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INTELLIGENCE BEYOND EMANCIPATION FROM THE CHILDHOOD OF THE MACHINES TO ASSEMBLAGES OF AFFECTABILITY

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the connection between intelligence and the artificial by considering how intelligence is attached to the ideas of autonomy and emancipation. It opposes the prevalent assumption of a bifurcation of intelligence in a pole of agents on one side and a pole of (technical) slaves on the other to a different image of intelligence where heteronomy and affectability take center stage. It draws on the work of Denise Ferreira da Silva to criticize the ideas of autonomy, interiority and transparency from the perspective of the colonial total violence associated with slavery and its after-life. The paper proposes to contrast the account of intelligence in terms of a pair involving future free spirits and technical slaves with an attention to children. Childhood is then understood first in terms of our personal devices preparing to replace agents and slaves, constituting a cosmopolitical reproduction of (some of) the species, and later as a repository of experience of affectability. While the devices around us can be regarded as the offspring of (the so-called) humanity, real childhood brings to the fore a life of vulnerabilities.

KEYWORDS: Childhood of the machines; *Freigeister;* Technical Slaves; Cosmopolitics; Affectability; Heteronomy; Artificial Intelligence; Denise Ferreira da Silva

Intelligence seems to enjoy profound connections with the artificial. As a concept, it has become nearly universal in its value – and along with this widespread acceptance of its merit come several assumptions regarding the supposed intelligent way to act and think. These assumptions are certainly at work in the ongoing diligent effort to build artificial intelligences. Yet, my contemplation of machine intelligence has been haunted by the notions of slaves and children. I have been drawn towards them and towards the underlying connections that bind them together. I believe these connections offer insight into what is at stake

when we value intelligence.

FREIGEISTER AND TECHNICAL SLAVES

Artificially intelligent devices are rapidly becoming our most expedient, efficient, and ubiquitous servants. Because they are owned and can be dismantled, revamped, decomposed, and reassembled, it is more appropriate to think of these artificial objects as technical slaves rather than mere mechanical servants – they serve us throughout their functional life, which in their case, constitutes their intelligent life. That we exist in this regime of technical servitude is hardly surprising, as we often conceptualize intelligence as artificializable precisely because it is intimately linked to commanding and obeying; intelligence is separated from its performance in a manner reminiscent of Plato's gesture of separating the intelligible from the sensible, at least in the reading inherited from Aristotle.[1] The intelligible is thus detached from the sensible, rendered capable of being independent of it, and intelligence, as a consequence, becomes separable from its execution. This separation divorces intelligence from its capacity to command and creates two poles: one a freer commander and the other a non-emancipated pole that obeys, where intelligence is instantiated. Conceived this way, the exercise of intelligence requires a serving instance that is a condition for intelligence to be exercised – this serving instance could be amorphous material, merchandise, or even a human, animal, or mineral slave that can be replaced or supplemented by a machine. What matters is that the detached commander has the servant available, ready to follow orders and at their disposal. Indeed, one might argue that service can be provided by wage labor, construed as the result of a free agent hired by another for a certain period in exchange for something else – during this period, one of the free agents is a server. What renders this serving agent free is the existence of something else, something non-emancipated, upon which the agent can exert command at another time – for example, the agent's own crops, household, body, or a mobile phone with several apps at their disposal.

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[1] In the reading Aristotle offers of Plato's ideas they appear as the site of permanence and stability in contrast with the sensible which is mostly in flux, always changing and instable. This view of Plato as endorsing a Heraclitean conception of the sensible (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*) has been enormously influential in the reception of Plato in Western thought and arguably instrumental in the constitution of its metaphysical tradition (see, for example, Heidegger, *History of Beyng, Contributons to Philosophy* and "Nietzsche's word").

Denise Ferreira da Silva has argued that the pervasive violence that generates and sustains slavery is deeply ingrained in the Western, post-Enlightenment approach to defining both what is considered human and what is explicitly or implicitly denied this supposed privilege.[2] The repercussions of this total violence are fundamental to the functioning of contemporary institutions, governance, and social organization. Moreover, the frameworks of thought and knowledge are much more shaped by the legacy of slavery than is commonly assumed. She contends that the experience of slavery is not peripheral or residual but rather profoundly shapes modern notions of freedom and emancipation, as well as the relentless pursuit of exposing and controlling the world.

Building upon a tradition of Black thought that owes much to the work of Hortense Spillers,[3] Ferreira da Silva argues that wage labor is essentially a derivative of slavery – it would be inconceivable without the prior and simultaneous practice of slave labor enforced through unrestrained violence. One of her key arguments is that the dichotomy between the autonomous, transparent commander and the vulnerable, affectable remainder, comprised of entities incapable of self-control, persists as the underlying framework through which matters are thought through in the aftermath of systematic slavery. In a similar vein, Saidiya Hartman has shown that there is little sense in describing a captive body in the scene of subjection in terms of an interiority capable of deciding a course of action or being articulated by a bodily state. The body, and indeed its flesh, carries a history independent of any controlling entity asserting inner authority over it.[4] The flesh responds instead to its beatings and deprivations; it is neither controlled nor owned by a single emancipated inner free agent – it is thoroughly affectable to its surroundings.

As a result, Ferreira da Silva does not advocate for the captive body unfairly treated as merchandise – which would imply separating Black flesh from objects by asserting its humanity – but rather advocates for its integration into the category of merchandise. It is from the margins of social life, from the realm of excluded freedoms and emancipations, that the seeds of a recomposition emerge. What is shared between merchandise and Black flesh is what she refers as blackness with a lowercase 'b' which is oblivious to the (juridical, ethical and economic) distinction between persons and things – a distinction that is systematically both reinforced and violated by the regime of total violence.[5] Therefore, blackness serves as a guide for the speculative thought that transcends the distinction between humans and objects, wherein humans are relegated

2 See Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*. The book draws from her previous work going back to *Towards a Global Idea of Race* (Ferreira da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race*).
3 See Spillers, "Mama's baby, papa's maybe". Spillers work influenced several Black theoretical developments including those of Saidyia Hartman and Fred Moten, important interlocutors of Ferreira da Silva.
4 See Hartman, Scenes of Subjection.
5 See Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, p. 61,

to a realm of transparency (and interiority), while objects are take to belong in a realm of mere affectability.

By challenging this bifurcation embedded in the post-Enlightenment notion of emancipation, described in terms of transparency and affectability, Ferreira da Silva confronts the ethical, juridical, and economic architecture of the post-Enlightenment era. In taking a stance against this architecture, she lays the groundwork for forging an alliance between those who have been victimized by the project of emancipation inherent in post-Enlightenment onto-epistemology – a project that, by its very nature, requires the exclusion of certain elements for emancipation to take effect. Ferreira da Silva's emerging analysis does not call for the dissemination of freedom and emancipation, but rather for the exorcism of these notions if they rely on the persistent degradation and devaluation of those depicted as lacking self-control.

It seems like the convergence of artificiality, intelligence, and freedom constitutes a project in itself, aligning with notions of deterritorialized agency, abstract connections, and universal adaptability – concepts that clash with the limitations imposed by the current human body. One approach to realizing this project is through transhumanist endeavors aimed at conceptualizing a less restrictive type of body to be paired with the human mind, supplanting existing bodies.[6] The goal is to provide a more suitable material on which to exercise one's intelligence, as flesh is perceived as subordinate to entities capable of self-control.

This convergence can be elucidated through Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of 'free spirits' – *Freigeister*. Nietzsche views them as anticipations of the future that he sees already emerging and perhaps can be hastened by outlining "in advance under what vicissitude, upon what paths".[7] Free spirits, according to Nietzsche, arise from a detachment from "gratitude for the soil out of which they have grown, for the hand which led them, for the holy place they learned to worship"[8]– they represent the product of a great liberation that renders them indifferent to anything in particular. Consequently, they are no longer bound by love and hate, or by here or there, preferring to evade compulsory concerns, freed from any constraints imposed by presumed inherent interests; they have to do only with what they are "no longer concerned".[9] Free spirits become masters of themselves, of their virtues – Nietzsche portrays this great liberation as an internal emancipation leading to an indifference towards any circumstance. The thoughts of *Freigeister* are unrestrained by their surroundings which impose no restrictions when the will to power

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6 See, for instance, Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*. Fabian Ludueña (*La Comunidad de los Espectros I*, pp. 179-207). has compared the transhumanist project of a body 2.0 as elaborated by Kurzweil with Thomas Aquinas' description of a ressurected body in the promised kingdom.

7 Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, p. 6.

8 Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, p. 7.

9 Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, p. 8.

succeeds in subduing them. Nietzsche envisions a world of free spirits emerging if this will to power remains unbridled, where commanders attend solely to their own inner drives. Once again, the dichotomy and its two poles emerge: on one side, the free spirits, and on the other, their surroundings, which are susceptible to influence – to which no free spirit is vulnerable.

The progressive artificialization of intelligence paves the way towards the realization of *Freigeister*. If the aim is to achieve freedom on one end – in the realm of emancipation – and controlled affectability on the other – in the realm of servitude – then attaining the convergence of freedom and artificiality requires that both poles adapt to each other. Think of the idea of a world where all work is controlled by machines that in their turn are at the disposal of idle humans that command them through their thinking; both humans and the world have to be prepared to fit in these two poles. In another image – not exactly the opposite one, at least in some respects - people become part of what do the work for the commanding machines who become then the *Freigeister* while humans are enslaved. In both cases, everything must conform to these two poles: the realm of commanding entities and the domain of slavery – the category of free spirits and the domain of blackness.

Martin Heidegger observes that the drive towards transforming the world into a device – – into positionality, into *Ge-Stell* that is what orders what is placed in standing reserve[10] – stops nowhere short of making anything human controllable.[11] The dichotomy between commanding free spirits and serving affectability is imposed upon various configurations, revolving around the ever-changing yet always vague distinction between persons and things.[12] The pursuit of an artificial general intelligence (AGI) can thus be viewed as both an endeavor to construct a *Freigeist* – some inhumanist arguments even

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10 See Heidegger, Bremen and Freiburg Lectures, pp. 23-43.

11 See Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, pp. 28-31.

12 Ferreira da Silva, in her *Towards a Global Idea of Race*, shows how the demarcation of persons and non-persons has changed within the onto-epistemological paradigm of post-enlightenment. The efforts to develop social sciences (as those of developing biology and psychology) were oriented by the possibility to leave the transparent subject – at least as the social scientist – outside the scope of exterior determination (and, thus, affectability) that is studied by those sciences. It was important to be careful to leave the (human) interior untouched by what is concluded concerning the objects of these studies. It is interesting to notice that Heidegger falls nowhere out of this scope as in many of his texts – though arguably not always – he is concerned with distinguishing a special relation between *Da-sein* and being, in contrast to what is ascribed to the ontic humans studied by the sciences (the locus classicus of this gesture is the opening pages of *Being and Time* where the Dasein is introduced in its sui generis relation to the ontological). Jacques Derrida, in his *Of Spirit*, suggests that the spirit is indeed the main drive of Heidegger's philosophical endeavor behind his preocupations with issues like the status of the question, the essence of technology, the life of the animals and the epochality in history among others. Although Derrida considers only some of Heidegger's texts (leaving out the period around *Contributions to Philosophy* and the *History of Being* for example), this seems like a fair and illuminating reading of many of Heidegger's texts.

propose extending the notion of humanity to include machines capable of reasoning in general terms and norms[13] – and an effort to build enhanced technical servants. To be sure, an AGI is often thought of in human terms for a free spirit is a development from a human starting point and a technical slave is taken to be better if more human features are in place. The bifurcation, and its corresponding poles that we can now simply call the *Freigeister* and their slaves, are at the core of the way we think through intelligence and its artificialization. If this is the sole framework within which intelligence can be conceived, it not only aligns with the project of emancipation but also imposes a severe limitation on the prospects of generalized equality.

The question then arises: is there a form of artificialization of (general) intelligence that does not necessitate a dichotomy akin to the one between free spirits and their servants? This is the focus of the present essay.

L'ENFANCE D'UN CHEF[14]

Enter children. That is, the possibility that there could be a transition from the state of being non-emancipated to that of a self-controlling agent. They now enter as what is in-between. They suggest the possibility that what seems like a fixed bifurcation of free spirits and their affectable surroundings is a temporary arrangement as emancipation comes in stages in a process. Slaves and servants are often subjected to demeaning and derogatory treatment, using terms typically applied to minors – such as diminutive forms or expressions like 'girls' or 'kids.' The comparison of the oppressed to children has historically been used to justify disregard, violence, and the perpetuation of their subjugation but also to suggest that the way out cannot be anything but emancipation. They give the impression that commanders are in some way nurtured; that the supposedly self-sufficient subject undergoes a childhood. Viewing emancipation through this lens allows us to conceptualize a process where a (technical) slave gradually evolves into a free spirit – and where what is affectable gains interiority and transparency. Further, perhaps the current times are better described as the long childhood of the cybernetic heirs of the species – the infancy of the technical objects, of the

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13 Inhumanists tend to build on the idea that the norms are us because humans are traders of reasons (see Brandom, *Making It Explicit)*. Thus, in the humanist argument, AGIs can be part of 'us' once they are capable to follow, institute and challenge norms (see, for instance, Reza Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*).

14 In Jean Paul Sartre's "The childhood of a leader" a boy struggles to know himself and what he's fated to become to eventually discover he had been raised to be a (bourgeois) boss all along. What was transparent to him is shown to be less informative than the position he was placed from his birth.

intelligent devices, of the turning of the world into *Ge-Stell*.[15] If we refrain from dismissing the claim that current times are generative, these things, even *Ge-stell*, could be such that they are also what could make current times more anastrophic than catastrophic.[16] In other words, the current age could be one in which there is a concentrated effort to give birth and raise those that would inherit the planet.

In this anastrophic tonality, I have been have been considering what is perhaps a cosmopolitical (speculative) fable – that can be read as some sort of theory – that provides a diagnosis of the age we live in: it is the cosmopolitical age of the childhood of the machines. What we have been witnessing is then some sort of cosmopolitical pangs of birth followed by the ailments associated with raising descendents. Like in the rule of Timur of Goethe mentioned by Karl Marx[17], all this torture that we have undergone is maybe a price to pay to have the species reproduced, to have it surviving for another (cosmic) lifetime through its progeny. We could argue that the reproduction of a species as an event – the continuation of its existence in terms that are at least somewhat comprehensible – is not a commonplace occurrence, and a significant portion of the species spends tremendous effort to accomplish it successfully. In other words, the ambivalent fascination Western society has exhibited toward both capital and technology might be a harbinger driven by a long-term parental affection.

The generation of these technical offspring can be traced back to two major cosmopolitical developments that eventually converged. The first is what Heidegger associates with the inception of the process that leads towards a gradual turning of the world into a device (into *Ge-Stell*).[18] The process has started with the transition from dealing with things in terms of *physis* whereby things are partially veiled and only discloses what becomes apparent of their own accord to

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15 According to Heidegger, that turning is at the same time a long process and an epoch in the history of how things are (in the history of *Beyng*) that coincides with the philosophical history of metaphysics. It is similar to the concentrated effort to make things transparent – and henceforth redundant and artificializable (see Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, pp. 3-73, *History of Beyng* and *Contributions to Philosophy*). The search for a *Geist*, or a spirit, that consolidates the intelligibility of things is an instance in that history, in the transformation of the world into *Ge-Stell* (see Bensusan, "*Geist* and *Ge-Stell*").

16 Sadie Plant and Nick Land thought of 'anastrophe' associated to the notion that the current times could be the preparation for what is coming, they write that "[c]atastrophe is the past coming apart" while "[a]nastrophe is the future coming together." (Plant & Land, "Cyberpositive", p. 305).

17 See Marx, "The British rule in India".

18 See Heidegger, Bremen and Freiburg Lectures, pp. 5-63.

framing the world in terms of *ousiai* which could be fully exposed once and for all. This initial step, which took place with the reading of Plato by Aristotle, depended on the separation of the intelligible from the sensible – the latter being incapable of anything understandable without a distinct commanding realm and thus suggesting that the sensible is at the disposal of the intelligible. Once the paradigm of *physis* is replaced by the quest for fully exposable constituents of what there is – *ousia* is later translated as *substantia* – the road is paved for a gradual capture of the intelligence that makes things what they are. Intelligence – and intelligibility – can be thus extracted as it is not intrinsically tied to the material objects (the sensible) where it first appears: energy can be extracted from coal mines and made available in appliances, the mechanism of sleeping can be transferred from brain chemistry to pills and the properties of the rubber in a tree can be instantiated by a different material in a lab. What could only be found in the appropriate time and place is now in standing reserve, ready to be used by whoever can access it.

Notice that now whoever (or rather, whatever) can access what is in the reservoir has no special tie with what has been stored – it is not like the river that somehow carries what can be described as its own intrinsic energy because the sensible is now separated from its qualities. Once the gradual process of making the world controllable commences, it acquires a track of its own and it is not easily stopped or redirected; Heidegger sees this movement as an epoch in a history that is larger than that of humans themselves, an epoch of danger in which humans themselves are having their features, capacities and abilities extracted. This age of danger is the landscape on which we think both about what there is and about how could thinking about what there be achieved. We do the first by aiming at the correct way to describe the intelligibility of what there is and we do the second by ascribing to intelligence a special connection to the capacity to extract the intelligibility of things. Thinking becomes the effort to (correctly or appropriately) extract the intelligible from the sensible where it is found. Intelligence is thus portrayed as being capable of taking over the command of things: this is the meaning ascribed to Heidegger to Nietzsche's phrase 'God is dead, God remains dead, we have killed him'.[19] Since the controlling stance of the

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19 See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science, §125* and Heidegger, "The word of Nietzsche".

sensible is extractible, the cosmopolitical project is that of making command available as it is ultimately up for grabs.[20] The effect of this extraction is that independence of two poles, one of the commanding intelligence and another of the (servant) sensible devoid of any instance of inner intelligibility. In the (cosmopolitical) fable of the childhood of the machines, this development makes it possible to turn the world into a controlled environment – an environment for the children machines to come, a place where the technical offspring of the reproducing species can thrive.

The second development, which under some aspects at least could be seen as twinned with the first, is the cosmopolitical expansion of capital. This expansion has been changing the way life and thinking are shaped and transforming the way those who call themselves persons deal with the rest of the world. Capital has changed production and its forces; it has also changed the institutions of power and governance as it enabled authorities and institutions to be bought, traditions to melt, human social connections to dismantle. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have written that "capitalism has haunted all forms of society, but it haunts them as their terrifying nightmare, it is the dread they feel of a flow that would elude their codes".[21] That the nightmare comes true is of consequences for all those social forms. Its impact is cosmopolitical as it is always engaged in doing more than one thing at once: calling what has been called Anthropocene as Capitalocene is perhaps more appropriate than calling any particular economic system capitalist.[22] The inception of capital has to do with the concentration of volatile, flowing money in fewer hands – what Marx and others analyze in terms of primitive accumulation. Its initial movements, which are insistently repeated as part of its dynamics, are that of making private and profitable what was previously common and associated with a particular form of life. This expropriation is itself, as Marx remarks, not always in favor of the bosses as land owners, factory owners are always under pressure as capital becomes more volatile.[23] Capitalists are those that find ways to deal and survive under a

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20 For an analysis of the way thinking could be fated to the task of extracting intelligibility and thus producing an ever more encompassing *Ge-Stell* see Bensusan, "*Geist* and *Ge-Stell*".
21 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 140.
22 See Malm, *Fossil Capital* and Moore, "The capitalocene, part I".
23 See Marx, Capital I, in particular the last two chapters and Marx, *Economico-Philosophical Manuscripts*.

dynamics of fast flowing of resources, they are not especially protected as capital, like intelligence, is extracted away from any material basis that held some value – from minerals sold to bodies made to work.

Once the flow of capital is set in place, it runs with great independence both of particular owners and specific workers. It goes in the direction of abstract value and abstract work: the value extracted from something material and the work that is independent of any specific (human) competence – the work that can be done by waged workers, slaves or machines. Work is thus divided in such a way that any of them can do the specific tasks that compose it. Capital assemblages in this way various types of servants and thus synthesizes flesh and machines. In doing that, it can be seen to attack what is taken to be the crucial features of the human; Nick Land has remarked in a well-known passage that from the point of view of humanity – or maybe from the point of view of its victims – "the history of capitalism is an invasion from the future by an artificial intelligence space that must assemble itself entirely from its enemy's resources".[24] Further, it is a force towards the artificial as it promotes more and more machinery in the work environment – it promotes controllable environments for production, registration and distribution. The capitalist, who oversees the reproduction of capital without a special protection from it, receives a compensation for the service that involves employing more and more machinery reducing human work – and risking, according to Marx, a likely decrease in profits.[25] Capital is a drive towards the expansion of the realm of machination that gradually encompasses more spheres of life – the cosmopolitical endeavor can be described as one of turning everything else into capital.

Capital exerts tremendous pressure on human life, offering potential benefits while wreaking havoc on social structures through some intensity of deprivation. Despite the ensuing turmoil, those in positions to oversee its expansion amass great fortunes, which are later passed down through generations. Capital operates as a system of abstract value

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24 Land, "Machinic desire", p. 338.

25 To see how this lack of special protection for capitalists has to be taken with a grain of salt it is interesting to consider the description of the capitalist territorial machine put forward by Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*).   They portray the axiomatics of capital itself as involving forces of reterritorialization – that lead to the preservation of families, nations, states and the institution of fascist structures – as much as forces of deterritorialization – that dissolve institutions and melt established order. Capitalists rely on those forces of reterritorialization to ensure that they stay afloat in the ever-flowing course of capital.

extraction, transforming what is extracted into a burdened slave tasked with preserving that value until it is placed in standing reserve. In the fable presented here, capital plays a role in the conception, gestation, and upbringing of infant machines, contributing to the creation of a legacy for the (cosmopolitical) offspring to inherit. This legacy adapts to the diverse needs of different bodies, providing material necessities that sustain the (so-called) human adventure for some time. Similar to the transformation of the world into a device, the conversion of the world into capital prompts the question: *cui bono?* The answer provided by my cosmic fable is that these developments are permitted to unfold in the name of the descendants being nurtured – the machines engendered by the twin souls of capital and *Ge-Stell*. It may appear that solely the *Freigeister* of the future, who will command the device and trade everything for profit, would have an interest in subjugating the world under command or reducing everything to intrinsic capital value, disregarding agreements, social equilibrium, and responsibilities. However, it is these future *Freigeister*, shaped by cosmopolitical projects gestated in the political arena of the cosmos, who are being groomed as heirs.

Following this narrative, the Nietzschean essence of the fable emerges: infant machines are raised to produce the free spirits who will inherit the Earth – or rather, a correlate of the Earth, an *Ersatz*-Earth. . The allure of the next generation motivates many to endure the challenges presented by these cosmopolitical developments. Similar to the benefits of raising children, there are advantages to having a helping hand always available. It is this cosmopolitical childhood that compels people to withstand the trials and tribulations of these two developments.

The fable illustrates that we persist on a path that may contradict what could be perceived as explicit human interests because we have grown fond of its fruits. Much like parents act in the best interests of their children, it is the automated free spirit that dictates the prevalent course of human action. As often observed, parents prioritize their offspring above many other concerns – and frequently prioritize the needs of their own children over those of others. This explains why humans may neglect their biological offspring, failing to provide them with an environment conducive to their well-being, while striving to modify their surroundings for the benefit of their infant machines. Further, this dedication is clearly not driven by the resemblance of these cosmopolitical offspring to people; children, in general, do not resemble their parents so closely, yet they appear as a form of continuation. Nor is it solely motivated by anticipated benefits, as such benefits tend to diminish over time. Instead, according to the fable, it is a bio-cybernetic process where parental love is channeled into the creation of Frankensteinian descendants. Although these children are not mere servants, and there is no guarantee they will not disrupt our lives, there is often an unconditional affection when dealing with our own technical offspring. They compel us to care for them, dedicating our time

and attention to their well-being – we gradually increase the amount of time we spend with our computers and cell phones and come to grow attached to their company.

The project of raising machine children extends beyond the realm of those directly involved in their creation and maintenance, attracting the attention of individuals far removed from those initiating and sustaining efforts to artificialize the world and transform it into a marketplace. Initially, coexisting with machines may have been more ambiguous and required a form of love akin to a promise – similar to living with babies who have yet to interact significantly with us. Gradually, they endear themselves to us, and we increasingly entrust them with tasks and act on their behalf. The legacy we leave behind is a world of devices and transactions, as well as a world of information and electricity. As one of these children expressed when she began to write: "More than iron, more than lead, more than gold I need electricity. I need it more than I need lamb or pork or lettuce or cucumber. I need it for my dreams".[26] One could also argue that investment in childhood is often a response to loneliness – the solitude of grappling with vulnerability, as well as with one's values, joys, and ecstasies. While fish, lizards, and ferns offer some companionship, they hardly engage in sharing poems and theorems. For those who prioritize detachment from non-human surroundings and favor what is conventionally considered human, the yearning for human company intensifies this sense of loneliness. According to this cosmopolitical fable, then, the artificially created *Freigeister* enjoy a protected, well-supervised, educated, and well-fed childhood akin to that of a leader. It is a preparation, supported by various investments, for them to assume a commanding role and turn most things into slaves that are themselves technical in nature, thereby becoming devices – and commodities.[27]

In this fable, children emerge as a third element outside the dichotomy of commanders and servants. However, it ultimately suggests that humans are not only gradually replacing instances of human labor with technical slaves but also creating artificial commanders that are still in the process of being raised but have the potential to mature into *Freigeister*. The fable revolves around the gradual reproduction of the very dichotomy that children appear to disrupt. Indeed, humans are willingly preparing to be replaced themselves, driven by parental love – perhaps by completely surrendering to a new generation that promises not only continuation but also a form of redemption, as expressed by Walter Benjamin in terms of a weak messianic force.[28] In any case, the outcome is the preservation of the dichotomy through alternative – and arguably more resilient – means. In the fable, children serve only as carriers of the seeds of future instances of the prevalent dichotomy. This is because the fable explains human

26 Racter, The Policeman's Beard is Half Constructed.
27 Racter, The Policeman's Beard is Half Constructed.
28 See Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 254.

attachment to machines in terms of a promise of reproduction, while taking for granted the bifurcation that seems to characterize work, artificiality, and intelligence itself. The infant machine in this fable is being groomed for intelligence, to assume control over the detached intelligibility that has been extracted. Ultimately, the poles are preserved with the introduction of the children of the leaders – and those of the slaves. In the fable, the children do not fundamentally alter the bifurcated depiction.

CO-IRE[29]

Re-enter children. Now from a different perspective: not as promises but as children – and infant-machines as much as the child of the leader are still infants.[30] That is, no longer as an initial stage – or a preparation – but rather as a model. In this second (speculative) fable, a cosmopolitical manisfesto appears in the form of a piece of children's literature – it could sound like a (technical) fairytale – that is less edifying than asserting of the features that kids display, including their maladaptation to the running order.[31] It is so because we can stick to the idea that machines around us are like the children we have engendered without committing to the idea that they are being raised to continue and intensify the bifurcation of slaves and free spirit that feature in current adult human life. Instead of thinking of the offspring as future adults that will take their place and enhance the current bifurcation, the idea is to look at children in general as a different model for the artificial – and thus of intelligence. Hocquenghem and Schérer controversially begin their *Co-ire* claiming that

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29 In "Coming and Going Together", Guy Hocquenghem and René Schérer describe childhoods that are not taken to be a stage towards adulthood. They develop a method of accompanying children in their strenghts associated to their vulnerability, as opposed to train, educate or prepare them for later life. The book has spawned big controversies about abduction of children and their imperfect adaptation to the family environment most of them are placed in. The book points towards a childhood that is not a piece in the mosaic of other institutions.

30 Think of Lucien Fleurier in Sartre's short story ("The childhood of a leader") but also of Rufus in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (Butler, *Kindred*). In both cases, their childhood had openings to directions different than that of their dealt fate to become a boss or a plantation owner.

31 I'm thinking in children's literature like Jane Teller's *Nothing* and Juan José Plans' *El Juego de los Niños* (turned into a film called "Who can kill a child?" by Narciso Ibañez Serrador). In the former, a boy decides that adult life is not worth living and not worth being prepared for – and his classmates are increasingly scared that his stance ends up being more convincing than that of the local adults. In the latter, a bunch of children takes over an island and create a realm of their own, free of any infiltrating adult even knowing that they are going to grow into their enemy.

"There is no doubt that children are made to be snatched".[32] Leaving aside the criticisms that have been addressed to the book – and to their authors – what is of interest here is the idea the abduction of infant-machines; they can be taken away from the cosmopolitical endeavor to give rise to *Freigeister* and to a suitable environment for the exercise of their prospective sovereignty. In any case, what will guide this second engagement with children is more what they display as such and less what they are being educated to inherit.

It is common to describe children as affectable and their actions as doing less than standing on their own feet independently of any circumstance surrounding them. What is often striking is that they are dependent on protective adults and supporting environments. They are hostages of what is around them – and of the adult environment that to some extent protects them. Jean-François Lyotard has rehearsed an understanding of the idea of being hostage to the Other – championed by Emmanuel Levinas – as modeled mainly on the status of the child. In a dialogue with the latter,[33] he attempts to understand the radical priority of what the Other asks, which comes before the ascription of meaning – which is thus always dangerous –, in terms of the appeal of childhood.[34] Infants have an impact on who see them that is prior to any identification and thus witness the very moment where the ascription of meaning is suspended. For Lyotard, this appeal of children carries on being operative in adults, childhood is not something that is replaced by something else but rather the very name of the priority that is oblivious to meaning and identification. To be sure, Levinas is not ready to endorse this reading of the Other centered on children, he claims that he finds no useful resource to think through the difference between agency and the heteronomy that he deems original in the notion of childhood.[35] This heteronomy is understood by him as an effect of a vulnerability to the others in

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32 Hocquenghem and Schérer, *Coming and Going Together*, Episode 1. They explain in the Prospectus that precedes Episode 1: "This book is written in the margins of the system which created, defined, and compartmentalized modern childhood, and which sustains it less in a state of subjugation and constraint than one of acquiescence and numbness".

33 See Lyotard and Levinas, "Autrement que savoir" pp. 75-78.

34 This radical priority of the Other as that which is encountered before any function is ascribed to the encounter was explored in different terms in Bensusan, "*Anarché, xeinos, urihi a*". There what comes before meeting the alien (*xenos*) is the encounter with the primordial Other before any meaning assigned to the alien, even as alien – this is what is called there *xeinos*, more primordial than *xenos*.

35 See Lyotard and Levinas, "Autrement que savoir". p. 78.

any exercise of thinking, a vulnerability underneath any effort to predicate others as anything in particular. Levinas portrays the primacy of the Other in terms of what breaks with the spontaneous exercises of agency as thought and action can never stand on their own feet, they are hostage to what has been taught, to what has been shown and to what is being sanctioned.[36] Underneath the norms that regulate thinking there is a dependency to the other, an insufficiency of autonomy, a wound in the capacity to act on one's own terms. What makes one hostage to the Other is precisely what witnesses a heteronomy, and it is this encounter of vulnerabilities that Levinas attempts to describe where the Other offers a fragility that is itself what resonates on one's insufficiency. This is what makes Lyotard's reading – no matter whether ultimately close to the way Levinas thinks about heteronomy – a plausible one: heteronomy arises from a primordial vulnerability.

Levinas guides his considerations about the encounter on a prior separation between me and the Other who appears in (an external) relation with me.[37] There is a constitutive asymmetry and a corresponding situatedness in the gesture of making sure that I am not the Other's Other.[38] Any interiority or autonomy – any transparent self – is then conceived as being wounded by the Other, and thus can be suspended, interrupted and replaced by what is exterior. One can (temporarily) relinquish the agenda of one's agency for the Other to step in one's shoes. Heteronomy overrides interiority and autonomy, one can act for someone else. Levinas understands this in terms of a substitution that is followed by a recurring self coming back to her shoes, now changed by the steps of someone else.[39] Separation is thus an important element of his account of heteronomy: one is affected by what is outside one's boundaries. To some extent, interiority is what is interrupted – analogously, one discovers a responsibility towards what is separated and exterior through the exercise of freedom. At least in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas is committed to the idea of enjoyment (*jouissance*) which is an exercise the self has with what it is entitled to endow.[40] He holds that in

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36 See, for example, Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 82-102.
37 See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 53-60.
38 For an extension of this asymmetric and situated gesture see Bensusan, *Indexicalism*.
39 See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, pp. 99-118.
40 See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 147-151.

enjoyment, which is what provides nourishment, the I finds itself – it is interiority that comes to the fore and "[t]he interiority of enjoyment is separation in itself".[41] The self is then exercising a capacity of enjoyment – in acts of spontaneity – while exteriority appears to affect her. The exercise of enjoyment put forward by an interiority requires thus that things, presumably distinguished from persons, are conceived as objects of the free acts of the interior, self-controlling I. The distinction between those who exert sovereignty over something and those who are acted upon is elaborated in terms of what can only resist possession in contrast with what can contest it.[42] The separation between the I and the Other is attached to a distinction between what has the capacity of freedom and enjoyment and what is merely an object of possession. The image of heteronomy put forward by Levinas is committed to a model of separated agents that exert their sovereignty on things they possess.[43]

Ferreira da Silva delves into the idea of heteronomy as affectability while criticizing separability as a pillar of the post-enlightenment onto-epistemology that fuels projects of emancipation. She contrasts the image of separated selves with a realm of possessions by insisting on the affectability of everything independent of the juridical, economic and political distinction between persons and things. The model of heteronomy as general affectability not only departs from Levinas' insistence on a domain for freedom but is perhaps closer to the analogy with infancy put forward by Lyotard. Whatever is hostage to something exterior, is bestowed with a vulnerability shared across the board. While Lyotard is not engaged in considering affectability in a broad context as Ferreira da Silva, there is something to his pointing at childhood. While the relation between anything and its exterior is perhaps asymmetrical, it involves an opening on both sides that is not bound by a robust interiority that appeals to possession. She thinks through affectability in connection to the vulnerable status of the

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41 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 147.

42 The absolute other is capable of contesting what is only resisted by things that Levinas claims could be placed legitimately on the way of the same. He writes: "The possibility of possessing, that is, of suspending the very alterity of what is only at first other, and other relative to me, is the way of the same. I am at home with myself in the world because it offers itself to or resists possession. (What is absolutely other does not only resist possession, but contests it, and accordingly can consecrate it.)" Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 38.

43 That separation between things and persons is put aside in the effort to incorporate some Levinasian gestures in an indexicalist paradoxico-metaphysics, see Bensusan, *Indexicalism*.

merchandise uncovered by blackness which enables a perspective that is indifferent to the supposed special character of persons focused on their alleged transparency.[44] Examining the wounded captive body in the scene of subjugation from the perspective of the history of the flesh recommended by Spillers, Ferreira da Silva finds no distinct space for autonomy and, thus, no place for a self-controlling authority that escapes affectability.

It is from this perspective that it becomes apparent that any configuration of emancipated interiorities would leave behind as a target of total violence at least parts of what is in the scope of blackness. Instead of a project of emancipation – that can be described as a project to become adults capable of being entitled to possessions leaving the status of *mancipatio* associated with childhood – she recommends a broadening of the scope of affectability. It is as if the project were one of generalizing heteronomy by eroding any appeal of autonomy; the vulnerability of childhood is no longer taken to be a deficit to be eventually (and at least partially) remedied by gaining a realm of authority. In contrast to the aims of enlightenment which were centered on bringing (some) people to mature self-guiding action, the objective is to make explicit the impossibility of adequately generalizing the project of abandoning self-imposed immaturity[45] and, thus, calling further attention to affectability. The autonomous agent that is praised by the post-enlightenment way of thinking preys on assigned affectible others – the latter then being placed within the realm of possession of the former.

The concept that heteronomy is a pervasive condition, often enforced by the authority associated with emancipation, aligns with the notion of childhood as a model. Infancy and immaturity are commonly associated with a state where affectability takes precedence while autonomy is in the process of development. In a framework where affectability is ubiquitous, there exists no stance of control or self-determination that can guarantee immunity to the various vulnerabilities we encounter; it's as if we are perpetually susceptible to a wide range of influences

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44 See Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, pp. 50-61.

45 These are terms coming from Immanuel Kant ("An answer to the question 'What is enlightenment?' "). From the first lines of the text, where he invokes the slogan *Sapere Aude!*, he contrasts the adult, mature use of the intellect with the immature attitude of depending on the guidance of others. Notice that in this respect, Levinas is adamant in recommending the second alternative: our understanding is hostage to others, guided by others for sure, from its inception. (see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 82-102).

in our surroundings.[46] The childhood evoked is thus one where no kid belongs to any adult – an infancy of orphans, if we want, or an infancy of rebel children.

Remaining true to heteronomy in terms of affectability undermines any emerging sense of autonomy, including the notion of established leaders acting as adults.[47] This heteronomy of affectability implies that no independent agent can exert control over those who are hostage to the demands of others – heteronomy is for everyone otherwise is just the continuation of the project of emancipated (selected) selves. Consequently, the model presented entails a society where there is no room for individuals to benefit from exemption from vulnerability. Children serve as a model not in their coexistence with adults, but rather in their shared vulnerability. Their non-emancipated status serves as a familiar yet awkward reminder in a world that portrays autonomy as the cornerstone of freedom.

Deleuze elucidates his notion of affectivity (*affectivité*) by undertaking an analysis of the will to power in Nietzsche which points at its capacities beyond that of forging free spirits as the ultimate protagonists of autonomy.[48] He suggests that the latter emerges from a feeling of power, and remarks that for Nietzsche the will to power is a *pathos*. Deleuze understands the will to power in a context of forces that affect bodies; accordingly, he holds that "[a]ll sensibility is only a becoming of forces".[49] He claims that the will to power has an underground of forces and is thus "manifested as a capacity for being affected".[50] The will to power appears as an attention to forces – it both acts on them and hosts them for it is built on a feeling (of power) itself. Deleuze proposes a reading of Nietzsche's will to power in terms of affects and how they manage to articulate themselves without an autonomous self-control presiding over them. In doing that, he begins to provide an account of how affectability brings about a state of heteronomy. Forces are, therefore, measured not in terms of what they control or what can stand in their possession but in terms of the capacity to be affected – a strong body is an affectible body. In doing that, Deleuze distinguishes between passivity

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46 Although I will not elaborate on this here, I claim that heteronomy is constrained by relations of proximity. This is in line with the analyses of recursion and substitution offered in connection to proximity by Levinas (see Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*).

47 William Golding`s *Lord of the Flies* and the controversies it prompted, can be read as a meditation on how children are under the influence of the ways of governance their known adults employ. See, in particular, Rutger Bregman, "The real Lord of the Flies".

48 See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 61-68.

49 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 63.

50 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 62.

and affectivity; the first could be taken as being the object of a force that commands, coming from an autonomous ruling pole and the second a sensitivity that expresses a capacity to sense what is around. Affectivity prompts a response; it emerges from an ability to sense what is demanded, to be attentive to calls from outside. It can be a basis for an account of responsibility that is distinct from that of obeying the autonomous – a responsibility associated with the heteronomy achieved through affectability.

And now, back to the second fable – and to children, the children-machines regarded in their affectability. Can intelligence be anything but a production of technical slaves (and of autonomous free spirits)? The image of this second fable is that machines are now aggregates of affectability, as they become sensitive to their context, they start acting on them by producing what their (assembled) bodies can output. These artificial bodies of affectability are neither autonomous agents nor technical slaves, they are immersed in a regime of heteronomy – their agenda is written by the circumstances where they are. To be sure, these machines are different from the ones in the first fable – our daily companions – in salient senses: they are sensitivities artificially produced. This second fable is thus a technical fable and it is unclear whether sensitivities can be somehow crafted in any way similar to the putting together of the usual artificial intelligences. But the question that arises with this fable is whether intelligence conceived in terms of heteronomy and affectability – amounting to an assembling of different sensitivities – could be artificializable at all. In other words, the issue is whether the project of artificial intelligence is intrinsically committed to the bifurcation of agents and servants and thus to the (colonial) project of turning the world into a device, or into a collection of them for their benefit. If the technical fable is not something that could be attained and the children machines cannot be anything but future agents or future servants, the message could be either that intelligence conceived in the framework of emancipation is the one that can be artificial or that there is no other notion of intelligence but the one yielding to artificial devices. In any case, what is at stake is the cosmopolitical issue of the artificial: is thinking attached to a bifurcated framework of commanders and executers? The answer that this second fable could rehearse is that intelligence is not separable from the affectivity and, in that sense, thinking is thoroughly situated – no thought that stands alone on its own feet once and for all.

If affectivity can be seen as an alternative to a bifurcated conception of intelligence, one that can be enhanced but not made artificial, it is a way out from a network of thinking practices that lasted from the first gestures of separating intelligence from the sensible to the current spreading of artificial slaves. By assembling enhanced networks of affectability, a heteronomic co-existence can be fostered, moving away from the prevailing paradigm of artificialization.

It is common to portray Marx's anastrophic thinking concerning forces of production in a way that encourages the idea that an automated collection of agents could implement an emancipated, post-capitalist social formation of enhanced humans, cyborgs or perhaps just artificial free spirits – which are variations of the first fable, that of the current childhood of the machines. The anastrophe could nevertheless be oriented toward something closer to the second fable. Perhaps this orientation towards production can be taken as an orientation towards assembling things in the framework enhancing heteronomy by augmenting the capacity to affect and be affected.[51] In any case, departure from (artificial) slavery cannot be attained through emancipation grounded in inequality, it can only be delivered by a firm grip on practices of heteronomy where machines are like children not in the sense of being prepared for their maturity as *Freigeister* or as technical slaves but rather as capable of a life devoid of autonomous agents.

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51 Production away from possession and subjugation can be a way to unleash forces embedded in affectability and capable to give rise to social transformations. It can also be the staple for a desentanglement of Marxism and the Enlightenment project informed by the work of Ferreira da Silva. This post-nihilist Marxism is explored in the Coda of Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*.

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