



INTO THE AMAZON BOX

**A VISUAL INQUIRY BY
INTO THE BLACK BOX**

SILENT WORKS, BERLIN, NOVEMBER 2020

Big tech has been using the Covid-19 pandemic to take over various regions in the world, including Northern Italy. Amazon, for instance, one of the biggest profiteers of the crisis, has been turning its logistical empire into 'critical infrastructure.' Meanwhile, workers are being romanticized as an 'essential' labor force in order to suppress their bargaining power: 'heroes' are expected to sacrifice themselves for 'the greater good' rather than go on strike. This big tech-driven neo-feudalism is fostered by the fact that Northern Italy is at the forefront of the global neo-liberal transformation – including a far-reaching privatization of health care services and hence not coincidentally emerged as one of the first epicenters of the pandemic.

The work of the research collective Into the Black Box in this context is based on the assumption that the present system of production is in crisis and that it – as history has already shown at earlier stages – moves its balance from production to logistics (and finance) in order to survive.

The questions raised by the collective are the following: What is inside the Amazon warehouses that can be seen next to the highways? How does an Amazon Locker located in a supermarket work? How does a delivery girl, a truck driver, a picker, an Amazon technician work? How does Amazon promote its services as Amazon Prime?

This inquiry is representative of Into the Black Box collective's agenda that is in turn mirrored in its name. It derives from the symbol of contemporary management techniques that hide to external viewers the whole logic of the system.

**Into the Amazon
Box**

**A Visual Inquiry
by Into the
Black Box ft.
Davide Blotta,
Ilaria Depari
and
Dario Sanna**

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Similar black boxes are all around us: in platform capitalism and industry 4.0, in urban planning, in labor organization, in State governance. A way to penetrate the opacity of the system is to analyze inputs and outputs, operations and consequences, procedures and resistances. Thus, the collective's multidisciplinary approach provides a flexible tool to gain deeper understanding of the contemporary world. Into the Black Box's visual inquiry not only enables an elaborate critique of the Amazon model and its thorough restructuring of labor, but also offers a glimpse into the potential for labor struggles yet to come.

Taking this question as a starting point for their contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition, the collective started a broad and shared project of visual inquiry around the way in which one of the most 'advanced' enterprises of contemporary capitalism is transforming work. At first, they launched a call for an artistic mapping on the presence of the multinational company Amazon in Northern Italy and the working conditions within it. Here we present three works selected by the call. Davide Blotta documented the workday of an Amazon driver in Bologna; Ilaria Depari iconized Amazon presence through and outside the city inviting the spectator to reflect on the work behind the supply chain; Dario Sanna condensed the first Amazon delivery as a milestone.

At the same time, IBB started to collect information on the company organization, history, working conditions and ambitions using videos and newspaper articles. The ambition is to create a polyphonic narrative combining inquiry and art. Here we present part of the materials collected creating Amazon, A Critical Tour, a path of investigation on Amazon through different steps, from the history to the company to workers' strikes.

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Flying Drones crossing the sky to delivery packages. AI devices managing your home while waiting for next Amazon Prime Video series.

Thousands of robots working in a smart warehouse with all kind of commodities. Welcome to the Amazon World. This is the surface of a black box containing all the information on how this Giant achieved to gain his leading position in the global economy.

The Critical Tour prepared by Into the Black Box will lead you inside the box, behind and beyond the curtain of its rhetoric. Collecting opinions and info from newspapers, workers' protests, videos and paper, Into the Black Box prepared a path of 6 steps to discover the hidden contents of the box. Starting from the history of the company the spectator will move through its expansion and vision of the future to gradually arrive to the "secret laboratory of production" where thousands of workers are exploited along a supply chain that connects all the globe in one click. This Tour is focused on Amazon but talks about capitalism in general, with its ambition to replace human labor with machines and flows in a smooth and frictionless world. Nevertheless, working class cannot be totally replace as well as class struggles agitate the capitalist dreams.

Into the Black Box is a research collective that adopts logistics as a point of view on contemporary political, economic and social transformations. Its inquiry started in 2013 with a research project at the University of Bologna on supply chain development and conflicts in North Italy. Today, it enlarged its attention on social reproduction, platform capitalism, post-pandemic world, planetary urbanization, and new class struggles.

www.intotheblackbox.com

**Amazon. A
Critical
Tour**

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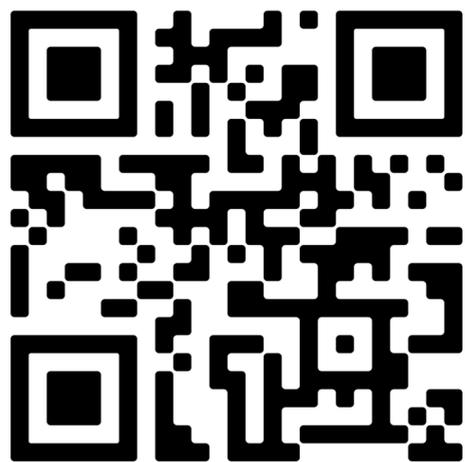
The Amazon History

Amazon has been founded just 26 years ago in USA and after surviving the dot-com bubble rapidly became the biggest internet company in the world. Its name is inspired by the famous South America river. His founder, Jeff Bezos, is considered one of the richest men in the world. The company started as an online book shop, enlarging more and more its products and services. Basically, Amazon promises all the World in your hand with a click. This vision of just-in-time and to-the point- deliveries imposed work standard to all the other logistics companies and consumption expectations in the customers. Nevertheless, what is in the middle between the customer order and the product delivery?

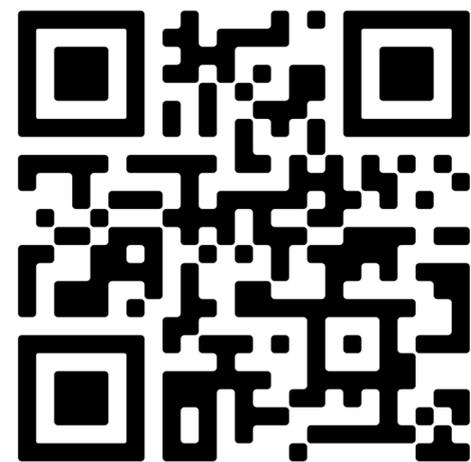
**Amazon. A
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The history of Amazon



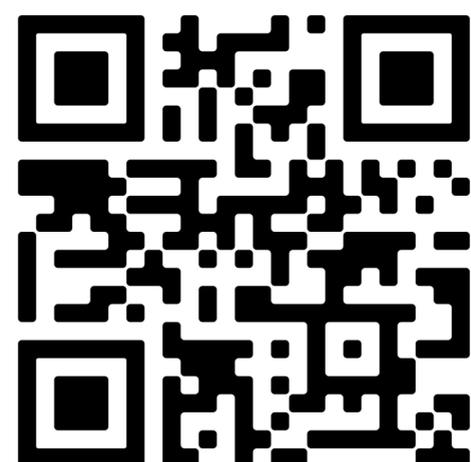
How Amazon Makes Money



How a Bookstore Conquered the Internet



How Amazon Delivers On One-Day Shipping



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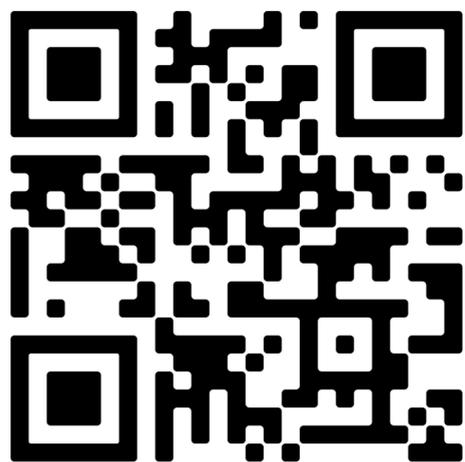
Amazon Venture City

Amazon has not only transformed logistics and consumption, but it is constantly inspiring capitalist imagination. From drones to robots, from cashless shops to virtual assistants, the company innovates our daily life designing the city of the future: full-automatized, smart organized, AI driven. This vision materializes a more general logistical dream, the aspiration for a frictionless and smooth world of flows and consumptions, without conflicts, bottlenecks and ripples.

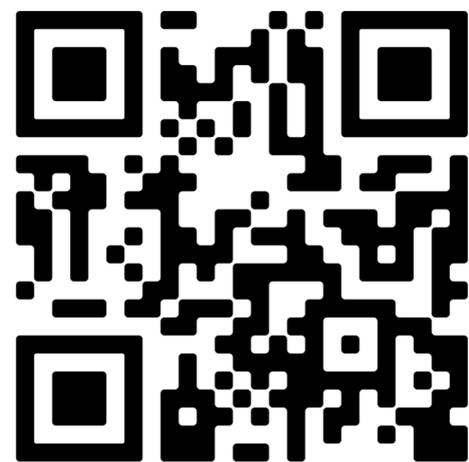
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Amazon's City of The Future



Introducing Amazon Go



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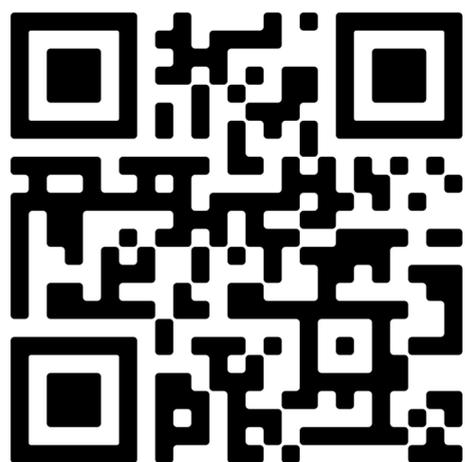
Amazon Logistics

One of the strength points of the company is its logistics infrastructure. Amazon built a global and integrated distribution network, consisting of cross dock centers, fulfillment centers, sortation centers, delivery stations, hubs and lockers. There are 75 fulfillment centers and 25 sortation centers with over 125,000 employees. A detailed management allows to control and supervise the supply chain in all steps and moments. An army of pickers, packagers and drivers gives life to this logistics system.

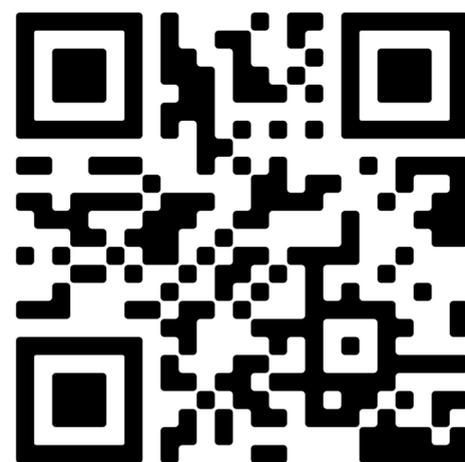
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Secrets of an Online Mega-Giant



Amazon Sorting Facility- Life of a Package



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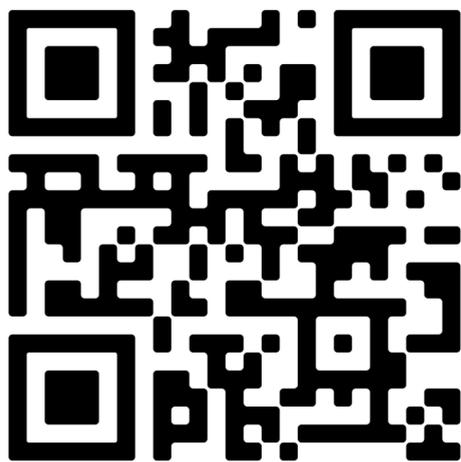
The Myth of Automation

One of the ambitions of the company is to fully automatize the labor process. Amazon robotics promises to replace in few years all human tasks with machines: drones will take the place of drivers, robots the place of pickers, AI the role of officers. This vision of labor, at the moment, is useful to attract investments and to regulate human labor to intensive standards with the threat of machine replacement.

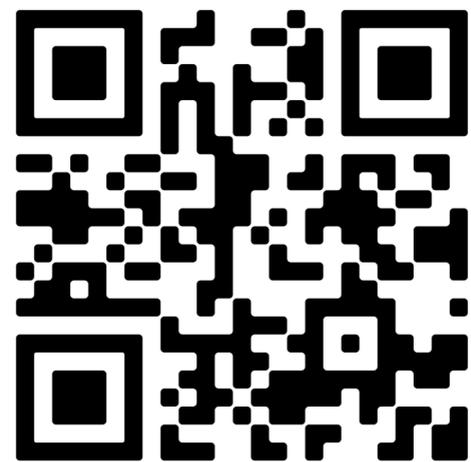
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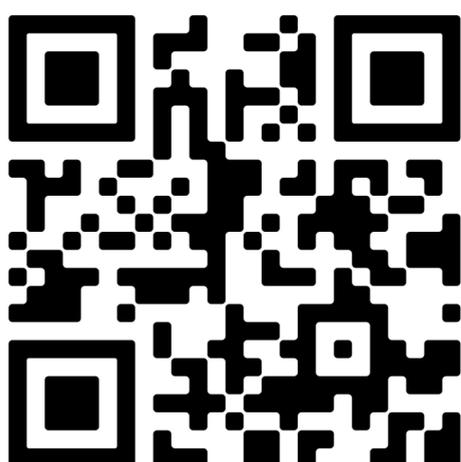
Delivery drones



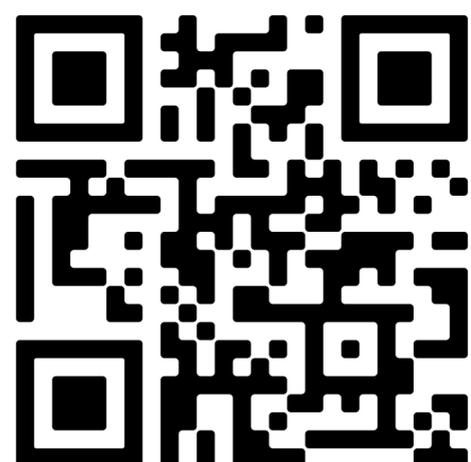
Amazon's Robotic Empire



Meet the Robots at Amazon



Amazon workers "treated like robots"



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Working for Amazon

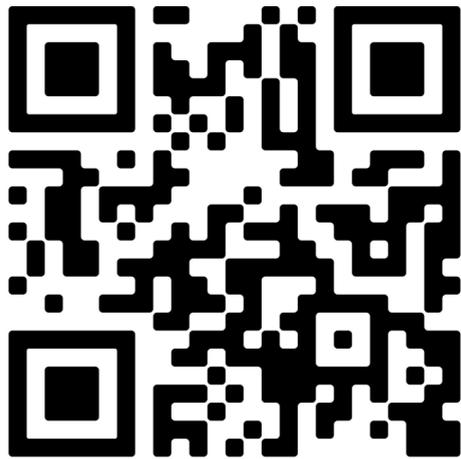
How is to work for Amazon? What is the labor control and how do the company supervise workers?

Warehouses are larger than a football field and workers must run through the lanes in search of commodities on the shelves. A scanner is used to register the products and measure the performances. As the commodities are ready, swarms of drivers distribute the packages along the network until the customers doors. This labor organization entails a hard exploitation of workers because of pervasive monitoring, lack of rest, intensive shifts, causing physical and psychological injuries.

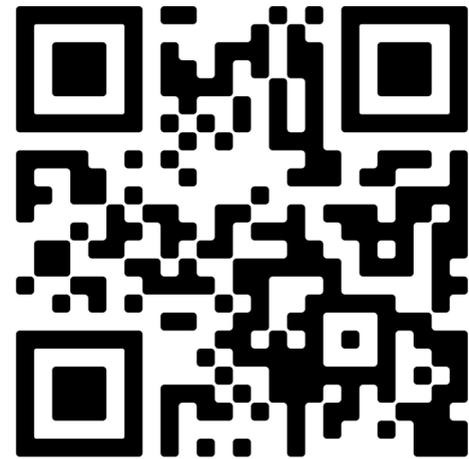
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What It's Like To Work At Amazon



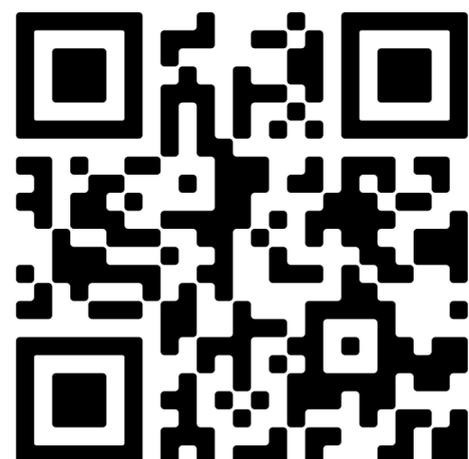
A Day Of An Amazon Delivery Driver



Ex-Amazon workers talk



The 'Enormous Pressure' At Amazon



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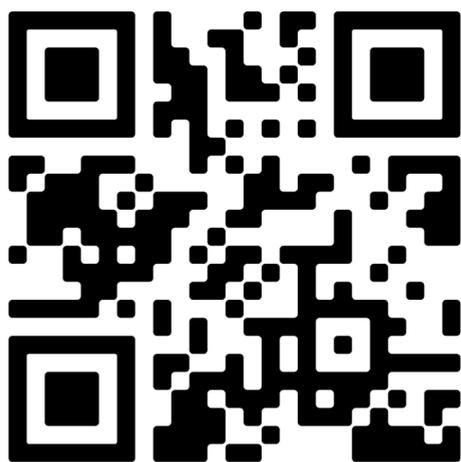
Struggling with the Giant

During last months Amazon services grew up as pandemic forced millions of people to home staying. While logistics confirmed and improved its role of fundamental infrastructure for contemporary capitalism, its workers assumed an essential role. Nevertheless, several problems spread through Amazon warehouses because of lack of PPE and safety measures. Protests broke up and this is not the first time. Despite an anti-unions policy, workers tried to organize strikes to claim for better working conditions, from United States to Europe. Dreaming for a logistical world, Amazon tries to drive away the risk of logistical nightmare, that means a temporary shutdown or a collapse of its supply chain.

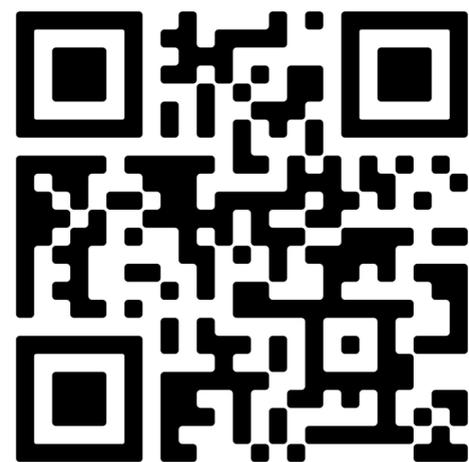
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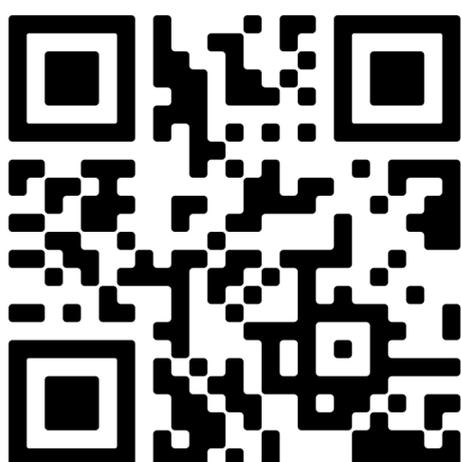
How Amazon Fends Off Unions



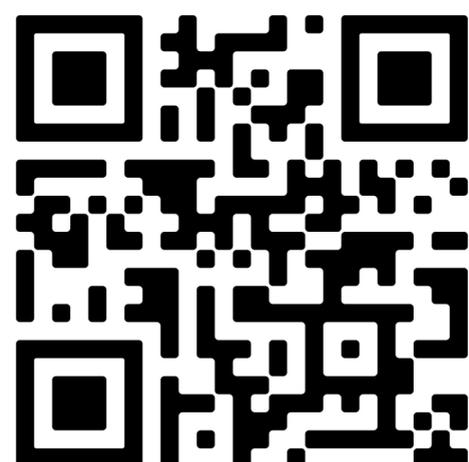
Amazon workers on strike across Europe



Amazon Strike Due to COVID-19 Crisis



Organizing a protest over coronavirus



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Logistical time tests the capacities of Amazon workers. Through the calculation of body agilities in elemental tasks, algorithm stocks data about bio forces, bio-attitudes of its workers. Time is scheduled in a maximum of eight hours per day, but during working hours, its definition among breaks and rests becomes obscure and opaque. Velocity is paradigm for Amazon. Velocity engrafts its disposition over lives conducts in the A-I work. Some of its fragments can be detected by optical audacity In order to confine, untie, abhor, forced need for speed.

Project by Davide Blotta, Riccardo Cosentino
Subject: Amazon worker; Riccardo Cosentino

Davide Blotta is an emergent photographer based in Bologna, Italy.

His works refer to contemporary urban dialectics. He started photography during Gilets Jaunes riots in Paris, France, in order to document and testify police and police undercover violence. In Paris, on December 2018, tear gas bullets were fired by an average of 11.000 every Saturday.

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**Velocity.
A.I. need for
speed**

**Davide
Blotta**

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Logistics gained more and more importance in contemporary capitalism. From global value chains to last-mile, it performs times and spaces of production and circulation as well human behaviors. It dreams of a smooth spaces where commodities flow without interruptions or bottlenecks. The world is reduced to a neutral and peaceful flat where workers get invisibilized or replaced by automation. Amazon is a leading enterprise in global logistics. It covers almost all world surface with its infrastructure of hubs and lockers, promising to delivery just-in-time and to-the-point 24/7 or with drones. Nevertheless, Amazon warehouses do not host only packages as well as lockers are not supplied magically. The mysterious force keeping the machine going on is still labor power in the figures of pickers, drivers, packers.

Amazon: A Logistical Dream explores the physical presence of the company in our everyday life. The supply chain of Bologna region is retraced in its different times and spaces: Crespellano's warehouse, a Bologna locker, a to-the-door delivery. The images of empty and neutral places - as the logistics dreams - collide with the contents of the slogans: the similar-to-advertising texts interrogate the spectator about the human presence and role in those spaces. The neutral space blends into a disturbing scenario where we search for who is missing while the pictures duplicated along stripes remember commodities flows and packaging ribbon. The images invite us to reflect on the effective role of workers in Amazon services and why they are not adequately represented.

Ilaria Depari is a Bologna-based photographer interested in visual anthropology and experimental photography.

<https://www.instagram.com/ilariadepari>

**Amazon: A
Logistical
Dream**

Ilaria Depari

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Fluid Concepts and Creative Analogies: Computer Models Of The Fundamental Mechanisms Of Thought wrote by Douglas R. Hofstadter and others members of the Fluid Analogies Research Group, it is the first book and also the first shipping of Jeff Bezos as part of the Amazon project, in 7th July 1995 in his garage in Bellevue, Washington. The work consists in a copy of the original book of the 1995 edition vacuum packed, embedded in a cement form. The vacuum keeps unchanged over time the state of preservation of the book, while the block of cement keeps it motionless, giving it a monolithic character. As in a photograph that fixes an image, Arkè fixes together some input representing the beginning of Amazon. At the same time, these inputs (or concepts) still have a specific weight in tracing the developments of Amazon system. The temporal aspect is predominant: the work must be observed as an archaeological find, known to us since 1995 and destined to remain over time to be part of a larger scheme. Starting from the origins of Amazon, Arkè makes some questions whose solutions can be found looking critically and bowing at the theories that laid the foundations of the ecommerce colossus, its development, its impact on present and future and the systemic model which it contributes to.

Dario Sanna (1996) was born and raised in Sardinia, currently lives in Bologna and studies visual arts at the Academy of Fine Arts. Since 2018 he is part and he is co-founder of the artistic and curatorial collective Transhumanza. During his artistic experience he worked with different media about different topics: muralism, sculpture, photography, video and participatory practices.

https://www.instagram.com/maitte_sernande

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Dario Sanna

