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‘Sitting In Front of My PC’. Working in Front of the Screen in the Era of Digital Capitalism

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The author is interested in the canonical visual forms that accompany labour in digital capitalism - that is, an economic-information-cognitive order based on screens, information and attention. He therefore analyses what labour looks like today where screens are necessary to perform it; what are the visual dimensions of that labour; how labour is represented by artists and popular culture. In the article, he discusses the liberalisation of the aesthetics of the remote working environment as a place that does not belong to the employer; the fetishisation of the aesthetics of the workstation and office space in marketing discourses; the simulation of physical presence through visual effects; the compulsion of visualisation in work communication; 'Zoom fatigue' and corporate worker fatigue; and the visual dimensions of waiting. He illustrates her discussion of these issues with examples from cultural texts.

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'Sitting In Front of My PC'. Working in Front of the Screen in the Era of Digital Capitalism

Considering that work in late capitalism is often devoid of meaning,[1] perhaps it could at least look nice? Since work corrodes our character,[2] expropriates us from our sense of personal[3] and collective identity,[4] and deprives us of physical and psychological equilibrium,[5] perhaps it could at least pretend[6] to be meaningful, orderly, and well-paid so as to sedate the worker–victims or at least partially preserve their sense of dignity? Work could strive to achieve this aim by following the rules of Baudrillard's game of facades–simulacra[7] on the one hand and by complying with the transactional model of "violence on demand"[8] on the other. Could work do this? Or perhaps this is already a reality? It is possible that employers and employees alike are already aware that senselessness, sadness, and cognitive and emotional exhaustion can hide, at least to some extent, behind a success-centric marketing narrative,[9] a slide appropriated from the aqua park installed between office floors,[10] and an attractively designed system of benefits, annual bonuses, and team-building events serving to "control and regulate workers' affective sphere, incentivising moods that are functional to the reproduction of capitalist labour relations"?[11] What defines the nature of work in today's capitalist society, especially in its digital version?[12] When we look at contemporary cybertariat, who and what do we see?[13] What are the visual dimensions of work, capitalism, entrepreneurship, employment, and the accompanying "frenzy of the visible"[14] and "seductions of the interface"?[15]

In answering these questions, I will outline certain digital entanglements of work and technology, discuss their selected visual cultural representations, refer to existing research on visuality in digital capitalism, and describe aspects of work as

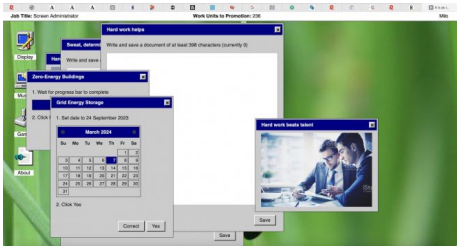
a visual experience mediated by screens in the merger of technology, knowledge, and power.[16] I will look at the visible (screens, interfaces, and office spaces) and the invisible (microwork, crowdworking platforms, and alienation). My core argument is that screens, as the primary sources of knowledge in digital capitalism, perform two functions simultaneously: they both reveal and conceal. They render visible the intangible objects of our work, namely spreadsheets, charts, text documents, Zoom calls, data recorded in databases, articles, recordings, dashboards, and images. We can click on the visible equivalents of knowledge, including icons, buttons, and symbols, practically the whole semiosphere of systems and applications. What is invisible, however, are work dimensions: its quantity, difficulty, quality, synchronicity, contradiction, and extent, as well as the required energy expenditure (caloric expenditure) and emotional expenditure ("emotional labor"[17]), whose absence prevents the execution of cognitive processes we engage in at work. Therefore, the screens make work both visible and invisible.[18]

In other words, they simultaneously function as a display device and a shield.

What Can We See? An Interface, an Office, and a Screen

What will we see when we look over the shoulder of someone sitting in front of a computer? What will we discover by peering over the partition concealing the essence of digital work? Pippin Barr provides an ironic answer to this question in the browser app titled *It Is As If You Were Doing Work*.[19] The game looks anachronistic, as it uses a Windows 95 interface, and the work itself is multilayered, with windows popping up on top of each other, which contributes to multitasking, the essential parameter of digital work. The game contains text (instructions and task descriptions), images (motivational photos), and interactive

elements (the clickable quintessence of work). The work follows a strict schedule, and "employees" can take a break only when the pop-up window lets them and not when they feel like taking a rest. When the screen displays something new, work has to be done. Perhaps one does not need to work when there are no new tasks displayed, but this proves impossible to check,[20] as the screen is always full of new pop-ups.



Pippin Barr, *It is as if you were doing work*, 2017, source.

And what do I look like when I perform this mechanical and not particularly enriching work? Exactly the same as in the course of writing this article. I sit in front of the computer. This is how the dual function of the screens manifests itself: although what we use them for may differ, our stance in relation to the screens remains the same—the work performed is invisible, but the universal tool necessary for such work is evident. Viewing this situation from a historical perspective offers an intriguing approach. A quick glance at photographs by Milton Rogovin, Chauncey Hare, Bill Bamberger, Brian Griffin, Chris Clunn, Lee Friedlander, Sebastião Salgado, and Andreas Gursky[21] is enough to notice that the transformations that have taken place in capitalism from the industrial to the digital age reduce the diversity of visual spaces in which we work. The transformations in question include the digitalization of work tools and the increasing emphasis on immaterial labor in the service sector, which is characteristic of late capitalism. We perform work not with a hammer, pickaxe, digger, chisel, knife, or spanner in a car repair shop, barn, bakery, forge, or steelworks but armed with spreadsheets, algorithms, API plug-ins, translation "engines," and text, sound, and image editors while sitting at a desk in front of a computer screen. Either someone assigns this work to us or we organize it ourselves. Although

every digital tool that I will use and their analog counterparts have a particular form—of an interface or a visual façade on which the essence of things that need doing seemingly materializes—the visible dimensions of the digital workspace and the physiognomic and sociological manifestations of the situation, in which workers of different companies and different professions find themselves, have become relatively homogeneous in digital capitalism. One worker has one computer, one chair, one keyboard, and one mouse (although they may have several screens) and one desk space, separated in some way from the space of other workers belonging to the "cubicle diaspora"[22] or others who live and work in the same house. In consequence, the representatives of various professions and diverse sectors look identical while performing work. Although the subject matter or theme of their work is different, a university lecturer hard at work looks more or less the same as a Senior Master Data Specialist in a multinational corporation in the shared services sector. They do not differ in the equipment used, the positioning of their body, or their expression of emotions. They could easily be mistaken for one another or even swapped accidentally. A constant, indelible element of the human–work relationship is the screen and its technological and ideological substructure, which ranges from LEDs, semiconductors, corporate narratives, and ethos to software that disciplines employees and monitors their activity.

Susan Ressler, System Development Corporation (SDC), an element of Los Angeles Documentary Project, 1979.

Employers and entrepreneurs use a variety of approaches to contradict this superficial homogeneity and convince employees and customers that their workplace and their work's essence are unique, valuable, and meaningful. These measures assume the form of individual messages or complex narratives within the frameworks of highly conventionalized discourses known as "employer branding" and "brand building," along with personal brand building. I am particularly interested in the visual manifestations of this discourse, namely corporate and business photographs, videos, logos, and graphics, because they greatly determine our perceptions of work in digital capitalism and define what we think work looks like and what it does not look like. Unreliability characterizes the poetics of marketing discourses, including "autobiographical" discourses about the work of companies and the self-employed. As the persuasive function of the narrative of the uniqueness of working in a particular environment stands in contrast with the actual parameters of the visible (interfaces, data, pop-up windows in programs, pay slips, notifications of unread emails, and unattended "tickets") and the concealed (emotions, fatigue, and exploitation), audiences trained in critical reading, namely experienced workers, perceive it as a superstructure, an illusion, or a compensatory procedure. Any self-employed person who has ever taken a selfie with a laptop under a palm tree knows this, just as any employee who has scoured stock photo libraries in search of illustrations of their company's life: both the non-holiday selfie and the stock photos are the visual antithesis of how we see ourselves at work. It is easy to assume that no one smiles at work the way people do in stock photos, much like those

who see commodifying their identity as a strategy for business success. People perceive most promotional discourses in a similar manner, namely by subjecting them to a critical, mistrustful reading that exposes persuasive messages as a game of appearances. Therefore, the apparentness of the visible constitutes an essential dimension not only of screens themselves (where the icon is not an icon but its digital representation) but also of the guidelines for using many of the communication tools and strategies prevalent in digital capitalism.

The same is true of the attributes describing the places where we work. The visual parameters of the workspace prove crucial to the perception of the employer's image, and, as a vehicle for appearances, they often conceal shameful practices.[23] On the other hand, in the case of employees, the architectural, urban, and aesthetic surroundings directly affect their sense of personal identity and self-definition. Consequently, we can be inclined to think that spaces organized according to a coherent visual order necessitate correspondingly organized work. The equation of computer screens, digitalization, and technology with the idyll of order, aesthetics, and neatness at work is so powerful that even the office spaces of technology companies simulate the aesthetics of a glass plane reminiscent of a laptop or smartphone screen. Unfortunately, just as behind the display–shield, the façades of those big-tech office buildings also seem to hide something. Moritz Altenried addresses this issue by discussing representations of the Googleplex, the campus of the Google corporation:

> The complex sprawls out over a large area of land and continues to grow as Google steadily adds new sites and buildings to its headquarters. Between the buildings, most of which are of only medium height, are many green areas, parking spaces, and recreational facilities. Amenities of the complex include free restaurants and cafeterias, four gyms, swimming pools, beach volleyball courts, cinemas, and lecture

> halls. … A promotional video describes the Googleplex as "very academic" but also "a big playground" with an "eccentric" atmosphere. … The terms with which Google describes the Googleplex as a workplace include words like *freedom*, *creativity*, *flat hierarchies*, *playful*, *communicative*, and *innovative*. The buildings are designed to bring the "Googlers" in touch with one another—private offices are a rare occurrence, and employees are encouraged to pursue their own projects during working hours. At the Googleplex's main buildings, no masses leave at the same time, and no shift changes can be found—only individuals or groups dropping in and out, seemingly at their leisure. Is this the quintessence of labor in digital capitalism?[24]

Another question is: could any workplace be more distinctly different from the factories of the industrial age? Is late capitalism still trying to detach itself from its historical roots and the violent traditions of exploitation, both visually and in terms of caring for its workers? It seems that the "clean desk policy," with its sleek monitor that fits everything necessary and the comforts of a city center office, gives the impression of breaking free from the image of labor as exploitation taking place in undignified conditions. Or, on the contrary, perhaps this break with a troublesome tradition is only apparent? Perhaps the orderliness of the knowledge–power that the screens orchestrate does not match the organizational and ethical order that employees would like to accept if only they could see it immediately?

The hidden meaning of labor and its distancing from identity are themes we recognize when watching the *Severance*[25] series. Mark Scout, the main protagonist, oversees a team working in the Macrodata Refinement Departmentat the biotechnology corporation Lumon Industries. What associations does the name of the department evoke? What do we associate refinement with? What might working in this team resemble? Is it refined

and interesting? Are its products sophisticated conclusions, subtle deliberations, or exquisite objects? The answer surprises both viewers and employees of the department in question. Macrodata Refinement Specialists visually track numbers moving on the screen until one such number elicits an emotional response. Sitting at their computers, they dedicate their cognitive resources to a task whose meaning they do not understand, not only because nobody explained it to them but also because they do not want to know much about the corporation that employs them.[26] All they have to do is look at a screen, notice the numbers, and click every now and then, without knowing why or how, to get paid or simply persist in quasi-lobotomized isolation from life outside work. The visual nature of the material that Mark, Helly, Dylan, and Irving are working on does not help them understand their role or build a sense of meaning or agency.[27]

On the contrary, it reinforces their belief that there is no escape from work.[28] One of the protagonists recognizes this principle at the very first training session:

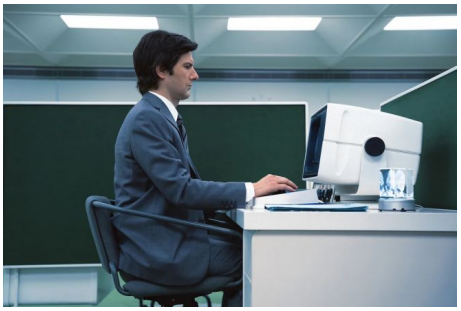
> Helly: Should this mean something to me?
> Mark: No. No, all the data comes from upstairs fully encoded.
> H: Then how do I categorize it?
> M: Each category of numbers presents in such an order as to elicit an emotional response in the refiner. Cat 1 numbers, for example, feel a certain way on sight. They'll be sort of disconcerting, scary.
> H: Scary?
> M: I know.
> H: My job is to scroll through this spreadsheet and look for numbers that are scary?
> Dylan: It sounds dumb, and Mark said it dumb.
> H: Are the numbers bloody? Do they chant?
> M: It doesn't make sense till you see it, and it takes a while to see.
> H: Am I trapped here?

M: In what way?
H: Like if it turns out I hate this and I want to quit, is that an option?
M: If you're really unhappy, you can submit a resignation request with your outside self for review.
D: And good luck getting that approved.
...
M: Well, since this perceptual version of you only exists at Lumon, I mean, quitting would effectively end your life. I mean, in so much as you've come to know it.[29]

Thanks to a surgical procedure, the employees entering the office "sever" their consciousness—they no longer remember who they are outside of work and vice versa—upon leaving the office, they remember nothing of their office life. The workplace enforces an epistemic regime built into the hierarchy. Business relationships have their foundations in power–knowledge and visibility; employees see "pre-coded" data on their screens, with only the board aware of their meaning. The top tier remains outside our field of vision—on the other side of the partition, the communications given, and the workplace orderliness. The lack of willingness to persist in such an organization equals the death of the self and the annihilation of the biographical capital,[30] which the protagonist ("alternative self") proceeds to accumulate once they start working for this peculiar enterprise—after their "severance." This professional career has very little in common with forging a personal identity, working on the "self," or social relations. It is about Sennett's corrosion of character. The oppressive working environment seems only partly problematic. The consequences of the severance procedure do not discourage employees from their work. Disbelief turns into acceptance. Although Mark assures Helly that "there is life to be had here,"[31] the "alternative self" leads someone else's life, as it does not express the employee's own identity.[32] The procedure is a form of outsourcing or subcontracting, and it aims to reduce the costs of

labor or remove them from sight, regardless of whether they are material, ethical, or emotional. The intellectual and emotional expropriation of the worker's personal identity takes place against the backdrop of apparent death and games: each day, the worker's "self" dies in order to be resurrected the following working day to undertake their duties and join in a motivational carnival of meaningless games that maintain the appearance of reality.[33] All this for employees to stare for eight hours at rows of fluttering digits with no meaning—at data that perhaps someone else might be using. Someone who we are unable to see from behind the façade of rituals and symbols on the screens.

What Is Not Visible? Data, Emotional Labor, and Exploitation



Still from *Severance*, dir. Ben Stiller, Aoife McArdle, Apple TV 2023.

We start with data, and we end with data. This is likely the expression of the thought process, which forms the basis of labor in late modern and late capitalist economies founded on knowledge. In the case of Mark Scout from *Severance*, we are unable to understand this data—we have no idea what it represents or what purpose it serves. How do you operate it? By means of the emotions the data elicits. This dependency could hardly be more perplexing: although emotions are not in short supply[34] at Lumon, just like in any other workplace, as work is a set of mechanical, cognitive, and emotional activities, the department's superiors suppress any emotions other than positive that the employees may want to manifest. The narrative vision from the series corresponds with the researchers' insights: Arlie Russell Hochschild writes

that emotion work is invisible; what is visible are the façades of affect ordered by the employer, such as self-confidence, a smile, an expression of complete, if only apparent, concentration in the tensing of facial muscles, and gesticulation as a sign of involvement.[35]

> Seeming "to love the job" becomes part of the job. ... [Smiles] were seen as the extension of the make-up, the uniform, the recorded music, the soothing pastel colors of the airplane decor, and the daytime drinks, which taken together orchestrate the mood of the passengers. ... Similarly, part of the job is to disguise fatigue and irritation, for otherwise the labor would show in an unseemly way, and the product—passenger contentment—would be damaged.[36]

As a result, the work reflects the wishes of the client or the boss rather than how it would appear outside the performance framework. While Hochschild describes these dependencies in studies of cabin crew members' work, we could make similar observations in an analysis of emotional labor in online conversations in any other sector. By positioning ourselves behind the screens, we add supplementary forms of cover-up to the required emotional work (as a kind of affective make-up), namely framing, muting, blurring the background, and turning off the camera. We hide our genuine sensations, such as boredom, fatigue, embarrassment, and despair, not only behind commodified façades of emotion work but also behind extensive technological instruments that are currently synonymous with digital work. What does this mean? Among others, the disruption of the "signal function of emotion"[37] and the concealment of "the human cost of becoming an instrument of labour."[38] Therefore, a large share of the processes we regard as work remains as invisible as the sense of visual objects of digital work or the authentic image of work camouflaged by narratives from the marketing department.

Although what drives capitalism is the "frenzy of the visible," capitalism likes to stay out of sight.

Practices of Concealment

The cultural analyses of employee circumstances and the practices prevalent in Amazon's warehouses serve as an excellent example that will remove us from behind our screens for a moment, albeit only superficially.[39] I would like to discuss two culture-based texts whose authors address matters that Amazon itself is reluctant to reveal.

The first point of reference is Heike Geissler's *Seasonal Associate*, which uses the convention of the second-person poetic narrative to document the experience of working in Amazon's fulfillment center near Leipzig. In a peculiar "split" in the personalities of the author–narrator and the employee–protagonist, Geissler explains that she decided on a job at Amazon at a time when the income from her creative work no longer sufficed to support her. This was in the period preceding Christmas, when Amazon temporarily increases employment. Let us follow the gaze of the narrator recounting her first days at work:

> You're the only person to get off the tram at Amazon's stop and you immediately know what a global corporation looks like. It can't be missed, but it could be improved. The dispatch hall is built gray and low, parallel to the street; it's huge but discreet. It appears docile, like a tamed giant or a prisoner on parole trying hard neither to do anything criminal nor to look like he might. There's a banner on the fence surrounding the building, announcing job vacancies.
> Ahead of you is concrete tower, which you enter because it seems obvious and because the man who let you in did the same. The tower is yellow and, as you'll soon learn, is called Banana Tower because of its color. It's the staircase to a metallic bridge that leads in turn to the hall. A laminated

photo of a male hand gripping the handrail is stuck to one wall, alongside it the instruction "Use the handrail!" …
[You] stand, now on pale floor tiles. On your right are people waiting on gray chairs, sitting like at a doctor's office, a doctor for those left over, a doctor for the distressed who don't make any great effort to lean away from the worn, greasy wall; they're all going to die anyway. …You're now in the mouth of the company (in its jaws?) and are being predigested before you're allowed to enter the rest of the digestive tract. …
[You] see signs of minor and more major neglect: dust on the leaves of the plant opposite you, the door that doesn't quite close, the gray patina on the wall above the chairs where the heads and shoulders of many waiting patients have rested and made their mark. Employees at the reception desk watch the images provided by the surveillance camera halfheartedly or not at all. Behind the reception area, a glass wall enables a clear view inside the hall. … From your seat, no employees are visible in the hall, only the empty space above them. …
[Another example of] beautiful and elegant of trial presentations begins in front of two shelves full of books, CDs, and DVDs. A young woman lifts yellow crates from one pallet onto another empty one beside it. She doesn't bend her back as she does it, holding herself as straight as a rod; she performs her work calmly, following a well-practiced choreography. This dance, this piling dance, which then becomes a box-counting dance and segues into a locating dance for various products on the sample shelves, is masterfully accurate and ends with lackluster succinctness. You expect a speech at the end, a jump, a banner unfurled to reveal something eye-opening; you expect something. The woman, the dancer, goes out to the corridor and eats a granola bar.[40]

The writer's confrontation with everyday life at Amazon abounds in detailed, ironic descriptions of mechanical work in front of the screen:

> You're supposed to transfer data from a column on the left into a column on the right. The left column contains typographical mistakes and peculiarities, which are supposed to appear exactly the same way in the right column, without corrections. Later you'll ask yourself why you didn't simply copy-and-paste the information. You retype everything meticulously and start running out of time, the most difficult thing being having to lean over at this normal-height desk without a chair, which makes you nervous.[41]

There is also an understandable criticism of the particular entanglement of customers with the American company's business model, which restricts workers' rights in the name of customer welfare:

> [You are going on a] training day at Amazon which you won't be paid for taking part in. Of course you ought to be paid for taking part in the training day. There's a quiet complaint to be heard inside you as you approach the company premises, but there's no one there to listen to you, or anyone like you, complain that a training day ought to be paid, and then to say: "Right! We forgot about that. We'll change it right away." Anything you could possibly want from this company, you'd have to tell the company's customers and make them understand. You'd have to win the company's customers over to your side to get paid for the training day, but just you try getting hold of them all.
> Anyway, 75 percent of the customers would probably respond to your request to get paid for the training day with: "Why? I didn't get paid for my training day either."[42]

Much of Geissler's novel describes such experiences. The narrator writes in the state of tension between herself and the

recipient instance—the other, "you," the addressee—as if she was aware that capitalism results not only from anonymous foreign forces but also from our personal decisions and practices. This belief is evident in the scene describing the training and the accompanying commentary:

> Robert has explained that the door, the door table, is a reminder that the customer is king. Is it important to the customer that I have a mahogany desk or that he gets what he wants for a good price? Does the customer want us to be sitting here on comfy sofas? Does the customer want to pay for smart offices for us? Exactly. The customer wants his order.
> You'd like to contradict him, incidentally, and say: "I, who am also a customer of this company, would be glad to sit more comfortably here. And I think the company could afford to provide us with more comfortable seats without having to raise prices for the customer."
> You don't say that, though, because you're me and that means you're shy; you can't get your mouth open.
> ...
> I read an essay by Claudia Friedrich Seidel, which begins with an admission: "Yes," she writes, "I too buy my books from Amazon.com."
> ...
> A few days before, I held a far too vehement lecture at mother's kitchen table, preaching that one doesn't necessarily have to buy things one wants from the cheapest source. I said there was no order and no law that you have to choose the cheapest offer. My mother looked at me as though checking whether I meant it seriously, first of all, and secondly whether I might have turned into a rich woman overnight, someone who could afford to say such things.[43]

Geissler's novel speaks volumes about the ordinariness of labor—its cognitive, processual, emotional, and material aspects. The novel discusses both Amazon and the author's personal

experience, which eludes marketing narratives about what capitalism allows into the field of visibility. A supplementary theme relates to personal responsibility for "turning a blind eye" to the consequences of easy shopping in front of the screen.[44]

The second culture-based text dedicated to Amazon and discussing the visual dimensions of work is a multimedia project by Tytus Szabelski-Różniak entitled *AMZN*.[45] The project encompasses photographs, recordings, scans, transcriptions of documents, and quotations relating to working for Amazon and, more broadly, to working in the era of late capitalism. The viewers look at the materials on a website, which uses an algorithm to randomly choose the materials displayed and a timer to measure the viewing time. At the end, the viewers can download a pack of all the materials they have seen. The photo *Situational Approach #9* (*Widok sytuacyjny #9*) depicts the field adjacent to Amazon's warehouse in Łódź.[46] The field is overgrown, and the warehouse looks flat. A dozen or so gates are used to load goods onto the trucks. Although there are no screens here, such images also contribute to the visual dimension of work in digital capitalism. Thousands of employees must travel to such places and spend at least eight hours a day there so that we can all buy a new smartphone with express delivery in as little as three clicks. These are images from behind the partition, from territories "out of sight"[47] of consumers. This being said, the employer will make sure to look where the customers will not look. *Light-Out Factory* (*Fabryka bez świateł*), an animated video which forms part of the same project by Szabelski-Różniak, illustrates warehouse processes in an automated company. The video includes the following fragment:

> For years we have been fed a vision of the world in which only machines work. … Every shelf, package or product has to be scanned. And the system sees it all. It also sees, of course, if someone stops scanning because, for example, they had to go to the toilet.[48]

Amazon's warehouse, like many other workplaces in digital capitalism, functions as a space of control where movement, time, and breaks are monitored in accordance with "unrealistic expectations" regarding performance.[49] Szabelski-Różniak quotes an employee who describes HR processes taking place in this digital panopticon: "How to fire people? Two managers always come in, just before a break or at the end of a shift. They talk to a person, while other employees leave for a break. When the others are back, that person is already gone."[50] There is also a quote from James Bridle that synthesizes the relationship between the visible (am interface, product, purchase, and package) and the concealed (work, movement, effort, and blocking trade union action): "Every time the buy button is pressed, electronic signals direct a real human to set off in motion, to perform their efficient duty. The app is a remote control device for other people."[51] Such an inconspicuous entanglement of human labor, of warehouse workers on the one hand and buyers on the other, with the work of machines or algorithms, which determine the work of human subjects, raises the question of agency (who decides about the purchase: the customer who feels a need or an interface designed to make it difficult not to buy, to unsubscribe, or to cancel a service?) and the relevance of the narrative of progress that will make businesses independent of human lability by placing work in the "hands" of robots.

Tytus Szabelski-Różniak, „Widok sytuacyjny #9, Amazon Fulfillment Center LCJ3, Łódź, 2020.

Both Geissler and Szabelski-Różniak (as well as Tristan Poyser, who peered inside the American tycoon's warehouses during the COVID pandemic)[52] question Amazon's practice of concealment as the key epistemological strategy of capitalism.[53] Of course, they ask not so much about its business viability as its social impact. If these were positive (for instance, along the lines of Lucy Suchman's observations[54]), then David Wellman's anecdotal statement that "how people work is one of the best kept secrets of America"[55] would probably not have become widely accepted. Since nobody knows what work looks like, as it is a closely guarded secret despite being continuously displayed, then every instance of removing the partition proves interesting not only to critics of capitalism and labor voyeurs but also to everyone who has ever wondered about the power dependencies in relations between humans and technology. Szabelski-Różniak's *AMZN* demonstrates that these relations do not cultivate human liberty and customer well-being; instead, they exacerbate the rift between images of work in digital capitalism and one's personal experience of this work.

Workers Do Not Leave the Factory

Let us retake our places in front of computer screens for a moment. Pippin Barr's jocular game requests its players to perform microtasks. Most take a fraction of a second. It took me a dozen or so seconds to "perform" the longest task, which was writing a message, even though I was interrupted several times. Volunteers who find employment with Amazon Mechanical Turk execute similar work, but not in jest. Within this multiplication of work forms, these always-ready-to-act members of the

cybertariat find both a way to earn money and a justification for the cognitive exertion carried out around the clock at the expense of sleep, well-being, and the development of their own skills. In exchange for micropayments (for example, 20 cents per task[56]), "crowdworkers" accept long waits punctuated by minute tasks: categorizing photographs, completing surveys, writing one-sentence product descriptions, "farming" on commission, skipping levels ("power levelling") in video games,[57] or tagging datasets to train artificial intelligence models. Only the owner of the platform on which they have registered and the direct principal know that they are the ones performing these tasks. The principal's clients, who are the recipients of the services and products, are not privy to this information. This is:

> Repetitive yet stressful, often boring yet emotionally demanding, requiring little formal qualification yet oftentimes a large degree of skill and knowledge, and inserted into algorithmic architectures not yet automatable (at least for now)—these segments of labor are a crucial part of the political economy of the present.[58]

Jeff Bezos, Amazon's founder, admitted that these tasks are performed by "artificial artificial intelligence," or, in other words, people.

Undoubtedly, such an approach to this issue proves problematic on both ethical and identity-related grounds. Although the discourse on the productivity of technology-assisted intellectual work seems to highlight its qualities relating to aesthetics, hygiene, and creativity, apparently distancing mental effort from the notorious toil on the assembly line, there is no shortage of examples clearly demonstrating that microwork fits neither the visual order that global technology corporations have designed for their businesses nor the affirmative narrative of technology development as an opportunity to improve working conditions.[59] And while steelwork chimneys no longer produce

smoke or do so outside the field of vision of those focused on the hypothetical blessings of digitization that directly depend on the burning of fossil fuels—and computer screens always seem quite a neat type of equipment—working by means of platforms such as AMT does not at all fulfill the promises of digitization enthusiasts and apologists. On the contrary, this type of work has something anachronistic about it—it resembles solutions we know from Taylorism. As Altenried demonstrates:

> Whether Google's scanning workers in California, crowdworkers or warehouse workers in Germany or Australia, gaming workers or content moderators in China or the Philippines, Deliveroo drivers or search engine raters in the UK or Hong Kong, video game testers or Uber drivers in Berlin or Nairobi: these are the workers of today's digital factory.[60]

These factories are invisible because they have been carefully hidden behind screens and a narrative of automation and progress, which has no space for unsightly themes relating to "virtual migration,"[61] monopsony abuses relating to the creative sector,[62] or costs of technological infrastructure. This story also has no room for personal accounts of members of the cybertariat, whom Andrew Norman Wilson, an employee of a company working for Google, imprudently asked for an opinion.[63] The author of the video *Workers Leaving the Googleplex* learned that people scanning books for the Google Books service do not enjoy the same privileges as full-time employees and that the company prohibits them from commenting on their own work, which, as the author fired for his investigation expects, bears little resemblance to the images projected in Google's narratives.

Detail of a still from Andrew Norman Wilson's, *Workers Leaving Googleplex*, 2011; Lumière Brothers, *Workers Leaving the Factory*, 1895.

Of course, the context for Wilson's video work is the Lumière brothers' film *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon* (1895) and Harun Farocki's work *Workers Leaving the Factory* created one hundred years later. "They are running as if they knew somewhere better to be," says the narrator of the latter, making a reference to the spatial and mental separation of work and non-work that determines the experience of the worker regardless of the historical and social conditions in which capitalism executes its oppressive practices.

> If we line up one hundred years of scenes of people leaving factories we can imagine that the same shot had been taken over and over. Like a child who repeats its first word for one hundred years to immortalize its pleasure in that first spoken word.[64]

Or perhaps like the relief of a convict who gets out on parole. Where is the factory gate today? When do we cross it? A naive analysis would suggest that in digital capitalism (computer, laptop, and smartphone capitalism), we could try finding this gate by logging out, switching off our devices, and putting them aside. But can we do this? Can it be done? Do we stop working once we log out, and are we not digitally entangled? After all, there are other screen-based activities left: entertainment, education, healthcare, and everyday household maintenance. While the capitalist nature of many such "jobs" cannot be easily interpreted, it is obvious: when I buy cat food, order a takeout, watch a TV series or a soccer game, listen to a podcast, read a blog, play a computer game, get listened to by Siri, or educate algorithms by scrolling through social media, I am always feeding some branch of digital capitalism. I am not at

work, but I am working. I do not log out because I live among screens. I never leave the factory.

What else is invisible? We do not see the creative effort of artists who become obscured as a consequence of the narration on the advantages of creativity over work[65] that is multiplied in digital culture; we also do not see game testers whose efforts have nothing in common (either in terms of pay or merit) with the work of the most acclaimed creators of *The Witcher* or *Baldur's Gate*. We do not see the work of actors in the seemingly most "visible" cultural genre, namely "amateur" online pornography. After all, people who "enjoy" amateur porn are not at work.[66] We do not see the practices of surveillance,[67] the compulsion of constant availability,[68] or the blurring of the boundary between work and private life.[69] Moreover, we fail to notice that when we sit in front of the computer, we feed algorithms and test unfinished technological solutions.[70] Another aspect we fail to spot is that by using social media, we perform valuable cognitive work[71] without demanding payment in return—perhaps because the promise of de-alienation and dopamine gratification provides a good counterbalance to this latent exploitation.[72] I use nomenclature to describe these issues, as they constitute manifestations of the same predicament: thanks to the tools (screens and display devices) and visual practices (charts, slides, dashboards, interfaces, but also adverts and other elements of marketing discourses), we cannot see that we are subject to cognitive, social, and political control through the use of technology. Or, to put it another way, subjectivity counts for less than productivity, employee welfare proves less important than the income generated by "body leasing," and societal and biological sustainability, so readily discussed under the banner of "sustainability," is worth less than the scheduled autumn launch of the new iPhone. This hardly comes as a surprise. The only novel aspects include distancing employees from each other to

make it more difficult to organize resistance and the multi-modal structure of enslavement,[73] which stands in the way of potential self-diagnoses.

Enslaved by a Narcissist

Labor and screens are entangled in countless ways. As the primary epistemic and social resource of digital capitalism, the screen acts as both a display device and a shield within these combinations. It helps to manage knowledge and vision—what is visible–knowable and invisible–unknowable in labor and capitalism. Screens also contribute to the aestheticization and sterilization of work—on the one hand, by means of appearances (work in front of the screen, i.e., digital work, pretends to be pleasant, meaningful, always doable, and orderly) and, on the other, by means of cover-up techniques. In this latter case, the dimensions of work that disappear are those difficult to reconcile with narratives about employee welfare, efficient automation, or the failure-free character of infrastructure. In turn, the digitalization of work tools implemented on the screens pauperizes the diversity of visual spaces where this work is performed, which leads to the standardization of workplaces. Moreover, in their relationship with employers who use screens and technologies, employees become victims of a particular kind of violence. Since much of labor's semiosphere is contractual, technology makes it possible to exploit the "biological computing power" beyond the boundaries of conventional office space-time—employees can work anytime and anywhere because technological considerations are no longer an issue. Within such an order, the artifacts of the work environment, such as files, data, and cloud facilities, prove more important than the subjectivity of those who produce these artifacts.

All these entanglements find their validation in a historical outlook, which reveals a clear misalignment emerging on the route between analog work and digital labor. Finding factory

work alienating, we have decided to move toward screens that promise pure labor. This work is purely mental, convenient as we can do it from home, and enjoyable because, after all, clicking resembles playing a game. However, it becomes apparent that in its alienating mindlessness, digital work mirrors factory work. Furthermore, it blurs the boundary between working time and free time, depriving employees of their last domains for reflection, rest, and social connectedness.

Can we draw a coherent conclusion from all this? Probably only that what we can see is not what it appears to be and that reality only begins to emerge once we apply a non-literal and systematic approach to its interpretation. The dimensions of labor that this article discusses and of the screens with which this labor is digitally entangled, to a considerable extent, perform the opposite function to the one declared. Rather than revealing, they obscure, replace, and offer an alternative narrative, which constitutes a type of epistemological curtain that is hard to see through, not just because it is opaque but because the act of looking too intently has consequences. If I were to attribute an anthropopsychic identity to digital capitalism for the sake of this exercise, I would arrive at a clear conclusion: today's capitalism embodies digital narcissism.[74] This façade conceals a deep existential wound beneath the manic display of appearances—a consciousness marked by decline, cognitive exploitation, and the fragility of "staged authenticity."[75] The narcissist in question feels so sick that they no longer want any treatment. This being the case, perhaps we should remain vigilant and reflect on the nature of labor beyond capitalism, away from the computer screen.

1 David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (Simon & Schuster, 2018).

2 Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1998).

3 See Bernard Stiegler, *The Age of Disruption: Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism*, trans. D. Ross (Polity, 2019), 245; Yasmin Ibrahim, *Production of the "Self" in the Digital Age* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

4 See Mark Healy, *Marx and Digital Machines: Alienation, Technology, Capitalism* (Westminster University Press, 2020); Sandro Mezzadra, *In the Marxian Workshops: Producing Subjects*, trans. Y. Lanci (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018). David Graeber writes: "There is something very wrong with what we have made ourselves. We have become a civilization based on work – not even "productive work" but work as an end and meaning in itself. We have come to believe that men and women who do not work harder than they wish at jobs they do not particularly enjoy are bad people unworthy of love, care, or assistance from their communities. It is as if we have collectively acquiesced to our own enslavement"; Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 25.

5 Al Gini, *My Job, My Self: Work and the Creation of the Modern Individual* (Routledge, 2001); Judy Wajcman, *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism* (University of Chicago Press, 2015); Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (Stanford University Press, 2015); Tiziana Terranova, "Attention, Economy, and the Brain," in *The Lives of Images: Analogy, Attunement, and Attention*, ed. S. Wolukau-Wanambwa (Aperture, 2021), 131–52.

6 In his book *Empty Labour: Idleness and Workplace Resistance* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), Roland Paulsen writes about passivity, employees pretending to work, and feigning engagement as strategies of defense against violence. See also Peter Fleming, *Resisting Work: The Corporatization of Life and Its Discontents* (Temple University Press, 2014).

7 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. S. F. Glaser (University of Michigan Press, 1994).

8 In the article "Violence on Demand: Commodification of Digital Violence in Trash Streaming," I write that "violence on demand" means commodified violence that is a subject of transaction (exchange). In the case of "trash streams," this exchange involves the self-degradation of performers in exchange for financial support, which are small contributions designed to incite increasingly radical transgressions; Miłosz Wojtyna, "Violence on Demand: Commodification of Digital Violence in Trash Streaming," *Storyworlds: Journal of Narrative Studies* 13, no. 1 (2021): 49–78. In the case of employment, the exchange involves submission to violence in return for a monthly payment. For more on labor as a form of violence, see Studs Terkel,

Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do (Ballantine, 1989).

9 To understand the analogy between business success narratives and the eventfulness of a literary text, see Miłosz Wojtyna, "Narratology and Imagology," *Tekstualia* 4, no. 1 (2018): 125–44, particularly 134–38.

10 "The internal stairs, which facilitate communication, are a vital element of the design. Two slides connect the office floors. Located next to the internal staircase, the slides combine the concept of a circulation space with the recreation area. Each floor has a dedicated relaxation area next to the stairs. Employees can use swings, a climbing wall, or the slides mentioned above. One of the floors houses an amphitheater where the company holds employee meetings"; Joanna Puchala, "Trójmiejskie Biura: odwiedzamy biuro Sii," *Trojmiasto.pl*, July 5, 2019.

11 Elisabetta Brighi, "Beyond Repression: Reflections on Phoebe Moore's Chapter," in *Digital Objects, Digital Subjects: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Capitalism, Labour and Politics in the Age of Big Data*, eds. D. Chandler and C. Fuchs (University of Westminster Press, 2019), 146.

12 Digital capitalism is capitalism which uses intangible labor mediated by means of technology to extract value. The term "digital capitalism" first appeared in academic discourse in Dan Schiller's *Digital Capitalism: Networking the Global Market System* (MIT Press, 1999). See also Michael Betancourt, *The Critique of Digital Capitalism: An Analysis of the Political Economy of Digital Culture and Technology* (Punctum Press, 2015); L. Panitch and G. Albo, eds., *Digital Objects, Digital Subjects*; *Beyond Digital Capitalism: New Ways of Living* (Merlin Press, 2020); Jenny Huberman, *The Spirit of Digital Capitalism* (Polity, 2022); Sabine Pfeiffer, *Digital Capitalism and Distributive Forces* (transcript, 2022).

13 The origin of the term "cybertariat" can be traced to Ursula Huws's article "The Making of a Cybertariat? Virtual Work in a Real World," *The Socialist Register: Working Classes, Global Realities* 37 (2001): 1–23. Nick Dyer-Witheford makes a reference to it in his *Cyber-Proletariat: Global Labour in the Digital Vortex* (Pluto Press, 2015), and Radosław Skowron in his article "Cybertariat – prawo pracy a nowe formy zatrudnienia w ramach ekonomii współpracy," *Przegląd Prawno-Ekonomiczny* 4 (2020): 153–73.

14 In cognitive capitalism, one of the digital capitalism's operating models, we often encounter the spectacularization of human activity, which Debord describes. Olivier Frayssé writes about this aspect in his article "Guy Debord, a Critique of Modernism and Fordism: What Lessons for Today?," in *The Spectacle 2.0: Reading Debord in the Context of Digital Capitalism*, eds. M. Briziarelli and E. Armano (University of Westminster Press, 2017), 67–79. In the context of visibility and the visual dimensions of work, of particular relevance seems to be the fragment on the imperative of marketing activity, which, although geared toward visibility, is based on hidden activities outside of the working time (p. 77).

15 See the analysis of the productivity illusion in which operating system and application interfaces submerge their users: Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (Touchstone, 1995), 29–49.

16 An excellent introduction to the study of the cultural role of screens is S. Monteiro, ed., *The Screen Media Reader: Culture, Theory, Practice* (Bloomsbury, 2017). Michel Foucault describes the amalgamation of knowledge and power in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage Books, 1979).

17 "Emotional labor" – see Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (University of California Press, 2012). For more, see below.

18 Linda Williams highlights the dual function of screens in a very different context in her work on sexuality and pornography. See Linda Williams, *Screening Sex* (Duke University Press, 2008); Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (University of California Press, 1989). Stephen Monteiro discusses the metaphors of the screen as a window and as a wall in the introduction to *The Screen Media Reader*, 1–11.

19 Pippin Barr, It Is As If You Were Doing Work.

20 Barr's "employees" only have access to tools necessary to perform the work they receive from the algorithm. Moreover, they have very little time to complete their tasks, and however hard they try, their task lists do not seem to shrink sufficiently to allow them to undertake creative initiatives stemming from their personal interests or even a desire to introduce improvements. The task windows appearing on the screen constitute a clear analogy for the mode of work of countless specialists who perform tasks not because they designed them but because they are their recipients. In this sense, white-collar work has the characteristic features of assembly-line or production work. See Moritz Altenried, *The Digital Factory: The Human Labor of Automation*

(University of Chicago Press, 2022). I refer to Altenried's work below.

21 See Milton Rogovin, *Portraits in Steel*, with photographs by Milton Rogovin, interviews by Michael Frisch (Cornell University Press, 1993); Chauncey Hare, *This Was Corporate America* (Institute of Contemporary Art, 1984); Bill Bamberger and Cathy N. Davidson, *Closing: The Life and Death of American Factory* (Norton, 1999); Brian Griffin, *Work* (Black Pudding Press, 1988); Chris Clunn, *Bummaree: Characters of Old Smithfield Market* (Fior Books, 2002); Lee Friedlander, *Workers: The Human Clay* (Steidl, 2023); Sebastião Salgado, *Workers: An Archeology of the Industrial Age* (Taschen, 2024); Andreas Gursky, *Visual Spaces of Today* (Fondazione MAST, 2023).

22 Cal Newport writes about the "cubicle diaspora" in "An Exhausting Year in (And Out Of) the Office," New Yorker, December 27, 2023.

23 "Supgame heaps praise on itself for its campus equipped with a swimming pool, free food, and parties, but many workers complain about the lack of holiday time, tight schedules, and low pay. When Germany established a minimum wage in 2015, this in fact meant a pay raise for many at Supgame. Even developers with university degrees had been working full-time for less than €2,000 a month." Moritz Altenried, *The Digital Factory*, 82.

24 Altenried, *The Digital Factory*, 1–2.

25 *Severance*, dir. Ben Stiller and Aoife McArdle (Apple TV, 2023).

26 When Mark's immediate supervisor requests his presence in her office, Mark discovers that members of the company's board of directors will also attend the interview. They are to participate remotely, and when Mark tries to thank them for his promotion by means of the speaker, his supervisor explains to him that "the board won't be contributing to this meeting vocally." We discover that, as in the case of many organizations, the board asserts its presence through displays of power and hierarchical authority rather than through direct, face-to-face communication. Computer screens and technology serve as the primary guarantors of invisibility for such boards, who wish to remain invisible.

27 "We do not know what data the figures represent. One theory quotes the need to safeguard company secrets. However, neither Mark nor his colleagues have any confidential knowledge. Equally incomprehensible is the work performed by other cells on the 'severed' floor. The Department of Optics and Design produces plastic watering cans and cards with images of people performing various activities. As we can guess, the cards may be hiding some vital data—when Mark's colleague takes with him one of these cards during a visit to this particular department, it triggers a very nervous

reaction from the bosses." Jakub Majmurek, "Kapitalizm i kłamstwa," Dwutygodnik 333, no. 5 (2022).

28 Karol Kućmierz noted that "the keyboards in Lumon do not have an "escape" key. … The ceiling in the Macrodata Refinement Department, where we spend most of our time, is suspended very low, further adding to the sense of entrapment and oppression. These scenes use wide-angle lenses, which brings us physically closer to the protagonists, while accurate, slightly asymmetrical framing evokes an undercurrent of anxiety." Karol Kućmierz, "Nie jesteś swoją pracą. Recenzja serialu 'Rozdzielenie'," Kultura Liberalna 699, no. 23 (2022). See Andrew Webster, "The Weird Computers and Claustrophobic Hallways of 'Severance'," The Verge, April 7, 2022.

29 *Severance*, episode 2, 00:13:03–00:14:35.

30 Danuta Lalak, *Życie jako biografia. Podejście biograficzne w perspektywie pedagogicznej* (Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak, 2010), 110.

31 *Severance*, episode 1, 00:24:20.

32 "Office environments mold their workers in many ways. For roughly 40 hours a week, they shape your time management, your sense of humor, the way you socialize and with whom, and your overall code of conduct. For roughly 40 hours a week, you are, by necessity, not quite yourself." Joe Berkowitz, "3 Hard Truths About Work–Life Balance That Apple TV's 'Severance' Eerily Illustrates," Fast Company, February 18, 2022.

33 Waffle parties, team-building exercises, and trips to the company's quasi-temples are rituals which Lumon uses to construct the corporate narrative. If the company uses this narrative to supplement the identity deficit of the "severed" employee, it will secure that employee's unconditional submission. The aesthetics of depicting these practices is satirical and bitter as we are fully aware that this is nothing more than the brainwashing of the previously lobotomized brains.

34 "At KFC, the standard defines everything. Even the facial expressions of employees should be appropriate, which means a delicate smile but not too much, just enough to express "positive energy," but not carelessness." Piotr Wójcik, "Jestem ofiarą rozdzielenia," Krytyka Polityczna, May 3, 2022, .

35 See "To the most powerful trends of our time, I believe: the profit-seeking drive for efficiency, the downsizing of public services, the growing gap between rich and poor, and globalization. Each of these trends fosters situations which call for emotional labor." Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, XII. Capitalist pragmatics dictates that employee emotions should be managed within a model focused on customer

satisfaction. This is why emotion management training pays so much attention to de-escalation, anger reduction, and desensitization, as Hochschild mentions (p. 25).

36 Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 6–8.

37 Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, XVIII.

38 Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 3.

39 Although in warehouses the functional role of screens does not seem as significant as in desk work, the screens have a direct impact on the situation of warehouse employees: behind the façade of the narrative regarding the agility of modern capitalism, which declares that it primarily aims to look after consumer welfare (which, in Amazon's case, means low prices and express delivery), there are complex organizational, financial, and logistical processes at play in which worker welfare is not a priority. Therefore, Amazon's shopping service interfaces, which the screens display, constitute not only a marketing and sales domain but also a curtain that conceals a broader, troublesome backstory.

40 Heike Geissler, *Seasonal Associate* (Semiotext(e), 2018), trans. K. Derbyshire, 16–28. German original: Geissler, *Saisonarbeit* (Spector Books, 2014).

41 Geissler, *Seasonal Associate*, 28.

42 Geissler, *Seasonal Associate*, 32.

43 Geissler, *Seasonal Associate*, 39, 58.

44 On account of screens and interfaces—these meaningful domains in which marketing semiosis takes place—customers may persist in partial unawareness of the exploitation they support by clicking "buy." This lack of awareness only goes halfway as it involves reconciling the dopamine gratification resulting from an efficient, quick, and cheap purchase with remorse about the basis of this efficiency, speed, and low price.

45 Tytus Szabelski-Różniak, *AMZN*, multimedia project since 2018.

46 Tytus Szabelski-Różniak, *Situational Approach #9*, Amazon Fulfillment Center LCJ3, Łódź, 2020, in Szabelski-Różniak, *AMZN*.

47 "But the geography of Amazon is strange: more than 150 million square feet of warehouses, distribution centers, and sortation depots located mostly in exurban sprawls and industrial zones, out of sight of the millions of customers who receive its goods on their doorstep"; Josh Dzieza, "The Everything Town in The Middle of Nowhere," The Verge, November 14, 2019.

48 Tytus Szabelski-Różniak, *Lights-Out Factory*.

49 "Life in the Amazon Panopticon: An International Survey of Amazon Workers," Global Union, January 2023.

50 Tytus Szabelski-Różniak, fragment of *Corporate Culture*, private conversation with an Amazon employee, in Szabelski-Różniak, *AMZN.*

51 James Bridle, *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future* (Verso, 2018).

52 Tristan Poyser, Masked: A Portrait of Amazon, 2020.

53 Amazon pursued the same strategy with its Just Walk Out autonomous stores, which—contrary to what the company's marketing narrative announced—were operated not by artificial intelligence but by poorly paid Asian workers; Parmy Olson, "Amazon's AI Stores Seemed Too Magical. And They Were," Bloomberg.com, April 3, 2024.

54 Lucy Suchman highlighted the beneficial effect of work visibility on employees' sense of agency; Lucy Suchman, "Making Work Visible," *Communications of the ACM* 38, no. 9 (1995): 56.

55 Suchman, "Making Work Visible."

56 "The average wage of a mechanical Turker, if they work quickly, is about one dollar per hour, with most tasks paid only a few cents. It follows typical outsourcing trends ...: requesters have to be in the US, where Turkers can be from anywhere. The idea is to get small people doing tasks for big companies as cheaply as possible, with no workers' rights and no ethical responsibility." A. Brown and D. Bristow, eds., *Twerking to Turking: Everyday Analysis*, vol. 2 (Zero Books, 2015).

57 "Farming" is a method of using MMOPG games to accumulate the resources necessary to purchase items or advance to the next level of experience. As this method is time-consuming, impatient players subcontract resource farming to companies which specialize in this activity, see Moritz Altenried, *The Digital Factory*, 77.

58 Altenried, *The Digital Factory*, 5.

59 Altenried, *The Digital Factory.*

60 Altenried, *The Digital Factory.*

61 Altenried cites Aneesh's observations about workers who are "staying in India while working for customers abroad, whose labor is situated in cultural, spatial, and temporal contexts that do not match their physical location." According to Aneesh, these workers migrate without moving from their homes; Aneesh Aneesh, *Virtual Migration: The Programming of Globalization* (Duke University Press, 2006); quote from Moritz Altenried, *The Digital Factory*, 76.

62 Rebecca Giblin and Cory Doctorow, *Chokepoint Capitalism: How Big Tech and Big Content Captured Creative Labor Markets and How We'll Win Them Back* (Beacon Press, 2022).

63 Andrew Norman Wilson, *Workers Leaving Googleplex*, video available on YouTube and Vimeo, 2011.

64 Harun Farocki, *Workers Leaving the Factory*, 1995.

65 This is how Dieter Lesage summarizes the basic tenets of the paradigm of the artist who does not treat creativity as work: "You are an artist and that means: you don't do it for the money. That is what some people think. It is a great excuse not to pay you for all the things you do. So what happens is that you, as an artist, put money into projects that others will show in their museum, in their Kunsthalle, in their exhibition space, in their gallery. So you are an investor. You give loans nobody will repay you. You take financial risks. You speculate on yourself as an artistic asset. You are a trader." Dieter Lesage, "Portrait of the Artist as a Worker," *Maska* 5–6, no. 20 (2006): 91–2. Bojana Kunst interprets Lesage's statement as follows: "By shifting the focus from artistic work to the artist's work, i.e. from aesthetic of philosophic reflection on the work to its actual production, Lesage … shows that the open, interdisciplinary, unstable and flexible character of contemporary artistic work is not only an aesthetic quality but one deeply connected to the ways how the works are produced." Bojana Kunst, *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism* (Zero Books, 2012), 134–135. See Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 63, vol. 18, no. 2 (2000): 33–58.

66 The interpretative aberration which the commentators pursue in their statements on the regulation of the sexploitation market, including the production of pornographic content, is the assumption that, since pornography is presented as amateur, it is

created for pleasure, and since it is for pleasure, there is no need to pay for it. Helen M. Rand mentions this problem in "Challenging the Invisibility of Sex Work in Labour Politics," *Feminist Review* 123 (2019): 40–55. When thinking about labor and pornography, we should also distinguish between the "labor of visibility" and "labor of seeing"; see Rebecca Saunders, *Bodies of Work: The Labour of Sex in the Digital Age* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

67 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (Profile Books, 2019).

68 See Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (Verso, 2013).

69 Branka Andjelkovic, Tanja Jakobi, and Maja Kovac, "Naked at Home: How Remote Work During COVID-19 Opens Doors for the Omnipresence of Employers in Workers' Lives?," in *Digital Labour Markets in Central and Eastern European Countries*, eds. B. Woźniak-Jęchorek and K. Marchewka-Bartkowiak (Routledge, 2023).

70 See Arjun Appadurai and Neta Alexander, *Failure* (Polity, 2020).

71 We read in the excellent summary of theoretical work on unpaid digital labor and immaterial labor in general: "some scholars … highlighted the fact that far from being democratic, web 2.0 technologies were in fact strengthening new forms of capitalist exploitation and corporate surveillance." Veronica Barassi, *Activism on the Web: Everyday Struggles against Digital Capitalism* (Routledge, 2015). See also chapter "Dallas Smythe and Digital Labour" in Christian Fuchs's book *Digital Capitalism Media, Communication and Society*, vol. 3 (Routledge, 2022), 157–74; Christian Fuchs, *Culture and Economy in the Age of Social Media* (Routledge, 2015), especially 207–9.

72 Eran Fisher, "How Less Alienation Creates More Exploitation? Audience Labour on Social Network Sites," in *Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism*, eds. C. Fuchs and V. Mosco (Pluto Press, 2019), 195. See also Jathan Sadowski, *Too Smart: How Digital Capitalism Is Extracting Data, Controlling Our Lives, and Taking Over the World* (MIT Press, 2020).

73 See the issue of *American Anthropologist* dedicated to multimodality, especially the article "Bad Habitus," in which the authors and contributors write about the "democratizing impact" of new technologies on anthropological research and the contemporary, nuance-sensitive critique of "modes," codes, channels, and media – the critique of the mechanisms of capitalism; Stephanie Takaragawa et al., "Bad Habitus: Anthropology in the Age of the Multimodal," *American Anthropologist* 121, no. 2 (2019): 512–24, especially 521.

74 "Digital narcissism is the daily looking at ourselves in a virtual mirror, where our reflection becomes other people looking at us .... Phantasms created online displace real personalities, becoming an emanation of the needs and primarily the shortcomings of individuals living in an ever-changing and uncertain world." Magdalena Szpunar, *Kultura cyfrowego narcyzmu* (Wydawnictwo AGH, 2016), 183.

75 Szpunar, *Kultura cyfrowego narcyzmu*, 152–63.

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