

Editorial: Transhumanist Politics, Education, and Design

*Jörgen Skågeby, Mattias Arvola,
and Lina Rahm*

In the imminent future, technological revolutions are likely to change societies, bodies and minds in more far-reaching ways than ever before in history. Perhaps, this historically recurring statement has always rung true, but the growing interest in the concept, preconditions, and implications of *transhumanism* also points to a potential radically altered human condition. Transhumanism can generally be described as a philosophy, a cultural movement and a growing field of study concerned with the future of humankind. More specifically, transhumanism is the belief in morphological freedom and the aspiration to enhance human abilities and attributes, and thereby transcend human biological and cognitive limits. As transhumanist technologies are coming closer to a point of realization (as opposed to existing mainly as imaginaries) the humanities and social sciences are also beginning to seriously ponder the implications of transhumanism, posthumanism and the tensions that arise in such, partly, overlapping fields. For this special issue we invited scholars to consider transhumanist politics, transhumanist education, and transhumanist design from a range of perspectives and with various focal points. Political issues of transhumanism is today visible not only in discussions in and about the World Transhumanist Association and the US Transhumanist Party, but also in more general social, ethical, and

moral debates around emerging technologies. Education continues to be an interesting aspect of a potential transhumanist future. Issues of access, upgrading, learning, and the very meaning of education in a world where new kinds of skillsets can be acquired through new (and contingent) means, come into question. Naturally, the design of such technologies, and the policies they embody, will also become an important point of convergence, in need of rigorous examination.

This special issue of *Confero* takes its start in an essay by John Mazarakis who presents an overarching perspective on the underpinning politics of transhumanism. Considering theoretical debates and differences in the transhumanist movement over the last two decades, Mazarakis proposes the emergence of two distinct political stances: the techno-progressive and the techno-libertarian. Using Lyotardian concepts, Mazarakis questions the latent legacy of ‘the grand narratives of modernism’ and their potential to function as a basis for theorizing a transhuman future.

Continuing the discussion of transhumanist politics, in the next essay Steve Fuller puts the focus on morphological freedom, specifically discussing issues of responsibility and representation. Transhumanists have defined morphological freedom as an extended right to one’s body, including the right to modify oneself according to one’s desires using technologies such as surgery, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and uploading. Taking its starting point in the transhumanist bill of rights and Lockean concepts of personhood, the essay discusses the philosophical (and practical) implications of taking the full meaning of morphological freedom seriously.

Morphological freedom notably includes both a potential range of possible individuals (as differently enhanced via morphological freedom) as well as a diverse range of potential (or imagined) transhumanist technologies. In his essay, Skågeby provides an overview of how various such ‘imaginary media technologies’ have spurred speculative visions of a transhumanist future. The essay argues that such imaginary media illustrate how human-

technology relationships and their temporal interrelations have been (and are) expressions of various desires both in the past, the present, and towards the future.

Next, through a parallel reading of the film *Surrogates* together with its accompanying short documentary *A more perfect you: The science of Surrogates*, Parisi considers the interpenetrating themes of the human, tactility, and the technological mediation of the body. By relying on, in the first case, diegetic prototypes of haptic media, and in the second one, the splicing together of fictional and real news footage, the films shows ‘surrogate technology’ as an imminent outcome of contemporary developments in cybernetics, making a seamless, and diegetically normalized, human-machine interface appear credulous. Parisi goes on to discuss how *Surrogates* raises crucial questions about the possibilities and limitations of synthetically reconstructing and extending touch, speculating on the potential sociological consequences of this act of technological mimesis.

Taking a detailed look at a different future technology, so-called care robots, Koistinen considers both utopian and dystopian technological futures and argues that speculative representations of care-robots can be used to make visible the problems as well as promises inherent in close relationships between humans and machines. By providing a number of evocative examples Koistinen points to the necessity of an enhanced dialogue between the human and non-human dimensions of robots.

Finally, Berg, Fors and Eriksson explore the relationship between biohacking and transhumanism, drawing on a focused ethnographic engagement with an “Upgraded dinner” workshop at the 2015 Biohacker Summit in Helsinki, Finland. Through an ethnographic account, the authors discuss how the reconfiguration of the practice of cooking into a transhumanist form can be conceptualised as a tension between mastery and mystery, which in turn relates to notions of aesthetics, medicine and alchemy. As such, the authors demonstrate that contemporary transhumanism is not always a question of cybernetics, DIY science and technologically enhanced life, but

can also be viewed as something that goes beyond technological revolutions and instead relates to a more ancient legacy.

Design is policy embedded in silicon. Algorithms, as both (pre-)programmed and (re-)programmable, are instantiations of political positions. Or rather, the decisions they make or support will have political implications. Our right to education ties into these inherently political technologies - technologies that will also be increasingly co-agential in our everyday lives. As such, our right to education is also a matter of the preconditions of this right, and consequently, about the access to, and designed agency of, transhumanist technologies. As we begin to explore our extended, enhanced and substituted selves, our relations to others will create new dilemmas to consider. This special issue of *Confero* discusses and explores such dilemmas and we hope readers will find the included essays as evocative and thought-provoking as we have.

Jörgen Skågeby is associate professor at the Department of Media Studies at Stockholm University. His research interests include media archaeology and humanistic HCI.
Email: jorgen.skageby@ims.su.se

Mattias Arvola is associate professor in cognitive studies at the Department of Computer and Information Science at Linköping University, Sweden. He studies situated cognition, interaction design and user experience (UX). That entails how to design for the interactions and experiences that people have with technology.
Email: mattias.arvola@liu.se

Lina Rahm is PhD student at the Department of Behavioral Sciences and learning at Linköping University, Sweden. She holds a BSSc in Gender studies, an MSSc. in social and welfare studies, and is currently researching the genealogy of the digital citizen.
Email: lina.rahm@liu.se

The terms and conditions of use are related to Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC-BY)

