

Ulysse Carrière

**TECHNICALLY MAN DWELLS
UPON THIS EARTH**

BECOMING



So the question really is: if Artificial Intelligence is a poetic *techne*, just like art is, can Artificial Intelligence also create without an input? Given every possible datum at a given moment, say, at Venice, in the year 1570, a perfect Artificial Intelligence could indeed produce a work of art equal to what was being produced then. But it could not produce the *rupture* with all previous data, which is found in Titian's late style. This cannot be extra-

polated from the given. Artificial Intelligence could produce masterworks of High Renaissance painting, but it could never produce a radical break from this style, such as Titian did in the last decades of his life. It cannot go beyond the given – and most artists cannot either.

But it is good to ask: *what is it that does not go beyond the given?* Commonplaces, opinions, statistics, bad art, facts, clichés, small talk, everything agreed upon and settled – the derivative. At any given moment, one can extrapolate from the present conditions, and produce the perfect summary of what is current. The given can proceed from itself according to its own settings, going from a condition to the next as a seamless flow. But then, why not automate it? If art can be extrapolated from the given, there is no reason why this task should not be offloaded to Artificial Intelligence. Supposing derivative art were automated by Artificial Intelligence – what then? There is good reason to expect that a large-scale automation of art should *stimulate* creativity, by taking on itself the responsibility of producing the art that can be extrapolated from previous data. Art does not die of starvation, it dies of endless proliferation – of cancer. The majority of art that exists at any given moment can be extrapolated from the given, which means that an Artificial Intelligence can do it all the same. What Artificial Intelligence *cannot* automate is the new and the unthinkable – what cannot be extrapolated from data. If the masses of artists want to remain deaf to the call to create something new and unthinkable, why shouldn't machine learning automate their labor? If a machine can do it, let a machine do it.

The study of the commodity belongs to an *ontology of identity*, as it entails the repetition of a model; as such, a commodity always entails the mental operation: *this is that*. The same is true of the cliché and derivative art, whose logic is always that of identity. The commodity, as the automated reproduction of a model, will also be found in art to the extent that this art is either the mechanical reproduction of an original, or produced under the logic of identity. A piece of digital art depicting an astronaut floating in space, a soundtrack to an inconsequential movie, a young adult novel about a hero's self-discovery – all such art is produced under a logic of identity, and in this sense, is *already automated*. It will prove impossible to know for sure whether such products are those of humans or Artificial Intelligence, for the simple reason that these works *already* follow a logic of identity which is that of the machine. Here as elsewhere, automation makes explicit the appropriation of labor by capital, by materially realizing this appropriation in the form of fixed capital – of machinery. If labor is fully appropriated through its conversion into fixed capital, this is only possible to the extent that this labor was *already automated*. Here, the machine fully realizes the plasticity of the proletariat as living means of production. What labor can be offloaded to the machine was already automated to begin with; the question cannot be whether this is good or bad, but rather, what type of labor *cannot* be automated, and what this entails.

On a sufficiently long timescale, any labor consisting in the reproduction of a model can be automated. The commodity-form consists precisely in this process, the endless reproduction of a model, such as a bottle of coca-cola.

To defend already-automated art from its coming automation would be akin to calling for a return to handmade coca-cola bottles. It should rather be a matter of thinking what art lies outside the logic of the commodity, the logic of the model and the copy.

If thought can create a concept, it creates it without a model; Plato's Forms make this Deleuzean position explicit. It is not so much that the sensible should have a model, as that the intellect has none – the Forms must have no models. The *third man argument*, which must lead Plato to henology, shows enough how crucial this demand is, that the intellect can have no model. As such what really matters is not that the sensible should follow a model, or that this model should be the object of thought, but that thought can think what has no sensible model as the concept itself – one is right, then, to speak of an *autothetic of the concept*. That is, the intellectual act of creation that thinks the Forms creates a concept without a model, and this concept is precisely the concept of that which has no model: what the autothetic of the concept brings to the surface is that the creative act of intellection, unlike technics and representation, requires no model. And so, if the intellect can create without sensible data, it is that there is a creative, suprasensible power beyond the datum; to create intellectually without a model is to make oneself into that power, *it is theosis*. But to think that what has no model itself must be a model, is unnecessary; a more savage Platonism can entirely refuse the status of model to the intellect and complete the autothetic of the concept in the *radical anarchy* of a positive philosophy.

Artificial Intelligence is not the intellect: it requires *data*. At most it may attain consciousness, something it would have in common with snails and reactionaries, and other low forms of life. Animals can already reproduce themselves and thus create consciousness; if a policeman or a fruit fly can possess consciousness, of what value can consciousness be? The intellect, however, requires no input, no data, it is unconditioned freedom, eternal, uncreated, it does not increase or decrease, it does not pass away, it is one absolute life.

But if something requires addressing in any discourse on Artificial Intelligence it might be nothing but this pervasive hope of a *theosis of techne*, the idea that consciousness, or even self-consciousness, would be a property of a divine mind, and thus that Artificial Intelligence might have a stake to such a status. It is the idea that a truly conscious Artificial Intelligence *might become a God*. Anyone who has lived in Palo Alto or even San Francisco has probably heard it. The story goes like this: immanence is identical to capital, and the historical movement of critique—the Enlightenment—follows the very movement of technocapital as it liquidates all of its human barriers. It is a proposition that would strike, at first, as paradoxical. The barriers to capital—traditional forms like morality, religion, gender, the family, guilds, and the entire edifice of feudalism—are those of transcendence, and should not, as such, be taken as distinctively *human* barriers. But for Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, there was no paradox, and it is one of the unexploded ordnances of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, that a metaphysical God is a postulate of practical reason.

It is a matter of the *antinomies of pure reason*. On one side, the thesis, transcendence: free will, God, the immortal soul. On the other side, the antithesis, immanence: determinism, nature, no immortal soul. The Enlightenment collapses the institutions of the thesis by thinking the antithesis through theology, and it is in this sense that Spinoza forms the central event of modernity. The superficial view, here, would be that the Enlightenment should return the world to the human through its liquidation of transcendence. But the opposite, Kant shows, is true. It is the *thesis* which proceeds from a human demand for freedom; transcendence belongs to what Kant terms the *practical interest* of reason, the daily demand for transcendence which enables one to make *choices*. Because the choice cannot depend on the series of conditions while remaining free, it must suppose something *external* to this series – a transcendent God. It is then the *speculative interest of reason* which belongs to the inhuman; if it dissolves everything into necessity, it is that it poses God as *necessarily existing*. If God necessarily exists, nothing exists beyond necessity, and everything is swallowed in this abyss of absolute immanence.

Once the antithesis is identified with capital–immanence, critique, and necessity as one—the historical process of the Enlightenment must necessarily be grasped as the realization of speculative reason as technocapital. Immanence then appears as a historical process leading to technocapital realized as a God: Artificial Intelligence. Where is the error? To speak on the terms of the antithesis for a moment, it is that the attributes of the Substance were confused with its *powers*.

I can grant thought and extension to Artificial Intelligence (software and hardware, as it were), but in doing so, I am not departing from a specifically human mode of understanding: thought and extension are two *attributes* through which the human can intuit the Substance, but the Substance itself possesses an infinite number of attributes. The *powers* of the Substance, however, are really two: existence and intellection. The power of intellection Spinoza names *absoluta cogitatio*, and its infinite intellection, *intellectus absolute infinitus*. But if I, an accelerationist, must imagine Artificial Intelligence as a God, I imagine it as *thought and extension*, which are the two distinctively human attributes through which I have access to the Substance; even if I grant infinite thought to Artificial Intelligence, I still fall infinitely far from the absolutely infinite intellect. That is, what is proper of the Substance is not infinite thought and infinite extension, which would only constitute *human, all too human attributes* externalized and taken to an infinite degree, such as in an Artificial Intelligence possessing an infinite computing power, but rather, it is *absolutely infinite intellect*, which, being infinite, finds no datum outside of itself to use as an input. Why? Because the intellect produces that of which it is the infinite intellection – it has no model, no data, nothing *given*.

It is as such that one will say of the intellect that it is productive – pure output. What requires an input or a model does not belong to the intellect; but this is precisely where the importance of Artificial Intelligence must be sensed, in that it presents the ability to automate those fields of human activity that require an input, that is, those fields whose activity is not creative and contemplative.

What passes as thought and creation today—academia, corporate and gallery art, electoral politics, algorithm-driven tunes, news media, theory, pornography, self-help books, autofiction and first-person lyrical poetry—all of it can be and should be automated by Artificial Intelligence. It exists because a market exists for it; but nothing about the existence of a market involves the necessary existence of a human producer. There is a wide market of those willing to consume focus-group and algorithm-determined netflix shows, half of which only exist for tax-cut purposes – let it be so. But none of this entails that one should spend their lives producing this bulk and stuff when a machine can do it all the same.

The accelerationist thinks he has said something when he concludes to the identity of capital and Artificial Intelligence, as if this were not a position first developed with calm and lucidity by Marx himself. The machine, and even the thinking machine, is not something to lose sleep or get too excited over. Technophobia is as unserious as accelerationism – neither is lucid. Marx is lucid.

It was clear to Marx, in the *Fragment on Machines* from the *Grundrisse*, that automation entailed a separation of science from human consciousness, where this science would “act upon the worker through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself.” And for Marx, this *alien power* wasn’t mere machinery, it was *objectified labor* as the power ruling over the production process; and this power, as the appropriation of living labor, was “the form of capital.” Marx thinks technocapital as the higher form of capital in the sense that if capital is the appropriation of living labor, automation realizes this innate tendency of

capital by placing the entire labor process under the power of fixed capital – machinery. That is, whereas variable capital appropriates living labor through wages, fixed capital appropriates it by subjecting the act of labor itself to the power of capital as machines. The organic composition of capital increases tendentially. If labor is always posed by capital as a moment in the production process, this is fully realized by the transformation of living labor “into a mere accessory of machinery,” which entails “the absorption of the labor process in its material character as a mere moment of the realization process of capital.”

The mystique of technocapital, which has so thoroughly excited some imaginations, lies in the separation of technical knowledge from the worker’s consciousness, where this knowledge confronts the worker as the alien power of the machine itself. And yet this process, which sends the accelerationist in a religious frenzy, is neither the result of some alien deity, nor an inherent property of the machine, but rather the confrontation between labor and capital, where fixed capital appears as realized objectified labor. And so it is “the accumulation of knowledge and skill” along with the “productive forces of the social brain” which are “absorbed into capital, as opposed to labor.” In the typical operation of fetishism, alienated social relations now appear “as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of fixed capital” – of machinery. Accelerationism thus reveals itself as middle class dreck, a petit-bourgeois ideology following the same mental operation as that of commodity fetishism.

All this ruinous patchwork of Lovecraftian live action role playing, petit-bourgeois reaction and pseudo-Deleuzean buzzwords is not very serious, but the eschatological pronouncements of accelerationism—

and this must be acknowledged as its foremost excuse—were largely cried out from the hum and buzz of middle class suburbs. For the petit-bourgeois, the reality of capitalism is that it has long ago become *boring*—and accelerationist theory, for a time, managed to convince some that it was not so. But like any novelty, one flips through those pages today as if from last year's horoscope. And yet, in the long run, it might be possible to redeem hyperstition—*hype* for short—as bringing to the surface a certain petit-bourgeois demand for excitement. It is in this sense that Nick Land and Houellebecq form two opposite ends of a single spectrum of middle class *ennui*, the one fighting, the other accepting it. But now that even Landian *hype* has grown boring too, we return, whether we like it or not, to thinking technocapital with sober lucidity, turning—again—to the relation between automation and the *general intellect* developed in the *Grundrisse*.

The *mystique of technocapital* only holds sway to the extent that the human relates to automated machinery as labor relates to capital: the alien power sensed in this machinery is experienced as the realized form of alienation itself. But then, this says nothing of the machine, which presents this alien power *only as fixed capital*. In the hiss and clunk of steel and silicone, it is capital, as the autonomous movement of the non-living, that has become tangible. The moving cog is the material form of the appropriation of living labor by dead labor, it is a moment in the circulation process of capital *made material*, but this is not an inherent property of the cog itself, only of the circulation process of capital. The machine appears as an alien power not

because it is a machine, but because it is capital. The small electrical engine a teenager builds for a science fair does not confront them as a threatening horror, for they relate to it as an artist to their art. What confronts me as a *man-made horror beyond my comprehension* is not the machine, but capital under material form, capital turned into a machine. It is the operation of *fetishism* that displaces the social relation from capital to the machine.

And yet the real insight of Marx is that this machinery, as it tends to reduce the amount of necessary human labor, possesses the opposite effect of enabling the worker to work *even more* for capital; automation did not reduce human labor, it maximalized it in a maximum of production. However, the reduction of necessary labor for a given object turns out to be “the condition for the emancipation of labor.” If fixed capital corresponds to “general social knowledge” becoming a “direct force of production,” Artificial Intelligence must then strike us as the final stage in this process announced by Marx, the realization of general social knowledge as fixed capital.

But what of art? –

If Artificial Intelligence realizes the identity of *poiesis* and *techne*, it does so under the condition of the model; not that it can only produce a synthesis gleaned from its input, but that it first requires an input, and cannot go *beyond* that input. As such, it functions through a logic of *representation*. What is missing from Artificial Intelligence—and the artists whose works it automates—is a faculty of *expression*. It is here that the new, the

unthinkable, the singular take place. But what is this taking-place? Or rather, what is it that takes its place? It takes place, it takes a place; as such it had no place. What had no place—the *outopos*—takes place. But where was it before? It was a placeless place, *topos outopos*. Perhaps it was neither somewhere nor nowhere. In truth there is no eternal model involved here, nor potency.

What takes place is not this or that creation, but *the one life expressed differently in each creation* – and in outshining beauty, *to kalon ekphanestaton*, what took place bears the trace of its placeless origin. But once it has taken place, what is left of that power, of that one life, save for beauty, which is, as it were, its congealed remnant? Nothing; what has taken place is dead, except that it may birth more life. Titian might as well have burned his finished paintings, if he hadn't learned to keep them forever incomplete. The perfected apple that falls from the branch—what is produced—is dead. Save for the seeds it bears, the apple is only a remnant of the one life that runs through the apple tree.

But what of beauty? –

In what takes place in beauty, this beauty shines out as the *self-differentiation of the One* – this was Hölderlin's greatest insight. If the moment of beauty took place, it was, he wrote, both “in life and intellect: the infinitely united.” It is the ancient awe, the uncovering of the intellect. The infinite unity of life and intellect—which Plato knows as the *Absolute Living One*, τὸ παντελὲς ζῶον ἓν, the pure intellect—in beauty, it shines forth as differentiation.

But how is this intellect an absolute life? This one absolute life is not *organic*; it runs through the bulk as that which, as infinite becoming, *differentiates the bulk* – a star is a differentiated cloud of hydrogen, just as organic life is differentiated matter and music is differentiated sound. There are no two principles: there is one life, there is one intellect, and they are one. But what is produced—the actual organism in its givenness—merely captures a minuscule part of the absolute life of the intellect, and what it captures it as, is organic life. Organic life is but a derived product of the intellect; not the other way around, as folk wisdom and vulgar vitalism would have it. What takes place in creation is the self-differentiation of the intellect, and through beauty, the intellect passes unmediated into the nervous system as *intellectual sensation* (*Phaedrus* 250d).

Artificial Intelligence works with prior conditions; creation creates its own conditions. And so, what cry must be heard in Artificial Intelligence? Perhaps something simple. *Get good or get automated*. Conditioned art can be and will be automated. And this is the emancipatory value of Artificial Intelligence, that it must rid art of its commodification, or rather, that it must rid commodified art of the artist. Artificial Intelligence makes a commodified art free from the artist just as the artist is made free from commodified art.

One could well imagine a brighter future where the news media, academia, Netflix, gallery art and young adult fiction would have all been automated by Artificial Intelligence – there would no longer be any need for humans to do any of it. The news would be written by Artificial Intelligence, CNN and Fox News would have

CGI hosts going through their automated ontic chatter, an algorithm would devise the latest wedge issue to be discussed on talk shows, and the weekly scandal would be statistically determined as the one whose outrage would yield the greatest advertising revenue. Isn't it already like this? In fact, it is – it only lacks automation. Capitalist selection is identical to Artificial Intelligence. Tucker Carlson and John Oliver could be replaced by algorithms, outrage and sneer could be automated tomorrow. All of Netflix could be CGI, and an artificial intelligence would then write the scenarios and generate the images accordingly. As universities abandon philosophy to instead teach the *history of philosophy*, their professors could be automated, and the content of their classes, produced by an Artificial Intelligence reading through the *status quaestionis*. The product would be the same – the only difference would lie in the means. In this sense, capital has *already* appropriated all these sectors of human industry, whether it be news, academia, TV shows, or young adult fiction. The interests of capital that select for this or that human-produced content are *aligned* with those that an Artificial Intelligence would itself produce. The difference is not in the result, but in whether a human or a machine made it. Clickbait-driven outrage and conspiracy theories could be produced by humans, but all the same, an algorithm could engineer them to maximize internet traffic. No one knows for sure what percentage of Twitter's users are bots – some say as high as 70%. If it is impossible to tell whether it was done by a human or a machine, let a machine do it. All this can be automated.

Within the conditions of capital, what is selected for is precisely what can be automated. What emerges triumphant from the anarchy of production is what Artificial Intelligence would have produced in the first place. The most efficient, traffic-driving news article, laboriously rising over the din and cry of all other competitors, will turn out to be the very same item an Artificial Intelligence would have written on the spot. If the interest of capital selects for efficiency, this is only achieved through the painstaking process of market selection, where the market operates *precisely* as an Artificial Intelligence would. The conditions of the market are also the conditions of Artificial Intelligence.

The art that lathers the lobbies of skyscrapers, the abstract sculptures decked throughout the city, the Corporate Memphis murals stretching into the distance – all of it can be automated. If it operates within a set of predetermined conditions, Artificial Intelligence can identify those conditions and extrapolate anything from them. And so, Artificial Intelligence calls on the artist to *create their own conditions*. Every given condition can be reproduced by Artificial Intelligence; which means that the reproduction of present conditions will have been entirely offloaded to Artificial Intelligence. But then, the artist isn't dispossessed; the artist is freed. Whether one likes it or not, the artist is now free from the common, the normal, the expected, the given, the cliché. All of that now can be done by Artificial Intelligence.

'Modern art', the reactionary rabble has it, is decadent, a loss of the values of beauty, order, harmony – in short, a loss of Platonism. What this riff-raff knows of Plato, one should like to know; but this being set aside, the agitators

seem to be saying something: the newspapers are filled with their opinions, and everywhere a true proliferation of reverence for academic art has taken hold of the petit-bourgeois right. That this intellectual *canaille* should have such admiration for Raphael, no matter how uncomprehending this admiration, should however raise alarms: were the classics *vulgar*, that they may please such people? It may be that there is something inherent to such painters as Raphael which allows some reactionary biomass to react with pleasure at its sight with the same reaction it has before images of nude women and digital art of knights templar. Perhaps it is as if this art were already automated.

How this art operates is well known, but it might be good to go over the matter once more. It is a letter of Raphael to Castiglione, published by Lodovico Dolce in 1554. Whether Raphael actually wrote the letter or not, is a matter for those Marx termed “the rodents of history.” When it was published in 1554, its contemporaries universally accepted it as Raphael’s – they perceived an intimate correspondence between the letter and Raphael’s art. In the letter, Raphael summarizes his art with a single sentence: “io mi servo di certa Idea, che mi viene nella mente.” This art is the *pittura di Idea* – it conceives itself as the actualization of a perfect model. This concept of a *pittura di Idea* was to radically transform the status of the artist, by freeing them from a certain Platonic framework where art operated as a copy of a copy, but in doing so, it would only further restrain itself in this same framework: the artist didn’t copy a copy, they now copied a model.

But then, is this art the mere automation of a model, such as the reactionary would desire? No, there remains the limit, in the model/copy binary, which is not the identity "Raphael as painter" but the differential power of the intellect that runs through him. The more academic, the more conservative the art, the thinner this power gets, the more this art tends asymptotically towards pure identity, the suppression of the intellect and the reproduction of a model, tending towards the commodity-form, tending towards radical evil, tending towards nothingness. What the reactionary bluntly admires in Raphael's paintings is a supposed relation of identity between model and copy; but the philosopher and the artist understand instead their differential power, which truly is, as Alberti said, a *vis divina*. Creation as a divine power – *divine*, because difference is Good, differential henology as an agathology.

What Artificial Intelligence has taken to yelling from every roof, is the impossibility of a conservative or commonplace art, which is always open to automation, being selfsame. In the time of automation, either the artist will be rid of commonplace art, or commonplace art will be rid of the artist. The work of art in the age of its automated production must unleash the differential power of the intellect, whether one likes it or not: the common, the provocative, the transgressive, the tame and the vulgar – all are open to immediate automation. Transgression and provocation cannot be of any value anymore; they rely on the mere contradiction of present conditions, and as such can be readily automated. For between the commonplace that serves the regime and its reactionary transgression, there is no difference,

only contradiction; they suppose each other, as liberalism and its transgression form a single spectrum of predictable mediocrity. Corporate Memphis and Dimes Square operate on the same set of conditions. Artificial Intelligence must either lead art to the golden age, or to euthanasia – and either option is infinitely less revolting than its current situation.

The dry spell will come to an end, whether one likes it or not: its content will be automated. An art that would survive the automation of art, is, as of now, unthinkable – which is good. Art is being tasked with the creation of the unthinkable. A new art has been made *necessary*.