

# No more generating knowledge for its own sake, research creativity is the new frontier

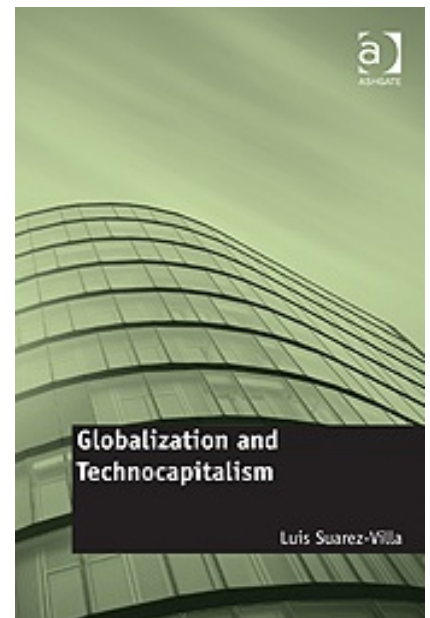
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As technological creativity, corporate research, and talent flows become more important than ever, ***Globalization and Technocapitalism*** explores the manner in which globalisation acquires new contextual features that will become central to the macro-social dynamics of 21st century societies. **Nathalie Mitev** recognises the book is not for a broad readership but argues that any invested reader will find many rewarding insights.



**Globalization and Technocapitalism: The Political Economy of Corporate Power and Technological Domination. Luis Suarez-Villa. Ashgate. 2012.**

*Globalization and Technocapitalism* provides a systematic critical analysis of the global commodification of intangibles, and clearly demonstrates how global capitalism is entangled with science and technology. The book is timely, as one way of digging ourselves out of the economic crisis is claimed to be growth. The author [Luis Suarez-Villa](#) obviously comes from a Marxian perspective, which has been quietly neglected for a long while now (“Well, capitalism is the only game left in town,” is often heard as the last resort during discussions in many an academic conference). This book addresses the macro level, whereby Suarez-Villa’s previous book, *Technocapitalism*, focused on the *micro*-level organisational phenomena.



Capitalism is entering a new phase compared to the industrial capitalism of yesteryear. Current buzzwords such as innovation, invention and creativity now refer to intangible resources to be harnessed, as opposed to raw materials and production labour. His objective is to counteract the dominant functionalist accounts that “populate the literature on technology, society and corporations” (p. 4). Injecting a critical stance on globalisation using the concepts of technique, the rational use of science and technology and corporate power can illuminate its ideological dimension. It is highly relevant to LSE and the university’s focus on, and reputation in, the social

sciences from sociology and economics to finance and management research.

After a brief historical overview of industrial capitalism and associated phenomena of stagnation and crisis, the author moves to the emergence and growth of neoliberalism over the last 30 years and its attendant redefinition of public governance and the role of the state, and the dismantlement of restraints to corporate power. Deregulation, privatization and financialisation are clear manifestations of this shift. Financialisation, in particular, is a way of aligning the interests of corporate power with those of the population and reducing the prospect of radical social upheaval (pp. 19-20). However, the growth generated by financialisation proved to be ephemeral resulting in the current crisis.

A return to financialisation being flawed (but happening, still), Suarez-Villa develops his argumentation about growth through technologically enabled intangibles in the so-called post-industrial services sector. Most of his illustrations throughout the book come from biotechnology, nanotechnology, bioinformatics, biorobotics and biopharmacology. These are essential to the new 'experimentalist world' of technocapitalism that depends on new modes of accumulation to advance corporate power and profits. Human existence, life, work, nature, the planet and even the cosmos are no longer out of reach thanks to research in technology and science. No more generating knowledge for its own sake, research creativity is now the next frontier to be enlisted. Boundary-less research has to be systematised and rapidly appropriated on a global scale, talent and creativity tapped globally. Individual chapters delve further into the topics of accumulation, intangible commodities, corporatism, global inequalities, democracy, and the last chapter suggests alternatives.

Having painted this stark picture, each chapter ends with identifying dilemmas and contradictions and warning about social pathologies, potential crises and dysfunctions such as: the potential failure of commodification; the high risk and uncertainty of research; the paradox between commodification of creativity and dependence on its reproduction; the social mediation necessary to reproduction, outside the control of corporate power, driving to increases of corporate control over public governance and society at large.

I particularly liked insights into the role of business school training (p. 37), which reaches into many human activities, for instance the capture of 'tacit' knowledge and mechanisms for reproduction of creativity. As well as the fast 'decomposition' of corporations for global advantage and the role of, and difficulties with, global networks (pp. 99-102).

In fact, I would recommend only reading the last sections of each chapter which focus on these dysfunctions and pathologies as they have more analytical traction. I found some of the material (e.g. on neo-imperialism or emancipation) a little predictable. I am not entirely convinced that the overall format of the book can appeal to a broad readership; one has to adhere to the initial framework before being able to dive into the details where it becomes really fun – for instance, I

thought the material in the footnotes rich, highly revealing and often amusing.

The well-researched illustrations and examples are spread out and could have been gathered together rather than split into the themes of the chapters, which are rather rigidly organised to fit with the framework. An example would be to make links between the co-existence, overlap, and co-dependence of 'old' and 'new' capitalism, in particular their implications for developing countries, which should be studied together for a real global outlook. Perhaps doing this in conjunction with the previous 'micro' book could have made for a fascinating and more persuasive read rather than separating the macro from the micro – especially for hostile audiences, including LSE academics and students.

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