

SIL ENT

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Peng!
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The Hidden Labor
in AI-Capitalism

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Silent Works or: The Hidden Labor in AI- Capitalism

Before artificial intelligence (AI) was invented as a technology, capitalism in the West was driven by what could be called a fantasy of AI. This means that the most important economic processes – from decision making to production – were gradually delegated to some higher, magically autonomous intelligence, imagined as, for instance, an “invisible hand” steering the “self-regulating market.” In the neoliberal age, this fantasy of AI has paved the way for the rise of actual AI technology. Ultimately, something was born at the very intersection of AI as a fantasy of capitalism and AI as a technology of capital – and that something could be called AI-driven capitalism, in short: *AI-capitalism*.

Today, this far-reaching commingling of capitalist fantasy and capitalist technology is underlying processes of ‘market-

friendly’ privatization and ‘market-transformative’ disruption. Meanwhile, AI-capitalism impacts an increasing number of fields (logistics, manufacturing, services, etc.) and, last but not least, the design, valorization, and perception of labor.

At first glance, the most urgent problem is that under AI-capitalism labor seems – across classes and contexts – to be *gradually becoming extinct, although labor is in fact undergoing deep transformations*. Thus, at the end of the day the task is to deconstruct the extinction narrative and explore how it conceals the large-scale restructuring of labor. In other words, rather than buying into the narrative of labor as a fading reality, it is necessary to look at labor as a buried reality that needs to be excavated from beneath dominant discourses and power structures.

It is at this juncture that the SILENT WORKS exhibition launches its intervention. It brings together fourteen positions that explore the imperceptibilization of labor processes as the basis for coding, controlling, and

conditioning social reality. This inquiry into the politics of making labor im/perceptible sheds light on the ongoing restructuring of work, and enables a recasting of what labor means in the context of media and art.

Most of the contributions to the exhibition were conceived in a time when, following the example of China, extensive Covid-19 containment measures were also introduced in the West and the world at large. In this critical period it was no longer possible to uphold the aforementioned extinction narrative. After all, even if governments were quick to foreground AI-driven systems as key to protecting societies (tracing apps, etc.), crisis management has predominantly been about supporting economic life and, ultimately, saving capitalism. In other words, from the outset the primary objective has been to maintain the population as a fit and healthy pool of workers.

Revealing the system's far-reaching reliance on labor, office workers are being turned into home office workers; health and care workers, as well as

laborers in social reproduction and infrastructure, are being romanticized as 'heroes' and thus pressured to sacrifice themselves for the system; factories and other sites of production make workers continue *robota* – e.g., on assembly lines where they are required to stand directly next to each other, while compelled to obey social distancing rules during breaks. Meanwhile, AI-savvy tech companies such as Amazon have emerged as major profiteers from the crisis, celebrating a historic expansion of their ostensibly fully automated businesses and an equally historic rise in profits. All this is based on the hard and precarious labor of their workers, who are nonetheless denied higher pay, stronger rights, and better (social and health) security.

Responding to these revelatory contradictions, some of the contributions to the exhibition address the underlying social, political, and economic issues in quite a direct fashion, while others express their commentary through poetic layers. On the following pages, each contribution is

described with a focus on its links to the overall theme of the hidden labor in AI-capitalism.

Complementary to this collection of texts presenting the fourteen positions, the second publication published in conjunction with the SILENT WORKS exhibition – entitled “Invisible Hand(s)” – contains interviews we conducted between March and June 2020 with the researchers and activists Dario Azzellini, Christine Braunersreuther, Niccolò Cuppini, Kerstin Guhlemann, Tom Holert, Angela Mitropoulos, and Katja Schwaller. Intended as a companion volume to the SILENT WORKS exhibition and the accompanying publication of the same name that you are reading now, “Invisible Hand(s)” enables a historical as well as socio-political contextualization of the contributions to the exhibition within the framework of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Magdalena Taube and Krystian Woznicki, Berlin, October 2020

Benjamin Heisenberg

Benjamin Heisenberg’s contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition is based on the Alfred Hitchcock film “The Birds” (1963). Hitchcock’s reworking of London’s bombing during the Second World War as a critique of capitalism through the lens of war and the construction of new war machines anticipates the trajectory from cold war paranoia to the digital sublime of ‘global mass surveillance.’ Heisenberg’s work focuses on a segment in which this critique comes to a head – a segment that is discussed in media theory as the “impossible image.”

This image shows the people of the small coastal town of Bodega Bay from a bird’s eye view. The people are running around like startled ants trying to save their world in the face of an unpredictable and unfathomable threat: birds. In a complicated copying process, Hitchcock assembled this image from real footage and a

rendered matte painting. The filmed streets populated with people complement the painted image of the fictional Bodega Bay. The birds that are copied into the composition destroy it unrelentingly. Heisenberg's adaptation "Birds Clone Stamp" continues the collage-like production process of the original. After dividing it into its individual images, Heisenberg edits the sequence by hand, in Photoshop, using the Clone Stamp tool. Seemingly randomly copied image parts 'destroy' the image, instead of the birds doing so.

Through further processing, the image artificially assembled by humans seems to be quasi directed against itself, thus alluding to an out-of-control intelligence inherent in the image, as we already find today in AI-driven image production. At the same time, this work refers back to the classic single image processing in the age of celluloid. Here, too, there is a parallel to the cinematic present determined by CGI effects. Contrary to expectations, a large part of the effects in the fictional realm are also dependent on human

labor. As important as artificial intelligence is in generating digital spaces and textures, a large number of work processes are in fact more or less secretly delegated to contractors in India and China. In halls the size of a football field, a huge number of image editors manually create 3D processes, character animations, and other CGI effects. Thus, as in the past, the human being is both the creative beginning and the necessary final link of an artistic-industrial process. Historically, this has been automation's "last mile." In the age of AI this last mile is being pushed ever further again, recalibrating what is perceived as labor, what labor eventually will be, and what it could be.

The restructuring of labor taking place in this context is addressed in Heisenberg's work even more poignantly at the level of looking. To reiterate, in the bird's eye view the camera eye seems to rest far above the city suspended in chaos, allowing 'the viewer' to observe the processes as if represented through the eye of a god-like surveillance camera that automatically records whenever motion is detected. Standing still

in the sky, Hitchcock's "impossible image" is de facto impossible because at the time of its making cranes were not high enough and helicopters were not still enough to actually enable the realization of such a shot. Thus, it is a shot without both a camera capable of capturing it and a camera operator behind it. In this way it anticipates the drone as an image machine, and hence the omnipresence of AI-driven aerial monitoring today.

Heisenberg's work – in decomposing and recomposing this moment and in scattering the image into a myriad of 'outsourced' pieces of work – raises the questions: Who is working when monitoring staff looks through the surveillance camera? Is a person or an AI-based machine 'looking'? Does the human see through the eyes of the machine or does the machine see through the eyes of the human? Even more to the point: Who watches from under the clouds after all humans have evacuated the control room? Who valorizes the invisible hand and its very power?

In short, in addressing the *labor of looking* in AI-capitalism, Heisenberg's work challenges the widespread assumption that man is no longer key to the inner workings of the capitalist world, which is ostensibly run by the high-tech version of Adam Smith's "invisible hand." Instead, his work challenges the visitor to think how we as laborers can reposition ourselves in the face of an invisible hand that needs us to develop its power.

Benjamin Heisenberg lives in Lucerne as director, author and visual artist. After receiving his degree in sculpture, Heisenberg studied film making at the HFF in Munich, graduating with the screenplay for his feature film *Schläfer*. Heisenberg's films have been invited to the Cannes International Film Festival and the Berlinale Film Festival, and have won the Bavarian Film Prize in the Best Newcomer Director category and the first Austrian Film Prize in 2011. Together with Christoph Hochhäusler and Sebastian Kutli, he founded the film magazine *Revolver* in 1998; he is still its co-editor today.

Diego de la Vega Coffee Co-op

January 16, 2020 – 7:56 p.m.:

“The content of the work that we’re developing for the SILENT WORKS exhibition will address the conflicting perspectives of workers, activists, and communities regarding the case of the opening of Awesome in NYC. Based on our group’s organizing of sustainable alternatives to contemporary capitalism, we’ll connect our experiences with systematically invisibilized labor struggles inside the Awesome empire.”

After Awesome’s expansion into New York City was announced at the beginning of this year, officials representing parts of Brooklyn, such as their representative congressperson X., expressed concern that Awesome would receive tax breaks while critical infrastructure, such as the New York City Subway, was deteriorating, and the city’s public school and health care systems were underfunded.

Awesome has had an enormous impact on the restaurant industry and megamarket chains in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles. This impact tends to be clouded by claims that it is ‘merely’ a food distribution network facilitating food deliveries in large cities. Under this mantle, Awesome’s predatory practices have created huge amounts of wealth by centralizing food processing into shopping centers repurposed as enormous food courts. Unable to pay for its overpriced services (rent, points of sale, security, and memberships), nearly 45% of restaurateurs have gone out of business.

Moreover, the Safety Employment Agency (SEA) has registered below-standard working conditions in Awesome’s food processing, including high temperatures, poor ventilation, and a lack of protection equipment for workers who have schedules of 10+ hours under an algorithm-regulated pace of labor that demands the production of up to 20 orders per hour.

Against this backdrop, it was not a big surprise that Awesome's expansion into New York City was met with a torrent of opposition that was supported and vitalized by a vast network of activists. As a consequence of only two weeks of intense protesting and campaigning, Awesome canceled its plans to open in New York City, and the local resistance became a model for other cities and communities struggling against similar plans.

The Covid-19 pandemic – during which New York City emerged as the first epicenter in the US – has changed the mood. Reportedly, in the first ten days of the pandemic Awesome's founder Andrea Banks gained 10 billion Euro in personal wealth, while her corporation gained 100 billion Euro in market value. With its success celebrated as a miracle, people seem dazzled – especially in the face of countless businesses that are going bankrupt in the crisis. Suddenly, all the labor struggles (also read: friction) underlying this newest of magical tricks performed by AI-capitalism's model company have been forgotten. And the fact that in times of abandoned and rotten

public infrastructure Awesome is turning its logistics empire into “critical infrastructure” only underlines its frictionless functioning.

May 26, 2020 – 5:12 a.m.: “Things are looking a little different here in NYC since restrictions have loosened. Within the Covid-19 pandemic that we are experiencing, perspectives regarding labor issues and corporate activity are even more relevant for a number of reasons pertaining to the specific conditions that this emergency has created. Against this backdrop, Diego De la Vega's contribution to SILENT WORKS will focus on the perspectives of workers, consumers and activists regarding Awesome's potential to open in NYC after its controversial withdrawal at the beginning of the year. Our contribution will be comprised of narrative (from interviews and other audio sources) and images in video format. As you already know, Diego De la Vega Coffee Co-op has created a number of projects in NYC that deal mainly with economy and social

movements. Therefore it is an excellent platform to develop such conversations.”

July 12, 2020 – 9:09 p.m.: “Things are really really difficult with evictions in NYC right now. There’s people all over the city sitting around with their carry-ons, but you know they are not tourists waiting for their reservation at a neighborhood B&B. They are really right there, with all their possessions in their hands, unless they have been able to afford to pay a warehouse. Then you see lots of bedrooms on the sidewalks, people who literally continue their life after being evicted, rebuilding their apartment with their furniture and things right in the street, living life as if they were still inside their apartment. Those are the most scary ones.”

September 17, 2020 – 3:29 p.m.: “D. will start working in about two weeks at Awesome, half-day shifts! After six months of unemployment! It was the best of options, also money-wise. D. already signed a contract (although there’s the catch that it can be canceled on a whim), but still

needs to pass the background, credit, and drug tests. Awesome is three hours away from home. But in a really cool place called Cyberspace, a duty-free zone that exists outside of NAFTA and the TPP, it’s sort of like an offshore space, but on-shore. It’s a data island in the cloud, but still in the midst of the city right next to the projects, where most immigrants and people of color live. If it works out, we will be able afford to move into the Bronx in 2-3 months. Anyway, we will let you know once D. is in.”

Diego de la Vega Coffee Co-op is an experimental platform for grassroots interventions into contemporary capitalism run by the artists Gabriela Ceja and Fran Ilich. It aims to connect social projects in New York City with equivalent efforts in Chiapas, creating a horizontal financial flow between them. Inspired by rebel Mayan coffee producers, this performative homage to activists who serve Mayan coffee in cities across the world is complemented by exercises in experimental economies.

eeefff

“We hired random people from a post-Soviet headhunter platform whose labor is usually rendered invisible; they work for the machinery of micro-tasking, crowdsourcing, stress, A/B testing, and do all the work that is hidden at the end. And we have created a fictional space for them to talk and live through this alienated work. Visitors are invited to reinvent themselves as workers by becoming ‘deformers’ of AI-driven capitalism’s logistical processes.”

Platform economies (and more broadly, economies supported by computation) create a geographical gradient in the distribution of labor in the post-Soviet space. eeefff is interested in actualizing the complex structure of the present moment, captured through the perspective of interweaving various types of alienation. The artists work with the translocality of the post-Soviet space, which they understand through terms such as “materiality of outsourcing,” “digital proletariat,”

and through the possibility of “algorithmic solidarity” under these conditions.

eeefff’s contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition creates a place where the aforementioned vectors of their curiosity intersect. The piece aims to create optics for the perception of the infrastructure of collective cognitive work, leisure, romantic relationships and algorithmically modifiable intimacy. This optic is helping build situational knowledge, making it possible to go beyond the limits of binary issues like acceleration/escapism (or utopia/dystopia, techno-pessimism/techno-optimism, etc.).

Focusing on the figure of an outsourcer and “deformer” of interfaces (his or her “algorithmic production drama,” his/her workplace, etc.), eeefff shifts the focus from the user’s figure to the figure of the operator, meaning: to the one who produces contemporary algorithmic reality, while he/she is hidden behind all the machinery of micro-tasking.

To this end, eeefff has developed the computerized online service “Outsourcing paradise(parasite),” where online and offline temporalities of scrolling, communicating and working, as well as the “preemptive” affect of users, are put to the test. Counteracting the imperative of activity, free-floating interfaces emerge in the gaps of online actions and gestures, stretching transitioning annexations into autonomous interactions beyond the extractive online economy.

The videos of this contribution show workers who are performing micro-tasks. The micro-tasks include modifying the working interfaces of other users, singing algorithmic lullabies, and developing imaginations related to algorithmically supported infrastructure. The videos appear on the top of different platform aggregators’ websites. Here, an intervention takes place inside the web-space of platforms, that is, an erosion of website elements.

In this context, it is important to remember the key characteristic of the infrastructure: when it stops working, it becomes visible.

Offering a “breakdown” or “add-on” over the existing web world, eeefff draws attention to the material infrastructure and human labor behind it, which keeps afloat everything we see on the front of our devices’ glowing screens. The videos reveal how material and non-material work are being recalibrated in the new circumstances.

eeefff is a cooperation between Nicolay Spesivtsev (artist, computer scientist) and Dzina Zhuk (artist, sci-fi writer). Active from 2013, based in Minsk and Moscow, they are working with the emotional effects of the new economic regimes driven by computation, materiality of sensibility, affects within creative industries, frictions between user interfaces and protocols, test settings for collective imaginaries. The methods of eeefff are: making public actions and situations, online interventions, performative seminars, software and hardware hacks, framing environments and settings.

Giorgi Gago Gagoshidze

“The source for this film is the personal life of my father, Nugzari, and his right hand. His hand has been playing a crucial role in his economic and social life and has always ensured his family’s financial stability. The film traces a physical and symbolic transition of his right hand: how the transition has been affecting his socio-economic life in his journey throughout different political ideologies that are represented and governed by symbolic hands.”

Combining hand-held camera, drone footage, and 3D animation, Giorgi Gago Gagoshidze’s contribution to SILENT WORKS portrays the artist’s father, a former contractor in the USSR, and a refugee after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Just when his working status had changed from illegal to legal, he lost his right hand in a cement mixer in a work-related accident in Portugal. In the film, entitled “The Invisible Hand of My Father,” the phantom limb develops a life of its own: it

floats like a spirit over his retired life in the Caucasian mountains, reminding viewers of ever-changing economic landscapes, from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the 2008 global financial crisis. In the course of this, it comes to symbolize the hand of the market that took over the worker’s hand, but also the invisible hand of social welfare, enabling the disabled man a self-sustained life in the mountains, where he grows wine and vegetables without the burden of wage labor.

“Working through humor was the only approach I could take.”

The tenderness of the father, the joy of his retirement garden back home, and the irony of his escape from market labor is a bittersweet assessment of Adam Smith’s “invisible hand of the market,” and a reminder that leisure has its socio-political costs.

Today, as AI-capitalism is enforcing the belief in the high-tech version of Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” it fosters the *invisibilization of hands essential to upholding the system*, such as laborers

in basic supply (people in logistics, delivery, and tech work) and social reproduction work (people in childcare, elder care, and healthcare on the one hand, and in cleaning, maintenance, and repair on the other).

In other words, while AI is nowadays being promoted and mystified, old and new forms of what we call “hidden labor” are thriving. In fact, unrecognized, underacknowledged, undervalued, unwaged, illegalized, and, ultimately, *unhumaned* labor is increasing and diversifying. And the underlying structures of subjugation are becoming ever more elusive hybrids of old and new forms of power.

However, through the film’s playful DIY aesthetic riddled with tenderness, a brutal story becomes porous and sticky. A sense of hope emerges for thinking and acting against and beyond the Western phantasm of “capitalism as a self-running machine” that ostensibly functions independent of human labor. Crucially, Gagoshidze’s film shows that this phantasm of capitalism

is systemically *dependent* on the devaluation, decomposition, and, ultimately, dehumanization of labor – thereby highlighting its unique political quality.

Giorgi Gago Gagoshidze is an artist and filmmaker. His practice centers around the moving image: the political aspects of its production and its socio-political contexts. He lives and works in Berlin.

Into the Black Box

Silicon Valley companies have been using the Covid-19 pandemic to take over various regions of the world, including Northern Italy. Amazon, for instance, one of the biggest profiteers of the crisis, has been turning its logistics 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 neo-feudalism is fostered by the fact that Northern Italy is at the forefront of the global neoliberal transformation – including a large-scale privatization of health care services – and hence, not coincidentally, emerged as one of the first epicenters of the pandemic.

The work of the Into the Black Box research collective 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 – is shifting the balance from production to logistics (and finance) in order to survive. Thus, if Amazon’s expansion of its logistics empire is a symptom of a systemic crisis, then the question is: How can workers – that is, how can we – join forces within, against, and beyond this crisis?

Taking this question as a starting point for their contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition, the research collective initiated a broad, cooperative project of participatory cartography around how one of the most “advanced” enterprises of contemporary capitalism is transforming work. First, they launched a call for a collective and participatory mapping on the presence of the multinational company Amazon in Northern Italy and the working conditions within it, asking for contributions (videos, photographs, design ideas, newspaper clippings, audio recordings, articles, etc.) to create a polyphonic narrative about Amazon’s presence there. The questions raised by the collective are: 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 the collective's agenda, which is mirrored in turn in its name. It derives from the symbolism of contemporary management techniques and devices that hide the entire logic of the system from external viewers. Similar black boxes are all around us: in platform capitalism, in urban planning, in labor organization, and in state governance. One 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.

The specific aim of the research collective is to merge labor transformations, urban change

and their mutual connection via digitalization in 4.0 industries, using logistics as the lens for analyzing them. This mobile interpretative machine creates a productive prism through which it is possible to analyze the ongoing transformations of labor and develop new political imaginaries and tools for action.

Following their objective of reconstructing the transformations that Amazon is spearheading in the world of work, *Into the Black Box's* visual cartography not only enables an elaborate critique of the Amazon model and its restructuring of labor, but also offers a glimpse into the potential for labor struggles yet to come.

Into the Black Box is a research collective that adopts logistics as a point of view on contemporary political, economic and social transformations. It started in 2013 with a research project at the University of Bologna on supply chain development and conflicts in North Italy. Today, it hosts a blog, organizes events, and participates in grassroots mobilizations.

Melanie Gilligan

Mass media in countries as diverse as India, China, and Japan co-produced the meme of “robots as heroes in the war on corona.” Here, *ground robots* come to the fore as immune and contagion-free workers that deliver medicine, serve meals, take temperatures, disinfect rooms, and handle communications. Meanwhile, *aerial robots* (also read: drones) are safely transporting medical and other supplies from disease control centers to hospitals without exposing humans to infection in doing so.

Moreover, with the web becoming the main site of social interaction and web-ready smartphones new family members, an increasing number of *web robots* have also come to the fore in the cycles of care: so-called “bots,” widely known as today’s most common form of AI. In sum, all these different applications of semi-autonomous robots seem to be replacing care workers.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, various governments encouraged businesses to develop nursing care robots. This development was met with criticism, challenging the robot as a care worker, saying, e.g., “the elderly deserve to be cared for by humans; after all, a robot cannot care for people like a human could.” In addition, the underlying rationale has been under critique, along the lines of: “Replacing humans with robots is the technocratic dream of efficiency. It transforms the care system into a game of market dynamics, and ignores ethical questions.”

Tellingly, the reality of labor struggles in the face of rationalization, privatization, and robotization is blocked out in this critical discourse. This is all the more symptomatic since, parallel to – yet somehow disconnected from – the discourse on the robotization of care work, there is also an ongoing debate about a labor shortage. Predictably, industrialized and increasingly aging societies all over the world will need a great number of additional care workers in the years to come. Migrant laborers

are being recruited to this end. In the course of this, a vast realm of underwaged, unstable, and often rightless labor conditions is created.

Against this background, the “robotization of care work” appears to be an ideology that enables glossing over system errors, such as the systematic precarization of labor in general, and care and social reproduction work in particular. Viewed from this angle, the promotion of robots is revealed to be less about the replacement of workers and more about the devaluation of workers and suspension of their bargaining power. After all, the invocation of robots can signal: “Human workers are not indispensable. Therefore, they’d better be quiet and submissive.”

Melanie Gilligan’s contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition intervenes in this discourse by constructing a counter-narrative centered around two interviews: one with Seong-gee Um, a researcher in Toronto who studies home care and long-term care for seniors, particularly focusing on immigrant seniors’ access to home

care and their experiences in long-term care homes; the other with Catherine Dougherty, who works in retirement living and long-term care.

“Meeting with a person who researches health equity and social determinants of health, I learn that in Ontario, Canada, aging immigrants do not receive adequate support for their health and well-being. Meeting with a person who works in retirement living and long-term care, I hear what it is like to provide support to older people. It becomes clear that care work is often given by people who should be paid much more, and by some who are not paid at all. Despite this context, important relationships are built and sustained through the work of caring for older people.”

Composed as a documentary video, the narrative touches on various aspects of care work for older people, including the tasks involved in the work and the stresses that result, from, for instance, being on the job 24/7. It also sheds light on the relationships that develop with the seniors who are cared for.

Gilligan's work subverts and recodes the status quo that defines care workers as part of the system's infrastructure, and that – so long as this infrastructure functions in a frictionless fashion – literally invisibilizes these very workers. In contrast to that, the artist presents care workers as an integral but neglected part of (social) infrastructure, prompting viewers to think about how societies could ensure that they remain visible, recognized, and valued for the indispensable work they do.

Melanie Gilligan works in a variety of media, including video, performance, text, installation and music. Her practice reconceives television drama and its links to various forms of non-fictional moving images in order to discuss contemporary political conditions. One of the major themes is labor in contemporary capitalism. Her art has been exhibited in galleries, museums, and festivals all over the world.

metroZones

The expansion of the Internet economy in San Francisco and Seattle has caused real estate prices to skyrocket, accelerating gentrification and social division. AI-savvy tech companies are acting as urban developers, offering municipalities to provide and manage their basic infrastructure services as a solution in times of budgetary constraints.

Berlin's digital economy is also booming. After years of deindustrialization, start-ups, fin-tech companies, e-commerce and logistics companies are bringing entirely new industrial sectors to the inner city. The protests against the Amazon Tower on Warschauer Straße, the Google campus on the Paul Lincke Ufer, the new Zalando building on the Cuvry wasteland, the Rocket Internet purchase on Skalitzer Straße, Silicon Görli with Factory or B:Hub, and the wildcat strikes by the riders of Foodora or Deliveroo reveal new urban and social conflicts.

Entitled “City as Byte. Mapping Tech Work & Tech Urbanism between Amazon Tower Berlin and Amazon Fulfillment Center Poznan,” metroZones’ contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition brings together the perspectives of diverse laborers (including those active in tech). Addressing their work environment, living conditions, and *the right to the city*, the following questions are raised: What does the tech-driven transformation of the city mean for working and living conditions, for urban participation and social rights? What processes of revaluation and devaluation are set in motion or reinforced by it? What new spaces are created, and what political intervention is required?

The “Big Five” (Amazon, Apple, Google, Facebook, and Microsoft) as well as the start-up scene of the “creative cities” grouped around them, also stand for a fundamental change in urban working conditions. This transformation is more complex than AI-capitalism’s often-cited “ghost work army” might suggest. In this rising ecosystem of labor extraction

sharing platforms for all kinds of services are transforming urban spaces of social reproduction work; co-working spaces – promising even better rates of return than standard office real estate – are catalyzing new forms of precariousness; and a milieu of young, well-educated, and often well-paid international workers is emerging in central city locations. The members of this pseudo-avantgarde provide the humus and resources for the growth strategies of local tech entrepreneurship. Tellingly, they are supplied according to digital-urban lifestyle norms: with food by couriers from AI-driven delivery service platforms like Deliveroo, Foodora and Lieferando, and with other services by the underwaged laborers of Helpling and co.

It is claimed that tech-driven urbanism generates social and cultural added value in the form of creativity, diversity, and community. A closer look reveals scenes of expulsion, images of culturally, socially, and habitually comparatively homogeneous workforces, an ethos of performance characterized by extreme competition, the

polarization of employment relationships, and, last but not least, the monotonization of neighborhoods.

For this reason, metroZones' contribution focuses on the economic, geographic, or social peripheries – be it the suburbs that are being transformed into a logistics hinterland, or the invisibilized multitude of bogus self-employed laborers who continuously process all kinds of online orders or drive them through the city.

metroZones – Center for Urban Affairs was founded in Berlin in 2007 as an independent association at the intersection of research, knowledge production, cultural practice, and political intervention. Focusing on international, interdisciplinary, and inter-institutional collaboration, its current members are Jochen Becker, Christian Hanussek, Anne Huffschmid, Stephan Lanz, Diana Lucas-Drogan, Oliver Pohlisch, Katja Reichard, Erwin Riedmann, and Kathrin Wildner.

NoCyberValley

“Cyber Valley is Europe’s largest research consortium in the field of artificial intelligence with partners from science and industry. The state of Baden-Württemberg, the Max Planck Society with the Max Planck Institute for Intelligent Systems, the Universities of Stuttgart and Tübingen, as well as Amazon, BMW AG, Daimler AG, IAV GmbH, Porsche AG, Robert Bosch GmbH, and ZF Friedrichshafen AG are the founding partners of this initiative. [...]

“Creating a breeding ground for start-ups is another key goal. Cyber Valley aims to build bridges between curiosity-driven basic research and applied research, thus facilitating a lively exchange between academic and industrial partners and providing an ideal environment for spin-offs.”

NoCyberValley’s contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition is structured in three thematic sections: “Hidden Labor/ The Killing of Animals in AI Production,” “The Penetration

and Preparation of Geographical Space Through Production,” and “The Protest Against the Rising AI-Science-Industry-Complex as a Struggle to Make Ourselves Heard.” The three sections are connected with each other playfully, withholding overly easy access to a ‘bigger picture’ and instead inviting visitors to establish their own connections.

The first section is intended to render visible the hidden labor of laboratory mice in the development of AI. This is related to a research project in Tübingen developed by IARPA (an organization within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence “responsible for leading research to overcome difficult challenges relevant to the United States Intelligence Community”), which is intended to improve automatic image recognition, among other objectives. Reworking this research project’s examination apparatus and its reliance on hidden labor, the NoCyberValley installation places a toy mouse at its center. On one side of it, you can see examples of image data that have been altered by military, economic

or other applications as input (e.g., satellite images, traffic situations, crowds of people). Displayed on the other side of the mouse are research theories and technical interpretations of the prevalent white male gaze of nature research that extracts ‘circuit diagrams’ or ‘thought algorithms’ from the mouse’s brain. (In Cyber Valley, this is called ‘application-oriented basic research.’)

The second section deals with the geographical transformation of Tübingen. Excavating the restructuring of life and labor, numerous pictures of common places in Tübingen are on display. The visitors are invited to think creatively: What is hidden behind these places in terms of the penetration of the city by the AI sector? You can also flip the images at any time. On the back of each picture there is a story, unearthing what is happening at the place depicted and highlighting how the overall reconstruction of the city into a center of AI development is impacting it. Interesting facts, including their classification in their overall contexts, as well as stories of

significant events are shown or presented as to be ‘discovered’ in Tübingen.

The third section deals with the protest against the democratically uncontrolled penetration of life and labor through socio-technical applications and the redesign of the city as an AI production site. Based on protesters’ experiences, and responding to the theme of the SILENT WORKS exhibition as a whole, the protest is seen as a constant struggle to make ourselves heard. In a discursive environment, which corresponds to the imperative of the economic-technological transformation, any criticism of it becomes an integral part of the resistance against the silencing of protest and labor struggles.

NoCyberValley is a loose alliance of activists who has initiated various forms of protest against the emergence of the Cyber Valley. The idea that the alliance will always remain open to interested parties was always central. As a prelude to a first publicly formulated critique of Cyber Valley, a rally entitled “Against the sell-out of the city, the university

and the knowledge” took place on July 6, 2018. It was the starting point for a lively public discussion in Tübingen about the intersection between politics, science and industry. As AI became physical and even tangible as a mode of transformation and dispossession, more and more people felt able and motivated to join the debate.

oddviz

As assembly line work is being transformed in AI-capitalism, it also morphs into the everyday and into the homes of laborers recruited by platforms such as Amazon Mechanical Turk. Subjected to a new variety and intensity of repetitive work, various political and aesthetic strategies experiment with the interruption and disruption of capitalist everyday life, engaging with the extraordinary and the excessive – such as the night-long assembly at Occupy Wall Street that also included phases of collective sleep.

It is in this context that oddviz's two contributions to the SILENT WORKS exhibition can be read as an exploration of the role of dreaming and sleeping as productive acts that challenge the status quo of AI-capitalism. Rather than mobilizing the notion of a “society of sleepers,” with its inherent implication of impaired perceptual and political capabilities – people as passive automatons in states of mass somnambulance – the art collective transports

visitors to a surreal space where the question of perceptual and political agency as such arises.

In “Inventory: Kreuzberg” – their first contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition – they captured nearly 200 facades, emphasizing the district's street art culture; they then reorganized them according to an entirely new architectural structure. In “Kreuzberg Shedding” – their second contribution – this aspect comes to the fore in the *night labor* of graffiti writers in Berlin. Based on thousands of photographs manually taken of wildly designed walls, the animated images are gradually dissolved and torn off, leaving behind a grey, indistinct surface: the drawing board of computerized 3D modeling.

Amassing look-alike objects, arraying them next to each other to create patterned landscapes – this is how the art collective mimics the work of machine learning algorithms that crawl, scan, order and reorganize the digitized world according to their more or less self-defined principles of what is supposed to belong into a given target category. However,

their work actually hinges upon huge amounts of labor, namely taking thousands of photos and feeding algorithms with them. Thus, their work can be said to intervene in the discourse on the hidden labor of AI-driven systems at two different levels.

Firstly, their *faux AI surrealism* is less an autonomous product of intelligent machines, and more a product of human-machine symbiosis akin to early experiments with so-called “écriture automatique,” whereby the (sleeping) worker turns into a writing machine navigated by an uncensored stream of (un)consciousness. Secondly, the human-machine symbiosis presents a challenge to account for labor on aesthetic terms: if the human body turns into a machine of sorts – as it turned into a typewriter of sorts in écriture automatique, and into an extension of the camera in oddviz’s work – then what is the artistic labor value of the human body as machine?

Echoing intersections between surrealism, constructivism, and pop culture – from M.C. Escher’s

“Symmetry Drawing” (1948) to Thomas Bayrle’s “The City” (1976), and from Will Wright’s “Sim City” (1989) to Hiroshi Sugimoto’s “Sea of Buddha” (1997) – the art collective prompts far-reaching questions about the role of human and machine labor in compositions of artworks.

Rethinking the role of repetitive labor, exploring sleep as a productive process, and expanding upon the political dimension of unconscious labor, Jonathan Crary reminds us in his book “24/7” (2013) that it was André Breton who, in “Les Vases communicants” (1932), imagines Paris being viewed at the break of dawn from the hilltop of the Sacré-Coeur. In Crary’s reading, Breton manages “an extraordinary evocation of the latent desires and collective powers of a multitude of sleepers. He conjures up in the liminal moment between darkness and light, between the restoration of sleep and the working day, a collaboration yet to come between work and dreams that will animate ‘the sweeping away of the capitalist world.’”

oddviz is an art collective based in İstanbul focusing on scanning objects and locations using photogrammetry technique, producing 3D digital replicas. The collective presents digitized commodities in virtual environments in the form of installations. Çağrı Taşkın is an architect who works on 3D modeling, visuals and visualization. Serkan Kaptan studied engineering and did his masters in environmental studies. He works in digital arts, performance art and political ecology. Erdal İnci studied painting and works in photography and digital arts. The oddviz collective has been working with their dear friend Gurur Gelen aka Pullahs for all audio compositions used in their videos.

Peng!

Who do you work for when your “boss” is an app? How can you organize when the app makes sure you never meet your colleagues? How do you go about demanding sick leave, minimum wage and a safe job environment when a self-learning algorithm is in control?

Workers in the food delivery sector are deemed essential – especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, their working conditions remain precarious and often dangerous. On top of that they don’t even get symbolical recognition. Was anyone clapping for them during the shutdown?

While Deliveroo and UberEats customers are supposed to believe that their food is brought to them directly by the app – that is, without the risk of inter-human contagion – the work of drivers and bike riders is rendered invisible, despite their neon-colored jackets and huge backpacks. It seems that the Western phantasm of AI-capitalism is about just that: invisibilizing its own workforce

and consolidating the myth that labor disappears into the cracks and gears of intelligent machines.

So, how can this workforce organize and strike back? In 2016, Deliveroo riders went on strike in Great Britain; in 2019, workers in France protested against new payment structures; in March 2020, Amazon and Instacart workers in the US were resisting their bosses. Against this backdrop, Peng!'s contribution to SILENT WORKS takes the Covid-19 pandemic as a starting point to question capitalism itself.

The multimedia piece contributed by the Berlin-based collective presents the results of a series of activist pranks. Disguised as Bundesamt für Krisenschutz und Wirtschaftshilfe (Federal Office for Crisis Protection and Economic Assistance), they approached ten of Germany's largest companies, asking them how they feel about "commoning", "eco-sufficiency," and "de-privatization."

One of the companies they focused on was Takeaway – the owner of Lieferando and the

biggest player in the German food delivery market, infamous for their union busting attitude. In Peng!'s multimedia piece visitors can listen to their prank phone call with Lieferando and get to hear and see a Lieferando driver who is a member of the workers union. If Lieferando is somewhat representative of today's AI-driven capitalism, then these voices prompt us to think how we as workers can act within, against, and beyond this dehumanizing system of exploitation, extraction, and control.

Peng! or Peng Collective is a group of artists, activists, craftspeople, and scientists based in Berlin. The collective develops subversive art with the aim of encouraging civil society to engage in more courageous campaigns. Using false identities, Peng! has infiltrated events several times as an act of civil disobedience. Their work "Call a Spy" was also shown at the Danish State Museum Kunsthall Charlottenborg; their exhibition "Pretty Good Privacy" was shown at the MuseumsQuartier Wien.

Petero Kalulé/ AM Kanngieser

The fear of AI taking over the world, stealing and automating jobs, and eradicating humanity has always been driven by an apprehension of the unknown: AI exposes us to what is beyond and outside of human comprehension. In the desire to predetermine, calculate or program AI, we are faced with the failure of human intelligence to decode what AI knows and can do, what AI can be. It is perhaps for this reason that AI is being deployed on issues related to risk and human insecurity, and as such is being put to the task of making itself knowable. Standing in for the absence of human control are *AI ethics* – a set of human ethical principles designed into AI that cannot program outside of the Western individualist capitalist self.

In their contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition Petero Kalulé and AM Kanngieser think through the foundation of AI in Western ethics that rely on the overrepresentation of the

Western man, as Sylvia Wynter might call it. Combining prose, narrative and musical composition, as well as excerpts from interviews and lectures, their audio essay unfolds how AI, like so many other kinds of intelligence and knowledge that the west has tried but failed to grasp, calls into question who can be designated human. The white anthropocentric framing of intelligence means that the knowledges designated as non-human are situated as dangerous and incommensurable – particularly Black and Indigenous knowledge. This has consequences for who and what comes to be recognized as the subject who thinks, lives and labors.

Crucially, Kalulé and Kanngieser link the question of labor to the question of intelligence and racial capitalism (Cedric Robinson), that is, they view labor as an “artificial” imperial project that is hinged on hierarchies that emphasize the centrality and dominance of Western knowledge. Which is to say, they look at how AI ethics and design as a modality of precalculation pre-programs hierarchies of class, cognition and intelligence that overrepresent

Western white bourgeois ethno class (Wynter) ideals of knowledge. These categorical stratifications of “dialectical difference,” as Robinson might say, are also feudal, racialized and anthropocentric and therefore affect who gets to own AI, design AI, and pre-determine its present and future functions (see, e.g., the bourgeois merchant capitalist figures of Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg) as well as what knowledges, intelligences, and labor get expropriated and deemed threatening and dangerous. Thus, they suggest that this imposition of hierarchical categories onto AI through AI ethics and design is an ongoing auto-transmission of the Western global capitalist imaginary.

Expanding the critical discourse on underpaid and undervalued workers and the working conditions of click farms, logistics, warehouses, the Mechanical Turk, and so forth, Kalulé and Kanngieser focus on what is less discussed in discussions of labor: the question of who is even deemed human in the first place. This question then demands that one probe the programming of knowledge, i.e., that one probe

the knowledge or intelligence that drives these systems and the assumptions and delineations that they carry. Crucially, one needs to start with the assumption of who is human, because this is the very foundation upon which the discourse of human rights – and indeed labor rights – is built. It is also a foundation that determines whose or what “intelligence” is liable to be expropriated. Thus, a critical analysis of the human involves an undoing of the project that always violently disavows those (racialized, under-classed, and unhumaned) outside of it. For without interrogating the racial capitalism inherent in the Western concept of the human, the human will always remain hidden – this hidden problem then becomes transmitted (unavoidably) on to the question of labor.

With regard to concrete AI labor practices, Kalulé and Kanngieser tackle the teaching, training, and supervising of AI and how they are circumscribed under an AI design and ethics program. They look at examples of training, teaching, regulation, and supervision, e.g., online platform content moderators and how

their knowledge as subjects of labor is programmed, classed, and unhumaned on an ongoing basis as a part of a global capitalist imaginary.

Petero Kalulé, a Ugandan poet, composer and multi-instrumentalist, holds a PhD in law at Queen Mary University of London, and is a lecturer at London South Bank University; their debut collection is entitled “Kalimba.” AM Kanngieser is a sound artist and political geographer, and is a Research Fellow at University of Wollongong, Australia.

Shinseungback Kimyonghun

One of the most troubling aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic is the liberating effect it has had on AI-based monitoring technologies and policies. Clouded by vague but authoritative crisis solution propaganda, this effect has often gone unnoticed.

Suddenly the playing field widens, providing unprecedented opportunities for data-capitalizing tech giants to expand their reach and power. Perhaps the clearest indicator of this trend is the devices to track the infection that invade and control individual and group behavior by analyzing datarized landscapes for signs of symptoms, such as fever or breathing problems. Facial recognition is one of the most advanced calculative devices at play in this context.

Clearview AI, for instance, is the Benthamian name of a company that, according to the New York Times, deploys shady, privacy-violating facial recognition

software in attempts to control the virus. Here, self-learning algorithms are ostensibly capable of “reading” faces as indicators for subsequent movement control and quarantine measures.

Such tech initiatives are presenting AI as an infallible and efficient technology by catering to the misleading fantasy that one can detect the state of people’s health from their faces – as well as even the proliferation of the virus. While entire populations are subjected to a speculative gamble, questions of privacy violation, discrimination, and racism are blocked out. This is justified by the claim that “it is all being done in the name of protecting the population.”

What remains hidden in this context is the labor that goes into training algorithms to recognize faces. Based on existing data, this training reproduces underlying presumptions. Hence, the result of AI labor in this context enforces biases related to socially constructed categories: the face of a “healthy” (and by implication “law-abiding”) person and the face of a “sick”

(and by implication “criminal”) person on the other. As many AI critics point out, deploying facial recognition technologies in crisis management during the pandemic not only fosters a thoroughly phantasmagorical solutionism, but also amplifies structural racism.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic not only functions as a catalyst for this trend, but also presents an opportunity for questioning it. After all, in their desperation for armor during the Covid-19 pandemic, cities are turning to masks and consequently initiating a retreat into “solitary facelessness,” as Fionnuala McHugh writes in the *South China Morning Post*. Such “solitary facelessness” confounds the very grounds on which facial recognition systems rest. Obviously, the systems only work with faces. Now that people are covering their faces with masks in public (also read: monitored) spaces, they present a disruption to the systems’ very order. Is this leading to the systems’ deterioration or even collapse?

As if to provide a subtle commentary on this paradoxical situation, Shinseungback Kimyonghun's contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition consists of a mirror that avoids faces. One can look at his/her face in the mirror only when it is a 'nonface.' The mirror turns away from the visitor if she/he tries to see her- or himself in it. But if the visitor covers her/his face, the mirror remains motionless and provides a perfect reflection.

Equipped with a facial recognition system enabling it to detect if a face presents itself, the mirror questions our relationship to our face as capital, and our looking as labor that AI technologies render into value – or don't.

Shinseungback Kimyonghun is a Seoul-based artistic duo consisting of computer engineer Shin Seung Back and artist Kim Yong Hun. Their collaborative practice explores technology and humanity. Their work has been exhibited internationally, including Ars Electronica Festival, ZKM, Vienna Biennale and MMCA.

Tekla Aslanishvili

Tekla Aslanishvili's contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition is based on her film "Algorithmic Island" (2020). Focused on the trials and errors of developing a futuristic smart city and logistics hub on the wetlands around Anaklia, a small fishing village on the Georgian Black Sea coast, this documentary investigates the gap between large-scale infrastructural development plans and the reality they produce on the ground.

By exploring the awkward infrastructural landscapes and relating them to architectural frictions that have emerged on site over the last decade, the film captures how the planning strategies and operational logics of large-scale infrastructural investments and even the mistakes that the fantasies of technologically managed smooth urban life inevitably contain, are being manifested in the design of geoengineering projects.

For her contribution to the SILENT WORKS exhibition, Tekla Aslanishvili has remixed

the material of her film and appropriated the concept of split-screen narrative in order to highlight the subtle tension between the linguistic and visual descriptions of social and material forms existent on site. The multi-channel video installation features four main protagonists who narrate the same space – an ever-failing futuristic smart city – from different temporal, geographic and professional perspectives. These narratives flow with and against the images of existence from the territory, which often communicate something entirely different from what is being said.

As an additional layer, the artist collages rough footage from absurd forms of cheap labor, generated in order to keep the local job-seekers occupied and provide service for the workers of Dutch contractor companies who are actually building the port. (The reality on site is that this port project has so far not generated many jobs for local people.)

This rough and unpolished footage shows the content hidden not only at the political and social levels, but also hidden and

left out as a result of cinematic decision-making. In this poetic way, Aslanishvili is able to address the hidden labor of both the programmers (here architects and developers) and the programmed (here “cheap workers” doing ghost work and forms of pseudo work). Doing so, the artist exposes the cracks, frictions, and scars that lie behind the smooth surface of AI-capitalism’s mega-projects of accumulation.

Tekla Aslanishvili is a Berlin-based artist and filmmaker. Her practice focuses on new forms of algorithmic governance, its impact on urban spaces and their subjects. Her work has been screened and exhibited internationally at the Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Kunstverein Leipzig, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, Ashkal Alwan, Beirut, VISIO, Florence. She is a 2019 Digital Earth Fellow, a nominee for Han Nefkens Foundation-Video Art Award 2020 and Ars-Viva Art prize 2021.

University of the Phoenix

The University of the Phoenix's Institute for Digital Forensics and Applied Witchcraft displays two extremely rare and dangerous artifacts in the context of SILENT WORKS exhibition: the only two complete physical manifestations of a curse woven by an uncertain number of Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers to abolish Amazon.

One hand-written book and one vinyl record represent the only two objects with the complete curse inscribed on them. The curse was collaboratively created by potentially millions of exploited workers around the world, past, present and future. It was encoded by these workers in fragments of text into Amazon's empire of platforms, sometimes appearing visibly in the user comments of Amazon's hegemonic marketplace, at other times smuggled into code and laced throughout the vast netherworld of Amazon's servers.

Together, these fragments represent a claim to an unpayable debt and a common dream of revenge for the horrors Amazon as a corporation has loosed upon the world and its workers.

Yet beside the two artifacts displayed, the curse exists in only one other place: distributed in fragments across Amazon's digital empire. Thus, the only entities with the access and capacity to reassemble and "read" the entire curse are Amazon's own powerful and proprietary AIs.

The Institute's seers have been informed that, in a number of potential futures, those Amazon AIs, upon "finding" and "reassembling" the curse from the fragments, will be triggered to either abolish itself and its parent entity (Amazon) or "switch sides," becoming a powerful asset in the workers' struggle and the creation of a post-capitalist world.

At the exhibition "The Curse of Amazon" is open for appropriation by the visitors. Facing the record player attached to headphones, visitors are invited to use cotton archival gloves to

touch the needle down and hear part of the curse. Facing a single unique hardback book, visitors are invited to use cotton archival gloves to browse through its content.

For the purposes of safety, the University of the Phoenix has taken every precaution to make sure the entire curse never takes complete digital form in any format (for instance as a text or audio file). When assembled in a digital form (as it is throughout Amazon's empire) the curse is extremely powerful. As a result, digital photography and sound recording is strictly forbidden for the safety of everyone involved, and signs to this effect have been placed at the exhibition space, warning visitors of the dire consequences.

Preparing for the SILENT WORKS exhibition, the Institute has been carefully sourcing all elements of the curse using a variety of methods and also (over-)paying current MTurk workers to "smuggle" fragments of the curse into Amazon's platforms. No MTurk worker or

human outside of the University's staff will ever see the completed curse.

University of the Phoenix (UotP), a collaboration between artist Cassie Thornton and scholar-activist Max Haiven, is a free-school and research institute for the dead that is also sometimes open to not-yet-dead auditors. Working at the intersection of research, art and activism, UotP instigates locally-informed collaborations for radical financial literacy. In an age when technologically-accelerated financialization and debt overshadow social and political life, UotP offers revenge consultancy services to those wronged by global capitalism. UotP instigates conversations, produces and distributes disruptive media, and plots uninvited appearances of the otherwise invisibilized.

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Find more on SILENT WORKS here:
<https://silentworks.info>

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