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# James Wilt, Do Androids Dream of Electric Cars? Public Transit in the Age of Google, Uber, and Elon Musk (Toronto: Between the Lines Press 2020)

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of the book, although they are valuable. “Working Time, Dinner Time, Serving Time: Labour and Law in Industrialization” by Douglas Hay is an interesting work of social history, and is in some ways an effective segue into Palmer’s lengthy discussion of E.P. Thompson, but its connection to the law as a remedy is somewhat tenuous. In the same way, Christine Sypnowich’s article, “Cultural Heritage, the Right to the City, and the Marxist Critique of Law,” although it does attempt to connect to aspects of Glasbeek’s thought, feels somewhat tertiary.

What at first glance may seem a disparate collection is in fact a rather elegant representation of Glasbeek’s approach to the law. In the first pages of *The Class Politics of Law*, Fudge and Tucker state that this book was meant as a celebration of Glasbeek’s career, and this book does that by showing how impactful and indeed revolutionary his way of thinking has been.

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**James Wilt, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Cars? Public Transit in the Age of Google, Uber, and Elon Musk* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press 2020)**

IN *DO ANDROIDS DREAM of Electric Cars? Public Transit in the Age of Google, Uber, and Elon Musk*, James Wilt cuts through the whiz-bang hype surrounding the tech industry’s predatory targeting of transportation services, while consistently pointing the way forward towards a positive vision of well-funded and accessible public transportation services. His argument is divided into three main parts. First, Wilt provides the historical background necessary to understand the crisis facing public transportation, and discusses the political economy of

the tech-finance-transportation nexus that makes up the balance of forces today. With this context established, Wilt proceeds to survey a range of topics that directly relate to public transportation: climate, economic and racial inequality, safety and congestion, accessibility, privacy and surveillance, rural and intercity service, as well as labour unions. Wilt concludes by proposing a vision for public transportation that prioritizes people over profit, and offers suggestions for organizing towards this goal.

Wilt’s brief history of the advent of car culture in North America is useful in that it denaturalizes the now-ubiquitous role of the automobile, illustrating its present role as the result of a range of industry-led campaigns and public policy decisions. At the turn of the 20th century, the automobile industry had to push out existing transportation systems like streetcars or trains. The dangerous new automobiles also had to tackle the problem of people continuing to walk about city streets (a long-standing human impulse) through the invention of jaywalking, a crime meant to shame pedestrians and blame victims of automobile accidents. By the 1950s mortgage-financing policies pushing suburbanization – combined with enormous public subsidies in the form of the interstate highway system – built the infrastructure that would slice up urban space and dominate transportation for the foreseeable future. Most damaging of all, this infrastructural lock-in of car dependence made public transportation alternatives all the more difficult.

The neoliberal turn meant rolling austerity for cities and their public transportation budgets. While the projects that do eventually succeed in getting built are often subject to the conditions of public-private-partnerships, Wilt explains that these P3s employ voodoo economics to initially appear less costly, while the back-loaded long-term financial costs end

up being absorbed by the public purse. Altogether, this historical trajectory has left public transportation systems in an emaciated state of what is in effect long-term disinvestment. Piecemeal projects that do proceed are themselves part of urban gentrification strategies, where increasing transportation amenities help boost property values and push lower-income residents out (who need the service the most), all while initiating further rounds of real-estate speculation.

It is into this arena that the tech giants step in, claiming a technological fix for our public transportation woes. Wilt points out how ridesharing tech giants are propelled primarily by a willingness to burn vast pools of venture capital while aggressively lobbying to avoid taxes and labour regulations that apply to other transportation modes. Public transit ridership is being eroded by unprofitable ridesharing services that subsidize rides with ample venture capital and circumventions of labour regulations. Wilt's analysis of the particulars of the transportation industry echo the insights of other works assessing the broader dynamics of post-2008-bailout capitalism, such as Nick Srnicek's *Platform Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

The technical fixes orbit three so-called "revolutions" in transportation: *electricification*, largely in the form of Electric Vehicles (EVs); *sharing or pooling*, which relates to the platforms and apps that govern their use; and *automation or self-driving vehicles*, where machine intellect takes the drivers' seat.

What follows is a thorough debunking of the tech industry's claim to inherit the future of human transportation. Through a critical discussion on a number of fronts – environmental impacts, equity, safety, among others – Wilt pokes hole after hole into the mirage of technological wizardry presented by the industry, repeatedly pointing out that a failure of

merely *one* of the three spurious revolutions makes the tech industry's vision completely untenable on its own terms.

Wilt's breadth in covering these topics is impressive, so mere highlights will have to suffice here. The material throughput of replacing two billion internal-combustion engines with EVs means enormous quantities of lithium carbonate, doubling copper output, tripling cobalt mining, and contending with the likely geopolitical consequences of such a resource rush, with particularly disastrous implications for the Global South. The power consumption necessary for automation processes requires the equivalent of 50 to 100 running laptops in the vehicle, effectively cancelling out any gains made from electrification. Personal vehicles, which sit idle for 96 percent of the time, are a remarkable waste of space and transportation capacity – and if not parked, in ride-hailing or automated form they risk becoming zombie-vehicles, congesting roadways as they await being summoned. From the standpoint of these material and technical problems, Wilt argues that public transportation is quite simply a more sensible and efficient deployment of resources, straightforwardly applying technology and energy usage to transporting large numbers of human beings through space.

Most praiseworthy, however, is Wilt's expansion of transit-oriented-thought to issues of equity, safety, accessibility, and democratic control. These fundamentally social and political questions are the same set that are conveniently ignored in the tech discourse, and their foregrounding in this text marks a refreshing departure from the economistic and technical wonkery that so often characterizes discussions of public transportation. Wilt's inclusion of accessibility, gender, and sexual identity complement a sensitivity to the racialized inequities that have characterized public transportation and

urban development. Wilt examines the growing dangers of data collection for tech-surveillance and the already-existing over-policing of public transit, exposing how little control over data users currently posses, and makes the case that public safety is best addressed through the provision of services and resources – not an expanded surveillance and carceral state.

The discussion of rural and intercity transit service complements Wilt's refusal to abandon the suburbs. While rural areas have long suffered from disinvestment and neglect under neoliberal governance, Wilt counters with a vision that includes rural public transit provision. Sketching out how very feasible this transportation access would be, Wilt argues in favour of such investments on the grounds of equity. Workers, too, feature prominently, as it is their labour that the tech giants hope to automate out of existence. The precarious position of rideshare drivers is explored at depth, bringing attention to their substandard pay, and their work disciplined through unfair and arbitrary "gamified" evaluation systems. Wilt deems transit unions as key players in the fight against these eroding employment standards, and holds public transportation jobs as one of several that could provide necessary employment to just transition efforts.

A welcome emphasis is made throughout the text on the constructive and positive role organized rank-and-file citizens, transit users and union members can have on policy changes. This emphasis on the attainable and empowering aspects of organizing are important for readers desiring to wage similar campaigns in their own locales. Some detail, however, could have been developed regarding the hostile jurisdictional infrastructure that continues to separate fiscal capacity (at the national level) from service delivery (at the municipal level). This insulation

of money and markets from redistributive democratic pressures remains a key barrier to overcoming the politics of austerity.

*Do Androids Dream of Electric Cars's* real strength is how forthright it is in making the issues political. Wilt presents rival visions for public transportation that are frankly antagonistic, plainly illustrating how allowing tech-giants to dictate the future will have the real effect of foreclosing possibilities of truly public and democratic transportation for people.

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**Eugene McCarraher, *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2019)**

I DID NOT EXPECT to enjoy this ridiculously lengthy (800 pages) tome which opens its critique of capitalism with an unapologetic theism that I found tedious. McCarraher writes that he sees the earth as "a sacramental place, mediating the presence and power of God, revelatory of the superabundant love of divinity." (11) I have little interest in religion and less in McCarraher's exploration of the ways in which many people seek not just a relationship with a God figure but "enchantment," that is constant evidence of God's presence and guiding hand in their lives. In the end, while my own materialist thinking remained intact, I was won over to McCarraher's view that capitalism and Christianity have become so entwined that it is not unfair to say that capitalism has become a religion.

This is a thoughtful, beautifully written book, tracing the ways in which the values of capitalism – greed, productivity, competition, selfishness – became confounded with notions of divinity, and