

## **The Early Breakdown of the Modern Anthropos?: The Evil Demon and the Little Automaton Francine as wounds to the Cartesian Cogito. Posthuman Speculations in Andres Vaccari's *La Pasión de Descartes***

BELISARIO ZALAZAR  
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE CÓRDOBA (Argentina)  
belazalazar@gmail.com

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**Abstract:** In this article text we will undertake a posthuman reading (Braidotti, 2015) of Andrés Vaccari's novel *La Pasión de Descartes*. The story of the relationship between Descartes and the automaton Francine questions the nodal concepts of modern Western philosophy such as the "subject", the "immaterial soul" and its secular substitute, "consciousness", and the very notion of "life". Figures like the automaton Francine and her posmodern heirs, such as the cyborg (Haraway), or in our 21st century the fembot Sophia, developed by Hanson Robotics, enter, from the very beginning and with the Cartesian metaphysic, in the narrative of modernization, either to destabilize or to reinforce the powers of the *anthropos* as the main regulator of the global becoming of the Western form of life. We will dedicate these pages to go over through a scene of this story, the one of the modern subject, nowadays crossed by the announcement of many "ends" announces and too many "post-"s. (humanism / human / biological / natural).

**Keywords:** Descartes, Human, Machines, Trans/Post-Humanism

### **Descartes: lights and shadows of the humanist story of the *cogito***

The debates around the figure of Descartes, or perhaps, to be more precise, around his philosophy, have taken on new strength due to the emergence on the contemporary scene of a set of beings or existents that populate both materiality and the imaginary. of our turbulent 21st century. This set, made up of mechanical automata, robots, indeterminate electronic digital systems, cyborgs, spiritual machines and the combination of the elements of this set - excessive for modern reason founded on the axiom of clear and distinct ideas - is based on the emergence of "a new episteme" (Rodríguez, 2019) that calls into question everything that, as Foucault pointed out in *Words and Things* (1966), modern knowledge outlined as the face of "the human." And Descartes is central if what we are talking about is elucidating what "the human" is being questioned by posthuman sciences such as neurosciences, AI, cybernetics, TGS, molecular biology, and the social and political sciences of the information; all of them brought into

contact through a block movement that operates through resonances between expert discourses, “philosophy” and the arts, including literature.

It has been repeated ad nauseam that the Cartesian discovery of the subject, of the presence of consciousness through thought, are the foundation on which the Westernizing project that we know as Modernity was founded. The modern world, its conquest, and we use this concept above all in the colonialist sense of the word, would have been difficult to carry out without the machine invented by Descartes: algebraic geometry and the preeminence of an idea of thought and reason reduced to the operation of decomposing the existing universe into simple, calculable and computable elements, then relateable in a complex way. However, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer (2009) and Vicente Serrano Marín (2010) have shown from very different perspectives, the self-evidence of the cogito and its role as a substance that defines the human of the special organism called homo sapiens, is found in the same writings. of the Parisian his own limit, or his self-destructive device. The Thesis of the human exception, the one that superimposes the ontological dualism (body/thought) on the ontic rupture that separates man from the rest of the living and from the order of the purely material world, is undermined from within, like a virus, by spectral presences such as the evil genius and automatons, which dazzled the most diverse social spaces with their artifactual mechanisms in the centuries from the 15th to the 19th.

The *Passion of Descartes*, the recently published novel by the versatile Argentine posthumanist philosopher Andrés Vaccari, takes up a dark passage in Descartes's biography, relegated to the shadows or to the corner of the “world of non-light,” as it is called in the novel to the unknown, death or what reason cannot clear with its rays of knowledge. And, like everything that inhabits the shadows, at least from Galileo onwards, and in our genealogy, from the Method devised and prescribed by Descartes, it belongs to the discursive universe of opinion, legend and myth. Myth, legend and opinion remain outside the region guarded by Reason that guides the just conduct of human subjects, therefore, they are necessarily banished as they cannot be demonstrable through the Cartesian logical artifact. **(1)** History, thus, is opposed to myth/legend; made to interpretation; science to opinion. Well, that passage tells that after little Francine, the illegitimate daughter of the French thinker, died of scarlet fever at the age of five, to “lessen her grief, Descartes ordered the construction of an automatic doll identical to his dead daughter in size and appearance, capable of moving and walking based on precise clockwork mechanisms. With this he achieved an artificial happiness that, however, did not last long. One stormy night, during a boat trip that Descartes was taking with “Francine,” the captain of the ship accidentally came across the doll and, scared, threw it into the sea. The second death of his daughter, even more tragic than the first, was a new blow from which the philosopher could not recover this time. He died five months later, on February 11, 1650” (Sandrone, 2018: s/p).

### **A universe full of machines: from the machina mundi to the fictional machine**

Vaccari manufactures a complex machinery, we would tend to say, due to the sedimented metaphors, of clockwork, but it is a fictional machine. A machine that sculpts, as cinema does over time for Tarkovsky, a life. And if it is a machine, it is because it requires a precise technique to operate it; or, of the manipulation of a series of knowledge concretized in particular ways. Fiction uses linguistic material and produces a narrative that operates with different writing techniques: soliloquies, dialogues, theatrical scenes, correspondences and baroque artifacts such as the theater within the theater. The machine tells, tells, puts into motion philosophical concepts that in turn generate collisions from which vivid images emerge. In a setting in the abyss, facing the baroque world in which Descartes participates, despite the pale image that is “too human”, simplified, rationalist, worn out, schematized that tradition has inherited from him, the fictional machine finds itself in the tableaux vivants of the work commanded by the character Vicente de la Vega, his double “material”. Descartes' life is broken down into narrative chapters, which in turn correspond to scenes represented by actors who wander in a world moved by mechanisms and gadgets that create a great illusion, not only optical, but also sensitive and cognitive. The furniture of the world of the work is nothing but a Great Machine. In this regard, the narrative voice, lost among the voices that circulate through living memories, materialized and represented in the scenes of the great philosopher, tells:

“The Jesuits will teach young Renatus the word that gives its name to what until then had been a cloudy sensation, an equivocal but persistent premonition: machina. Scaffolding, support, machine, structure, fabric. Machina: trick, machination, stratagem, scenery. Machina. The world is a machine designed by an inconceivable craftsman” (Vaccari, 2019: 51).

That Great Machine that is the world in which the actors represent the life of Descartes is nothing other than, and virtually, an immense theater. Stratagem, scenography, the Great Theater of the World designed by Calderón de la Barca. A baroque topic, the perception of the world as a theater is fed by the game of mirrors in which reason is immersed in its desire for knowledge. In its inner journey, the cogito, in search of reality, is shipwrecked until it loses itself in its counterpart, the unreality of the world, illusory, uncertain, populated by appearances that endanger the clear and distinct edifice of ideas and their coincidence with reality. extensive. For this reason, Calderón stated, in the mouth of Segismundo: “that all life is a dream, / and dreams are dreams” (Calderón de la Barca, 1873: 96). Modern monsters (the vampire, Frankenstein, Kleist's puppets, Hoffman's automatons, etc.) are offspring of this baroque fear, of this shipwreck whose driving force is nothing other than the sinister, the disturbing that lurks like a shadow on thought, to the cogito, to the modern subject. **(2)** On the other hand, the idea of Machina-mundi **(3)**, the philosophy according to which the universe or “Nature” is nothing but a complex mechanism governed by laws that the nascent physical science of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo

and Renatus Cartesius himself was called to discover, born once the idea of an inscrutable and mysterious Creation had fallen along with the grammars that gave rise to the lives of men in the Middle Ages. As Pierre-Maxime Schuhl (1955) and Paolo Rossi (1966) showed, exposing the ideas of the ceramicist Palissy, the philosophers Vives and Francis Bacon and the inventor and artist Leonardo, at the beginning of the 1400s a movement that sought knowledge began to take place. no longer reading the books of the learned, but searching in the observation of nature and experimentation with the entities and substances that make up the extension of the physical universe, the secrets that allow the vital movement of everything that exists. Little by little, the figure of the world is being introduced as a machine made of subtle mechanisms capable of being replicated, although rudimentarily, for the right reason, which must follow certain steps to achieve its goal. From there arise, for example, the well-known *Novum Organum* and the *Discourse on Method*. The mechanical arts, knowledge made up of sedimented experiences of groups of men associated with menial labor in the Ancient world (Schuhl, 1970), are valued as the access routes, not only to theoretical knowledge of the world, but also to practical tasks. of its transformation for “the improvement of the conditions of existence through the improvement of techniques” (Schuhl, 1955: 50).

In Descartes' *The Passion*, machinism is omnipresent. We have already spoken of the fictional machine, of *tableaux vivants*, of *machina-mundi*. In fact, De la Vega's theatrical work does nothing more than try to recreate the organ that the exiled thinker in Holland pointed out as the place where that which did not belong to the natural, mechanistic order was manufactured: thought. The substance that exceptionalizes humans as unique and superior beings, a humanist hierarchy already enabled by Pico della Mirandola (4), has a seat in the brain, although it does not coincide with it. Entire pages and treatises have attempted to patch up the mind-body problem inaugurated by Descartes. As an example further back in time, the debate held by thinkers such as Searle, David Chalmers, Daniel Dennett, Penrose, Chomsky, and a long etcetera gathered around knowledge such as cybernetics, neurosciences and Artificial Intelligence.

It is not by chance that De la Vega supports a purely mechanistic worldview of things; The story gives us clues that his person is none other than the “evil genius” who deceived Descartes in his inquisitions before discovering the certainties of his metaphysical edifice. Towards the end of Chapter Two, once the automaton Francine had recovered from her temporary amnesia after being rescued from the maritime contraptions, after the director of the play whispers to her “Are you ready Francine”, it reads: “The evil genie's arm gently guides her towards the stage, towards the light. Towards the world” (Vaccari, 2019: 35).

If the brain, as De la Vega, a fictional precursor of La Mettrie, tries to (de)show, is a complex assembly of pieces, springs and mechanisms that connect through openings like tubes with the different

“parts of the body, transporting sensations and causing movement of the living machine” (Vaccari, 2019: 89). If, furthermore, it does not contain immaterial souls that allow the movement of bodies and their agency, but rather “life is, like the world, matter, nothing more, operating according to the laws of mechanics” (Vaccari, 2019: 89), then what made man human disappears, and the ghost behind the machine disappears, rebelling like an artifice, one more illusion among many created by optical and perceptual laws. As Serrano Marín (2010) explains, if what triumphs is the structure of the deceptive evil genius, what remains behind the quicksand left by the sudden disappearance of the cogito is a power that desires, imagines and reasons, bowed down by the excessive effluvium. of the passions of the body. An imperfect will that desires infinitely, not only to know, but desires without further ado, and without limits imposed by Nature as in Antiquity, nor by the revelation of God (Middle Ages). This is a modern subject freed from all ties, whether internal or external, this does not matter since the edges are lost in the bottomless abyss of existence.

### **Who directs the scene? Of deceivers, bottomless abysses and transhumanist narratives**

The issue becomes complicated when we realize that the machine-mundi, the theater that represents thought, is directed by the strange and disturbing (unheimlich) character of De la Vega. If, on the one hand, De la Vega poses a danger to the human exceptionalism of the Cartesian story by denying the primacy of “I think,” on the other hand, it can be thought of as that desiring force without foundation beyond itself that he tells us about. Serrano Marín. De la Vega would not only be the “deceiver”, who in his play corresponds to the shadow that haunts Descartes throughout his life, a spectral and pressing presence especially in the “Sixth Chapter” and the “Epilogue”. ; Furthermore, and through his complete work, he represents the force behind the machine and urges it to self-design in an infinite engineering career, without limits. If we were content with the analysis of his figure as a radical materialist “all” a La Mettrie, perhaps it would not be a big problem for the Cartesian rationalism to which the Epicurean doctor claimed to do justice by separating it from superstitions such as the immaterial soul. Let us remember that Julien Offray de La Mettrie radicalized the Cartesian intuition according to which living beings, animals and humans, shared with everything that made up the material universe the fact of being complex mechanisms: bodies are machines whose functioning can be known through rational elucidation (e.g. the new science), and ultimately not only repaired but improved and perfected. The germ of transhumanist narratives was already found in this materialist metaphor. If Descartes, as Schaeffer affirms, separates the human from the *res extensa* - Nature described through the nascent scientific method applied by new sciences such as anatomy, modern medicine, astronomy, among others - through the thesis of the cogito, the soul immaterial that redeems him from the mechanistic laws that govern the entire universe, La Mettrie eliminates what for him is nothing more than a metaphysical

obstacle, leaving the “machine man” as a result **(5)** . However, as we have been saying, it happens that the motive for that machine is this disturbing character, the evil genius named De la Vega in Descartes' *The Passion*. By embodying that blind force, that desiring structure that runs through what we call Western Modernity as a civilizational project **(6)** , De la Vega not only rescues the automaton Francine but directs the work, existence and life of Descartes with a view to create a perfect work, without “failed scenes” (Vaccari, 2019: 60), an existence capable, among other things, of defeating death. There would then be no Reason that governs the designs of human and natural history (both are united in the capacity of the scientist and/or the engineer) drawing a straight line towards The Best, but quite the opposite. Reason would turn falsely, on an unfounded abyss (unground), “a power not subject to rules, forced to progress in a kind of flight forward, and fundamentally incapable of finding a limit to its own desire” (Serrano Marín, 2010 : 67).

In the 21st century, the transhumanist narrative defended by thinkers such as Nick Bostrom, Ray Kurzweil, Natasha Vita-More, among others, can be thought of as the avatar of that machine, moved by a limitless desire to perfect itself through the technological ingenuity that we recognized in the character De la Vega **(7)** . It is necessary to return here to Pico della Mirandola, who with his metaphor of man as a chameleon capable of being what he himself imagines and desires for himself, lays one of the bases of what Fabián Ludueña Romandini calls the discursive formations known as “transhumanism.” (2010, 212). The Adam of the Miralian story, being created without an archetype, does know how to take advantage of the artistic and technical powers that he possesses in a germinal state —“if (...) he withdraws into the center of his unity” (Pico della Mirandola, 2008: 209)— , you can create your own archetype, becoming. However, this archetype as an open possibility is immediately linked, in Giovanni's speech, with the figure of God as the Supreme Artificer. Well, in transhumanism, according to the reading of Ludueña Romandini (2010: 213), a secularization of the Judeo-Christian theological-political doctrines (where Gnosticism and Orthodox theology come together in an amalgam that form the political myths-motors of the Modernity), what survives is this idea that “man is something that has not yet occurred in its fullness” (Ludueña Romandini, 2010: 214). In this way, transhumanism takes over what Schaeffer calls the Cartesian segregationist thesis **(8)** and takes it to its extreme, whereby humans not only separate themselves from what they would share with other material entities, including animals. **(9)** , but rising above the laws that govern the life of bodies, it finally reaches its destiny: the appearance of “the first form of man itself” (Ludueña Romandini, 2010: 214 italics in the original) **(10)** . And all this is achieved through the instrumentalized mediation of a specific set of technologies— knowledge and techniques that Rodríguez (2019) calls “posthuman sciences”—: AI, nanotechnology, biotechnologies—especially germline engineering (Vaccari , 2013)—cognitive sciences. The problem with these discursive formations, heirs of Cartesian mechanism, through which “the ontological game

between artifacts and organs mobilizes a rhetoric that frames nature as a work of engineering and puts the scientist in the role of technologist” (Vaccari, 2017 : 337) improving the design according to its functions **(11)** lies in the fact that it presupposes that the “ends” are deduced from the direct “benefit” of the perfectibility of those functions. The plus ultra of history draws a tautology with the perfectibility of the functions of the organs-mechanisms. However, as Vaccari has noted in his criticisms of transhumanism, especially refuting Bostrom's arguments:

“... the three [elements called by the mechanism] (capacity, value and well-being) do not maintain a sufficiently consistent relationship to found the idea that the modification of capabilities is beneficial in itself” (Vaccari, 2014: 243).

Transhumanism, once the particular Cartesian genealogy that we have traced is recognized, is the last station of the chameleon-like Adam, whose movement would not be an ascent towards the spheres of the perfect God through rational engineering (a hyperpotent cogito), but the mad flight without “ meaning” of this “imperfect God, who is precisely an imperfect power, who desires like a God and desires infinitely to the same extent that he lacks his own divine condition.” (Serrano Marín, 2010: 68).

Perhaps a remedy for that movement without direction, limits or references (“Ello thinks, De la Vega thinks, bottomless desire thinks”) that, paradoxically, is denied but coincides with the story of the solitary cogito, isolated from the world—and therefore with the power to design it according to its autistic and illusory image—we find it in a passage of the novel object of our analysis. In the eleventh Chapter, Descartes' shadow reveals a fact that destabilizes the foundations of that story of the cogito in solitude capable of discovering the hidden truths of the cosmos and using them for his own benefit. When speaking about the Meditations, a synecdoche of rationalist-mechanistic-transhumanist humanism, the shadow says:

“A book so pure and orderly, a book that brings to mind the image of a man alone and calm in his room, far from the responsibilities and daily hustle and bustle of the crowd. A self-confident man, who is not afraid of the whirlwinds of extreme doubt. Except you weren't alone, no! Helena and Francine were the necessary condition of your solitude [...] your meditations are not a soliloquy, but a dialogue” (Vaccari, 2019: 134).

Not only are we not alone, and it is not true that thought precedes existence. It is the drama of co-existence, the shared destiny in the tumultuous theater of the world that requires cooperative work, and no longer only between Humans detached from the existing others **(12)** .

### **Francine or the passionate wound: automata and posthuman machines**

There is an even more important machine in De la Vega's work, that of the evil genius that moves the cables, pulleys and arranges the total scenery on which "the story of a man who set out to find the Truth and discover all the secrets of nature in times when the New Science had to confront the doctrines of the powerful Church" (Vaccari, 2019: 31) rescued from the plans and instructions deposited in a trunk by Descartes himself. That machine is the Francine automaton, whose body is made of thin receptacles that contract and expand at different rates, circulating steam or electricity, we do not know what force animates the little one, and covered in a flexible material that "imitates" the perfection of human skin, they make it equal to a living human being. However, Francine is a very subtle artifact, closer to the posthuman idea of a machine (Rodríguez, 2019: 315-322) than to that founded by the mechanism of the modern episteme. If De la Vega builds the man-machine through his tableaux, Francine, at first, would replicate the automata of the 18th century, the machine-men like those devised by Vaucanson.<sup>13</sup> However, as Francine takes center stage in the narration, a much more complex figure of a machine thickens and takes shape. It is no longer a deterministic automaton, destined to repeat functions following a finite combination of operating patterns. The Francine-machine has become a machine designed by the discursive formations of the 20th century such as system, organization, information, program and code. Francine resembles a cutting-edge computer program capable of capturing information from the environment and accumulating it to transform its operating system. Francine operates through deep learning. As foreseen by the theories of Varela and Maturana regarding complex and autopoietic living machines, and as Simondon stated about the concept of the post-mechanistic machine:

"The true improvement of machines, that which can be said to raise the degree of technicality, corresponds not to an increase in automatism, but, on the contrary, to the fact that the operation of a machine preserves a certain margin of indeterminacy." . It is this margin that allows the machine to be sensitive to external information" (Simondon in Sadin, 2017: 25).

If the young Descartes, in his student days at the College of Port Royal, experimented with automata, manufacturing one that materialized the ghost of Eurydice in a work that recreated the descent of Orpheus to the underworld (Vaccari, 2019: 75), as this No more than a stage artifice, a *deus ex machina* like that of Greek tragedies, the new generation of automatons embodied by Francine is an Artificial Intelligence capable not only of speaking and imitating the movements of the human body, but, in the manner of cyborg-replicant immortalized by the film version of *Blade Runner*, he can feel, cry and suffer, thus being able to manipulate symbols-signs with meaning. Francine is designed based on plans, equations and algorithms conceived in the times of Winner and Alan Turing's cybernetics. In fact, she herself proposes to her father, towards the end of the narrative, that he submit her to an



experiment, potentially experienced as a game by the girl: it is the Turing test developed to decide whether a computational machine is thinking or not. (see Vaccari, 2019: 101).

The modern invention, the epistemic figure of Man, was threatened since its appearance in the arenas of discourse and the materiality of the world built on the knowledge of the New Science. Descartes sensed this, and that is why he clung to the wood of the cogito in the midst of the storm of mechanism and the shadows that his own reason had wanted to exile to the reality of non-light. Francine stands as the early wound in the narcissistic certainty of the omnipotent subject who created the Modern world. And yet, at the same time it is his promise fulfilled, an artifice that knew how to defeat death itself. At this point, the little story woven by the story is the final stage of transhumanist teleology and its delusions of infinite perfection, space-time where death will have no dominion. Today, entered the 21st century, Francine has spread throughout the world, and the complex machine stands as the epistemic figure that guides us groping in a world populated by beings of a thousand shapes (14) , where man occupies a precarious, fragile, indeterminate position, in a cosmogram without mathesis universalis. We, anthropological bodies, as Sadin says, exist between applications that create a virtual world-interface that exceeds us in power and capacity for action, robots that supplant human labor in globalized metropolitan centers, artificial organs that are coupled to the biological organism, AIs like the Saudi citizen Sophia, we live in a posthuman world, and we know more than ever, as Vaccari's fictionalized Claudine knew, that we all "are something else, uncertain, beneath the surface" (Vaccari, 2019: 47).

The drama today, between virtual existences and intelligent silicon machines that promise us an indefinite life, where death will be nothing more than an archeology of the future, the drama we said, continues to be the way in which the fictional machine develops, the story of our existence, now accompanied, perhaps for a long time, by thousands of artifacts, devices and machines that we have invented.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Vicente Serrano Marín in his essay *Dreaming Monsters. Terror and delirium in modernity* (2010) undertakes an extensive rewriting of the philosophical concept of modernity, while detaching it from its coincidence with a stage that is often thought of as its definitive and characteristic face: the Enlightenment. The Spanish author shows in his journey that since the beginning of modernity that was born with Descartes, the element of the "I", the "subject" and its deployment (which in the French thinker occurs through the ingenuity of analytical geometry (with its spaces of action in the planes of representation) on which this not only epistemological, but also civilizational project of achieving the

truth would be built, is stalked and in some way falsified in nuce by a spectral, terrifying figure: the bottomless abyss that It “sustains” the self, the thought, the will to truth. Instead of “I think,” Descartes, based on the intrusion of the evil genius, would have avoided saying, according to Serrano Marín, as Nietzsche and Freud would later say: “It thinks.”

2. See Serrano Marín (2010) “Second Section. Terror.”

3. “The first to use the expression *machina mundi* ('the machine of the world') was the Roman poet Lucretius (94-55 BC) in his work *De rerum natura*. The metaphor (for that was what it was, evidently) was so apt that it did not take long to make a fortune, to such an extent that in subsequent centuries it was used by European writers and philosophers to designate the complexity of the world. Perhaps the first to fully develop it, beyond its purely poetic sense, was the Roman writer and politician Cicero (106-43 BC) [...] In *The Nature of the Gods* Cicero compared the precision and order with which it worked the Cosmos - the work, according to him, of the Stoic Creator - with Archimedes' world machine, a hydraulic automaton built more than 150 years ago by the Greek mathematician. [...] What the mechanistic and materialist scientists and philosophers [of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries] were going to put on the table in the following centuries will no longer be merely a metaphor, but a new theory of life that started from the fact —verifiable, according to them—that the bodies of animals and men were machines. Not 'as if they were', but they were” (Alonso Burgos, 2017: 53-56).

4. In his *Discourse on the Dignity of Man* Giovanni Pico della Mirandola elaborates one of the first attempts to find the place of man in the Cosmos in a period where the harmony of the divine Order of the Middle Ages, which in turn is a model and royal law of the social and terrestrial order began to shatter and the figure of Man began to appear drawn with the brush of the Humanist movement. This seemingly indefinite position, the last of the creations of the Supreme Father God, the architect who is man, nevertheless allows him to be located in an empty center that is paradoxically mobile, capable of occupying any part of the world ordered by divine laws. Potentially man is capable of ascending to the very height of the Supreme Father. The hierarchy is then decided in and based on the work of man (his intention and his judgment) as long as he knows how to take advantage of the perfectibility that defines him. “To the nascent man the Father conferred seeds of every kind and germs of all life. And according to how each man has cultivated them, they will mature in him and give him their fruits. If they were vegetables, they will become a plant; if sensitive, they will become brutal; if rational, it will be elevated to a celestial animal; if intellectuals, it will be an angel or son of God; and if, not content with the lot of any creature, he withdraws into the center of his unity, transformed into a spirit alone with God in the lonely darkness of the Father, he, who was placed above all things, will be above of all of them.” (Pico della Mirandola, 2008: 209).

5. The thesis of human exceptionalism devised by Descartes disappears in La Mettrie's materialist philosophical discourse: both the ontic rupture and the ontological dualism that define the human disappear. “The soul and the body fall asleep together. As the movement of the blood calms, a sweet feeling of peace and tranquility spreads throughout the machine; The soul basically becomes heavy with the eyelids and submerges itself in the fibers of the brain: it thus gradually paralyzes all the muscles of the body. These can no longer support the weight of the head, that one (the soul) can no longer support the burden of thought; It is in the dream as if it were not there.” (La Mettrie, 2014: 43) “Let us therefore

boldly conclude that man is a machine and that there is only one substance in the universe with various modifications” (120).

6. Project sustained by a set of knowledge, practices and technologies that converge in what critical posthumanists like Braidotti call Humanism: “At the beginning of everything there is He, the classical ideal of Man, identified by Protagoras as 'the measure of all things'. ', later elevated by the Italian Renaissance to the level of a universal model, represented by Leonardo da Vinci in the Vitruvian Man. An ideal of bodily perfection that [...] evolves towards a series of intellectual, discursive and spiritual values. Together, these support a precise conception of what is human about humanity. Furthermore, they assert with unwavering certainty the almost unlimited human capacity to pursue individual and collective perfection. This iconic image is the symbol of the doctrine of humanism, which interprets the empowerment of biological, rational and moral human capacities in light of the concept of teleologically oriented rational progress” (Braidotti, 2015: 25).

7. “Transhumanism is a philosophical movement that enacts the advent of a future state of humanity, called 'posthumanity.' It is a future in which humanity will have rationally intervened in its own evolution to reinvent itself in accordance with its own dreams and aspirations, thus transcending the natural prerogative of its existence and realizing its full potential [...] Nick Bostrom, the most prominent transhumanist thinker currently, he asserts: 'Ultimately, it is possible that these optimizations could make us, or our descendants, 'posthumans', beings with indefinite longevity, intellectual faculties much greater than those of any current human being (and perhaps sensitivities). or completely new modalities), as well as the ability to control their own emotions” (Vaccari, 2014: 238). Transhumanism, the son of the material culture of our hyper-technological Globe, proposes to use the technologies developed in the last decades of the 20th century and so far in the 21st century to produce a better human”, enhancing and perfecting, or redesigning, our cognitive abilities. , perceptual and biological. This possible “artificial redesign of the human body and intervention on the molecular bases of life on earth” (Ludueña Romandini, 2010: 200; italics in the original) is based on a budget, an artifact similar to the one used by Descartes to found all of life. his philosophy on the foundations of cogito: the “appeal to values that appear to be universal or self-evident, [i.e.], assumes that we all agree on what constitutes a 'better' human and that it would be ridiculous to oppose something that is better ” (Vaccari, 2014: 241). On the question of the Cartesian artifact, as we already said, it is a risky thesis by both Serrano Marín and Schaeffer, with very different claims and arguments. Schaeffer states it like this: “Cartesianism is the determination of man as ego. The possibility remains that this determination is nothing more than an artifact. If this were the case, then the privilege granted to the self-founding value of consciousness, far from constituting the unbreakable foundation of all knowledge of the human being, would be exposed to prohibiting us from accessing the knowledge of what we are” (2009: 59).

8. In that same movement he takes up the challenge launched by the Cartesian project of engineering the mechanisms that make up the *res extenso*, in which man of course participates as a material entity. Vaccari writes about it: “We should not be surprised that Descartes wrote the first transhumanist treatise, the *Opticks* (1634). As I have argued in detail elsewhere (see Vaccari [2012]), Descartes' *Optics* rehearses the discourse of human improvement on the basis of a mechanistic model of the living, while approaching nature as a system flawed to be redesigned from an engineering perspective. There are strong continuities between classical biological mechanism and transhumanist anthropology. Both

instrumentalize the relationship between body and mind, unfolding the human into subject and object of its action, into designer and designed. The process of human moral elevation, both for Descartes and for transhumanists, involves the correction of their biomaterial condition” (2013: 50).

**9.** Not only would the ontic rupture be repeated with respect to nature subject to regular and stable laws in which animal bodies participate, but, to put it in Ludueña Romandini's terms, this “is equivalent to the elimination of all animalitas constitutive of the human until the present” (2010: 214).

**10.** The ascending route of Pico della Mirandola reaches its telos. In this way, transhumanism stands at the beginning of the 21st century “as the most subtle form and the last avatar of humanism” (Ludueña Romandini, 2010: 214; italics in the original).

**11.** In this regard, Vaccari notes: “Intelligent design, in fact, is an important feature of the explanatory framework of the machine, and modern science would have enough problems to get rid of this association between mechanism and design (the contemporary debate in the philosophy of biology on the notion of “function” comes from this structural association between mechanism and function). One of the advantages of the mechanistic thesis was precisely this engineering approach to the organism, which allows a detailed understanding of the relationship between structure and function: the mechanisms by which each part in the organism carries out its predetermined purpose. As we have noted, the problem changes when we turn our attention to organisms as a whole: if the principle of unity of organs is function, what is the 'function' of an organism?” (2017: 332). On the other hand, regarding the role of technology in this teleology of history crossed from end to end by the “anthropic principle”, once again Vaccari enlightens us: “We see, then, how the philosophical anthropology of rationalist humanism is simultaneously, since its inception, a philosophy of technology. Under the shadow of Descartes, the entire philosophy of technology will include (and in many cases 'start from' or 'be founded on') an anthropology. Technology becomes ontologically absorbed within the category of mediation and instrumentalization; in other words, it is metaphysically neutralized. Technologies are transparent pathways that constitute a natural extension of volition, messengers between intentions and ends that ensure the sovereignty of the mind over the body and the world” (2013: 50; italics in the original).

**12.** The critical posthumanism of thinkers such as Braidotti, or the spectrology of Ludueña Romandini, as well as the tentacular compostism of Haraway, attempt to think and develop, from different proposals, an alternative to (trans)humanist metaphysics (which almost always favors in an individualistic ethic). As we see, it is not only about the cogito, but, and perhaps above all, about that unlimited and groundless desire that appears through a mirror, darkly like the shadow denied by the artifact of the cogito. <sup>13</sup> “That the automaton is a simulacrum of the human and that its creator intimately aspires to the condition of demiurge, is perfectly illustrated by the best and most celebrated automata manufacturer of the 18th century [...] the doctor and mechanical engineer Jacques de Vaucanson (1709 -1782). If La Mettrie had taken naturalistic mechanism to its ultimate consequences, affirming the man-machine, Vaucanson, starting from Cartesian mechanism and Newton's laws of motion, will attempt the opposite: to build the machine-man. [...] if everything was a machine that found its most perfect example in the clock, nature could only be imitated by providing an artifice with

the cables and pulleys that anatomists could observe in man and then making it work with the precision of a clock ” (Alonso Burgos, 2017: 90-91).

**14.** To enter this labyrinth of beings that feed the materializable dreams of contemporary technoscience (nourished by the imaginaries of science fiction so far in its short history, from its birth at the end of the 19th century to the present day) is very interesting. the route outlined by Alonso Burgos in the chapter titled “The Paradise of the Blessed: immortals, clones, cyborgs, alpha ova” of his excellent essay Theory and history of artificial man. Of automata, cyborgs, clones and other creatures (2017).

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