuboniks 2018, 15, 55).

In contradistinction to the explicit push for the rights of women as an abstract and universal group, Xenofeminism seeks to hijack the tendency for capitalism to destroy old social bonds (either via alienation or monetary abstraction) in the service of the liberation of subjectivity itself. Indeed, the question is not ‘for whom is Xenofeminism?’ but rather, ‘for what is Xenofeminism?’ Taking descriptive accelerationism – that is to say, the affirmation of the above analysis that capital continually deterritorializes subjectivities – as its starting point, Xenofeminism recognizes that subjects are not what they used to be. “Ours is a world in vertigo,” Laboria Cuboniks state; “it is a world that swarms with technological mediation, interlacing our daily lives with abstraction, virtuality, and complexity” (Cuboniks 2018, 13). This world produces positively rootless beings, beings for whom alienation is not a contingent feature of variable labour relations but is rather an existential

feature of the 21st century. “We are all alienated – but have we ever been otherwise?” (Cuboniks 2018, 15) A bold claim, no doubt, but a claim grounded in the queer historiographies of what Halberstam and Livingston call “posthuman bodies.” For them, posthuman bodies are mutable subjects created by constantly shifting “relations of power and pleasure, virtuality and reality, sex and its consequences.” The body, under the posthuman condition, is not merely a tool, but is instead “a technology” (Halberstam and Livingston 1995, 3).

Facing these constantly changing relations and integrations, Xenofeminism draws from its Promethean ‘heritage’ and asks us not to shy away from mediated modes of Becoming. Like the Promethean project latent in the transhumanism discussed above – a project that seeks to rework the already unstable self into a new image – Xenofeminism seeks to apply and “strategically deploy existing technologies to re-engineer [not only] the world,” but also the body as such, for “nothing should be accepted as fixed, permanent, or ‘given,’” least of all so-called ‘unnatural’ differences, too often used as the basis of exploitation (Cuboniks 2018, 17, 15). Thus, Xenofeminism was initially conceived as a rationalism: a positive application of technological mediation to human existence. Despite claims that rationalism is a patriarchal enterprise, an enterprise dominated by male minds, Laboria Cuboniks note that this is only a contingent fact of the world. For them, “there is no ‘feminine’ rationality, nor is there a ‘masculine’ one,” as to affirm such dichotomies would be to reify gender essentialism. “Science is not an expression but a suspension of gender,” they say (Cuboniks 2018, 21). Despite profoundly gendered technologies (and indeed, gendered questions of epistemology as they relate to technology),²² Sadie Plant’s account of women’s role in early computing is exceptional and ought to be read in tandem with Xenofeminism’s affirmation of rationalism (Plant 1998).

Furthermore, and in line with our discussions above, Xenofeminism rejects localized identity politics as being both too utopian inasmuch as attempts

²² See for example Wendy Faulkner’s “The Technology Question in Feminism: A View from Feminist Technology Studies” (2001).

“to secede from or disavow capitalist machinery will not make it disappear,” and fundamentally privileged as the notions of “slow[ing] down and scal[ing] back” are themselves “available only to the few,” namely the bourgeoisie in the Global North (Cuboniks 2018, 43). Instead, Xenofeminism calls for us to embrace the complexity of variable subjectivities by engaging not in reactionary attempts to apply the brakes, but rather by using a universal (although not totalizing) openness of and to the tendency to technologically tinker with all that was once held ‘sacred’: to change nature itself. For “to say that nothing is sacred, that is nothing is transcendent or protected from the will to know, to tinker and to hack, is to say that nothing is supernatural”; a materialism in the most Marxian sense of the word (Cuboniks 2018, 31, 59, 65; Marx 1986, 25-28; Steinhoff 2014). The most concrete, and yet vitally important mechanism for the survival of marginalized groups under disparate regimes of gender, is bio-hacking, generally speaking. For Laboria Cuboniks, “the distribution of hormones ... is of paramount import” as it allows for bodies to experiment on themselves, become who they want, and wrestle “control of the hormonal economy away from ‘gatekeeping’ institutions” (Cuboniks 2018, 81). Indeed, such calls to bio-hack and to, as Hester notes, embody “a tradition of radical amateurism,” realign with Halberstam and Livingston’s articulation of the posthuman body (Hester 2018, 89).

Adding to critiques of humanism levied above, we can look at Halberstam and Livingston and see that “the human has been configured as a tribal circle gathered around the fire amid the looming darkness of a dangerous [– that is to say, subjectively unstable –] world”: an exclusive group that fears difference while fetishizing sameness. Such a concept, a concept that is increasingly becoming outmoded, gives way to the posthuman (what I call the ~~transhuman~~, above); the subject that “participates in re-distributions of difference and identity” by playing multiple parts at the same time (Halberstam and Livingston 1995, 10). As opposed to the homogenizing logic of the human – a logic that “functions to domesticate and hierarchize difference” – the bio-hacked posthuman is a disruption of this static order that rejects naturalism and not only

embraces its alienation, but affirms it (Halberstam and Livingston 1995, 10). As Laboria Cuboniks provocatively state, “the construction of freedom involves not less but more alienation” (Cuboniks 2018, 15).

>>02: Affirming the Alien

Two recent interventions into the discourse surrounding Xenofeminism, Annie Goh’s “Appropriating the Alien: A Critique of Xenofeminism” and Jules Joanne Gleeson’s “Breakthroughs & Bait: On Xenofeminism and Alienation,” created ripples amongst the Fall 2019 Twittersphere spawning several back-and-forths. While it is not my intention to reply to all the criticisms raised in Goh and Gleeson’s articles – indeed, Gleeson attempts to reply to and expand upon Goh in her own way, and Matt Colquhoun has responded in numerous blog posts (2019a, b, and c) – the underlying theme of *alienation* runs through both pieces as a point of contention.

Discussed above, the affirmation of alienation is a relatively crucial part of the Manifesto. Indeed, it is arguably the point that “raised the most negative responses to the text” while also “not [being] adequately theorised” within the manifesto itself.* Despite Lucca Fraser saying that “there was something a little beligerent [sic] in using the term,” adding that it “is needlessly confusing” with “its contrarian sheen” tempting (or rather, taunting) Laboria Cuboniks to include it, I think there’s more to it than that (Fraser 2020). Thus, what I want to do is look at Goh and Gleeson’s critiques of Xenofeminism as a politics for alienation and ultimately reaffirm not only the positivity of *a certain kind* of alienation, but conclude that alienation is part of the ~~transhumanist~~ *humanist* lineage.

Before continuing, however, it is important that we clarify what we’re talking about when we discuss alienation. Indeed, the concept of alienation in Marxism proper is a contentious subject, with Marx himself seemingly shifting his views as his writing evolved. Despite the changes in articulation from his “Comments on James Mill” up to *Capital*, an underlying thread of authenticity remains within the concept. While a broader discussion of commodity fetishism is interesting, it is not what will be attended

to here. Instead, we will briefly recapitulate the moves Marx makes in “Comments on James Mill” and “The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844” to elucidate what we do – and subsequently, do not – mean by alienation in the context of Xenofeminism.

For Marx, the first and clearest understanding of alienation comes when discussing our relationship to others as mediated by production. Taking Hegel’s understanding of the master-slave dialectic and applying it to labour, Marx argues that production motivated by selfish means (and with the added ‘benefit’ of surplus) changes the ‘natural’ relation to our products from one where we find ourselves authentically represented within our work (*à la* Hegel), to one where we become objectified by our labour as it holds power over us via the satisfaction of a need (Marx 1986, 32). Further, as one produces more than one needs, one’s “*surplus* production is cunningly *calculated* for [one’s] need” so that the relationship between individuals becomes materially mediated. Indeed, our “essential nature,” a nature wherein we are related to our work as an expression of ourselves and related to each other as purely social beings, becomes twisted into “the *value* of our mutual objects”; we become “estranged” from each other by a third party: capital (Marx 1986, 32-34). When one’s work ceases to be the site where the subject finds themselves, it becomes instead both a mode of interaction between people and a mere “*means* of life” (Marx 1986, 35). What’s more, for Marx, labour that is not tied to self-actualization and is instead tied to mere survival reverses the relationship between worker and worked matter such that the worker becomes a commodity in and of themselves;²³ a means to actualize the finished product of their labour (Marx 1986, 37).²⁴

What is of vital importance for us is the implicit contrast between an internal and external existence.

23 For the sake of thoroughness, it ought to be noted that this view of worker as commodity is a view that shifts in Marx’s thought. As he continued to theorize capital, the worker ceased to be a commodity *as such*, with labour-power taking its place. Indeed, in *Capital*, commodities are explicitly defined as “external object[s]” and thus the worker themselves ceases to be a commodity (Marx 1990, 125). While not terribly significant for the overall vector of the argument in this paper, noting the above is important. I thank my reviewer for pointing out my oversight.

24 To add: Arendt thoroughly problematizes Marx’s conceptions of labour and work in *The Human Condition* (2018). Such a discussion, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

To tease out this distinction, it is necessary to quote Marx at length:

The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence, the greater the activity, the more the worker lacks objects. Whatever the product of his labour is, he is not. Therefore the greater this product, the less is he himself. The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. (Marx 1986, 37-38)

The last sentence alone provides us with everything we need to continue.²⁵ Pre-alienation, if such a state can be talked about, a labourer put “his life into the object [of his construction]” and was defined by such a relationship (Marx 1986, 37). The relationship of labourer to laboured matter was a way for the slave (in Hegel) to transcendently overcome their master by receding inward and defining themselves solely in relation *to themselves*. The alienated labour of the worker created by scarcity and competition, however, is the labour that turns the worker into an object with an existence that “exists *outside him*” and “as something alien.” The labourer no longer has a stable, self-defined essence, rather their essence is materially created by the conditions of their labour.²⁶ Thus, what is being bemoaned in the transition from the former to the latter – internal, ‘authentic’ existence to external, ‘inauthentic’ existence – is what Marx is naming alienation, and this is what we will be

25 Marx later provides a more poetic explanation (to which Lyotard (2017) responds) and reification of ‘human nature’ when he says, “What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour? First, the fact that labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it” (Marx 1986, 39).

26 Similar understandings of self-creation via alienation (alternatively: estrangement) can be garnered from the early Russian Formalists and, later, Brecht’s critique of Aristotelian Dramatic Theatre (Shklovsky 1991; Brecht 1964). I thank Jessica Harvey for unknowingly putting me on this track.

looking at.²⁷ While it may be true, as Steinhoff notes, that Marx does not have a rigid conception of a human essence – rather, “we actually produce ourselves in other objects” such that they “constitute a world in which we see ourselves everywhere” – and, indeed, our existence is determined by our material conditions, I want to continue to pull the thread between labourer and labour (Steinhoff 2014). For Marx, a *specific mode* of production is nevertheless preferable insofar as we regain a level of *authentic social existence* whereby we relate to one another ‘naturally,’ and not under a commodity relationship (Marx 1986, 33–34). The inauthentic, commodified existential relationship is what young Marx seems to be deriding as ‘alienation.’ Ultimately, my contention following Marx’s thinking, rejects the claim that a commodified existence (an alienated existence, an existence of “estrangement” where the worker no longer finds themselves within their labour) is intrinsically bad or somehow ‘inauthentic.’ Indeed, if we are to buy the accelerationist thesis, such an estrangement is a particularly unique way of escaping existent material and historical social relations by allowing us to redefine them from the outside.

It is this articulation (or rather, her *ignore-ance* of it) that Gleeson finds problematic. Indeed, for her, alienation is *not* a disruption or destruction of one’s essence – such a reading has no place in her critique. For her, “alienation is not an indication of a life drained of authenticity,” but rather is solely “a relational feature of *class domination*” (Gleeson 2019). While class domination is surely an aspect of alienation – indeed, one only needs to look to Marx’s other articulations of alienation in “The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844” – that is *not* the kind of alienation Xenofeminism seeks to affirm. Such a form of alienation, one based on “*class domination*,” is exactly what Xenofeminism seeks to abolish. Indeed, Laboria Cuboniks note that “every emancipatory abolitionism must incline towards the horizon of class abolitionism” (Cuboniks 2018, 55).

Thus, while Gleeson notes that “the ‘pro-alienation’ position of the Xenofeminists can only be made sense of as a contribution to discussion of technology,” she simultaneously notes that such a view is both “deficient” and “baffling for those schooled primarily in Marxism.” Providing no rejoinder to alienation “counterposed to *authenticity*” (apart from saying, ‘that’s not what alienation is’), Gleeson’s critique misses the boat entirely (Gleeson 2019). To ignore alienation as an opposition to essentialism (that is to say, an affirmation of an authentic human subject) – the alienation Laboria Cuboniks speaks of and what Marx thoroughly theorized in his early writings – and rewrite Xenofeminism as an affirmation of alienation as a tool of class domination is a fundamental misreading. Gleeson needn’t be taken further.

Goh’s critiques are more of a force to be reckoned with as she correctly isolates something that could be very problematic in Xenofeminism: it’s apparent attempt to speak for everyone. Indeed, Laboria Cuboniks tacitly admit as much when they name “reason as an engine of feminist emancipation, and [declare] the right of everyone to speak as no one in particular” (Cuboniks 2018, 21). While not intrinsically a claim that Xenofeminism speaks for everyone, too often the attempt to speak “as no one in particular,” to take the view from nowhere, manifests itself as a reification of the status quo. As Goh aptly points out, “it is hard to imagine how [such a view] radically departs from Eurocentricism [sic] when there is little effort to divest the overburdened term ‘universalism’ of its whiteness” (Goh 2019). Goh’s concern does not go unheeded. For Hester however, Xenofeminism ought to borrow from Haraway, adopting the terminology of ‘kin’ as opposed to ‘family’ in its charge against a reproduction of the same. Ever so slightly at odds with the universalism advocated in the manifesto, Hester advocates for a form of hospitality that allows for “the creation of the ideological and material infrastructures required to synthesize new desires” (Hester 2018, 64). This opening of possibilities and explicit rejection of the given, while itself a universal claim, is a claim made in the service of what she calls “counter-social reproduction”: “*social reproduction against the reproduction of the*

²⁷ See also Patricia Reed’s understanding of alienation as a force opposed to the familiar (2017).

social as it stands" (Hester 2018, 64). While the view from nowhere implied in the manifesto *does* have with it the baggage Goh notes, it needn't carry such baggage any further, as the affirmation of the Other as a social being in and of themselves, and further critical race theoretical interventions into feminist theory that Goh cites can likely mitigate, if not excise, the whiteness she isolates.

Further, and linked to the above, Goh is concerned about the usage of "we" in the manifesto. For her, this "we" implies a "shared subject position – which infers that 'we' are somehow all equally alienated – [that] creates particular difficulties when attached to the accelerationist injunction to go for *more* not less alienation" (Goh 2019). Pushing back against this, however, while the "we" of Xenofeminism does imply a certain shared subject position – namely, the subject position of being Other by virtue of being a woman,²⁸ something explicated by de Beauvoir and recapitulated by Plant, among many others (de Beauvoir 1974; Plant 1998, 35) – it does *not* imply uniformity. Indeed, Plant's account is likely the most helpful here. The "we" that is shared is the "we" that is excluded by patriarchal rule: it is the woman as lack, or rather, the lack of a universal "*The*," as Plant quotes Lacan. Such Others, 'not-x,' are what is being talked about when the "we" is invoked (Plant 1995; Plant 1998, 35; Ireland 2017). This does not, however, imply a uniformity of experience. As Laboria Cuboniks make clear at the start of the manifesto, Xenofeminism is a feminism that seeks to address the needs "of every human, cutting across race, ability, economic standing, and geographical position." While not providing a laundry list of groups for whom Xenofeminism is for (as such a task would necessarily be exclusionary), Laboria Cuboniks instead affirms an 'opt-in' model where those who identify with the "futureless repetition" they cite can jump on board. The "we" of Xenofeminism is intentionally expansive so as to *not* homogenize difference and imply uniformity (Cuboniks 2018, 13).

²⁸ It is important to note that the status of trans* women and/or 'feminine' identifying people is incredibly problematic and is still hotly debated. I do not feel that it is fair for me to comment apart from affirming my own personal commitment to individual freedom of Becoming and desire to never exclude trans* people from any feminist politics.

That being said, if there is homogenization occurring within the manifesto, it is because it was written for 21st century human-like-entities. As Deleuze and Guattari, drawing upon Marx, note, capital is a world-wide phenomenon:

Today we can depict an enormous, so-called stateless monetary mass that circulates through foreign exchange and across borders, eluding control by the States, forming a multinational ecumenical organization, constituting a de facto supranational power untouched by governmental decisions. (Deleuze and Guattari 2014, 453)

Given that, there are things common to all human-like-entities living under industrial capitalism: they can become alienated or bound in relentless cycles of repetition. The universalism of Xenofeminism is thus *a claim to the world as it is*. Furthermore, Goh launches another two-pronged attack when she argues not only that "the 'xeno' of xenofeminism uses alienness univocally," but Xenofeminism as such fails to provide a "convincing account of difference" (Goh 2019). I will take these two criticisms in stride. It must be noted that the prefix 'xeno-' has a plurality of meanings, all of which are at play in our understanding of Xenofeminism. Indeed, as Rebekah Sheldon notes, not only does 'xeno-' mean 'alien,' but it has particular biological and scientific meanings as well – grafts and vectors, for example. "XENO is trans": it is not merely 'alien' or 'foreign' or 'other,' but it "names the movement between the moving entity" such that, similar to Derrida's semantic vacancy discussed above, its meaning is always shifting as it is applied in different contexts – 'xeno-' acts as "the eruption of another meaning" (Sheldon 2017). It thus makes no sense to speak of 'xeno-' in the abstract, as it is always attached to something; a lived being, an entity, a *becoming*. Xenofeminism is thus an intrinsically transitory feminism, applied differentially depending upon who takes up the call for alienation.

What's more, when Goh claims that Xenofeminism fails to provide a sufficient "account of difference," she, on the one hand, expects too much from a manifesto while, on the other, tacitly implies that a non-exclusionary "account of difference" can,

in fact, be provided (Goh 2019).²⁹ Xenofeminism, however, was never meant to delineate difference; rather it “is a platform,” an *intentionally broad and inclusive platform* “to construct a new language for sexual politics.” As Laboria Cuboniks very poignantly say: “Xenofeminism indexes the desire to construct an alien future with a triumphant X on a mobile map. This X does not mark a destination [but rather] the formation of a new logic” (Cuboniks 2018, 91-93).

Thus, we return to the quintessential question: what does Xenofeminism mean when it posits that “alienation is the labour of freedom’s construction” (Cuboniks 2018, 15)? Taking alienation as the externalization of existence brought about by, among other things, changing material relations, and as opposed to a transcendent and internally consistent human nature, affirming alienation is, put simply, *affirming the uprooting of the self*. Opposed to the affirmation of an authentic, intrinsic nature to the human, Xenofeminism, as the corrupted heir to transhumanism, rejects such a notion not only as antiquated, but harmful. Indeed, we can apply the above discussion of deterritorialization to our understanding of the subject as such. If, as per the initial Marxian formulation, labour under a capitalist system necessarily estranges one from their authentic self, we can say the following: ‘good, for any dream of an authentic self is itself a reification of purity politics.’ As Plant and Land ask, “to what could we wish to return?” (Plant and Land 2017, 306). The notion of an authentic self, abstracted from all its material relations – pure Being – is another myth of an essential subjectivity from which we have fallen. Breaking with this, Xenofeminism asserts that “nothing should be accepted as fixed, permanent, or ‘given’” as such conceptions rely upon an immutable “natural order,” that only serves to re-legitimize certain subjectivities while de-legitimizing others (Cuboniks 2018, 15).

As anti-ontological, Xenofeminism follows Haraway’s lead by not only asserting a preference for the cyborg over the goddess, but also by doing away with “puritanical politics of shame.” “We want

neither clean hands nor beautiful souls, neither virtue nor terror. We want superior forms of corruption” (Cuboniks 2018, 27). And why not? “Being died in the führer-bunker, and purity belongs entirely to the cops” (Plant and Land 2017, 306). Critical of nature, a concept in whose name so many have been oppressed, estrangement from an authentic self is the next move. By becoming so materialist that even the historical materialists can’t stand it, Xenofeminism makes room for new assemblages of Becoming between a myriad of different material conditions. Affirming not only the *contingency and variability* of lived experiences, but of *life as such*, Xenofeminism encourages Becoming in the transhumanist sense: a rejection of stability and staticity in the name of experimentation.

²⁹ While Deleuze’s account of difference in *Difference and Repetition* (1994) may be able to provide such a non-exclusionary account of difference as such, the discussion is arguably too abstract for a pragmatic feminist platform and instead operates on a metaphysical register.

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