

## Between Karoshi and Surplus Future of labour and non-labour

*The London business consultant Deloitte is making an effort to disperse any doubts: „Ask any economist or technology expert and they will gladly tell you that decades of data prove that automation creates more jobs than it destroys.“ So far predictions of the end of employment have all failed. Nevertheless reassurances concerning the profound changes of the working environment caused by the innovations of technological attacks are little convincing, when reactionary economists such as Thomas Straubhaar (Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft) call for an „unconditional“ basic income as a means of preventive appeasement, since less and less people will be able to live from their working gains in future. The fraction of the „superfluous“ (surplus) that will have to organize their survival without employment will rise drastically. We will discuss whether or not and which kind of work will be scarce in the last chapter. First we want to examine the conditions that lead to massive devaluation of labour and massive submission of those who are still working or already without employment.*



### **Timeless exploitation as a basis for a smart new world**

More people die per year from the consequences of labour than from all current wars summed up. A study by the labour organisation ILO from 2015 talks about 2,3 million people that lost their lives directly in work accidents. Most of them occurred in the global South. Miners that were locked-in, construction workers who fell from scaffolds, or sewers that got killed by the debris of factory buildings tumbling down in Bangladesh.

All those who die of long-term consequences of their occupation are not counted in that figure of 2,3 millions. People who come into contact with toxic dyes of clothes for big European labels, who have to work with acids to mine the rare earths used in mobiles, laptops and batteries for clean electronic cars. Or people that are forced to inhale pesticides and fertilisers for soya that is fed to livestock for meat production in Europe and North America.

Foxconn universally is the greatest subcontractor for electronics with 1,4 million employees worldwide. The subcontractor became known in the year 2010 for a series of suicides because of its insufferable working conditions. But little has changed since then. 100 hours overtime were prevalent before the suicides, now they are still 80. Foxconn lets every employee sign that they have agreed on their own account. A culture of restrictive behavioural norms dominates - as well in the company as in the living spaces that are organized like prison camps. Any rule breaking will be answered by a clearly defined catalogue of punishment: abuse, standing to attention, citing citations of company bosses, public self criticism. The strict system of the factory works the same way as in jail. A worker might have inattentively trod on the grass, immediately two employees from the factory security office will electroshock and kick them. The standard police is not admitted on the premises. Their role is taken over by the factory security office.

The Japanese „death by overworking“ (karoshi) is a specific term for sudden work-induced death – mostly caused by heart attack or stroke. But even outside Japan stress and excessive labour causes people to burn out increasingly. The effects on health are such as sleep disorder, back problems and heart attacks.

### **Shareconomy has nothing to do with sharing**

In the „smart“ world everything becomes a *platform* or an *app* and everybody becomes a user. The digitalization of all areas of life suggests „smart“ sharing of cars, holiday flats, offices as well as „self-organised“ providing of social connections and services. The internet enables a direct and next to free connectivity among users in a „sharing“ network and diminishes the importance of classic institutions as former operators for intermediation. „Hierarchic structural principles will be substituted by non-hierarcic platforms with direct „end-to-end“ exchange“. Some leftists envisage a chance for emancipatory change of paradigm by means of which capitalist market structures will sooner or later be replaced by social economy of commons.

But the rising of platforms didn't lead to post-capitalism, but rather to an ultra-capitalist opening for the development of up to now only scarcely exploitable areas of social life. Via app even mutual aid and neighbourly help have been commercialized.

The open sharing concept is perverted the moment a network starts growing effectively and the *network-effect* hits home. The use of a network for its users grows quadratically to their number – according to the direct linking possibilities within the network. The consequence is a concentration of lots of little specific platforms and networks towards one big one; i.e. facebook, where „everyone is“. With the result that older forms of administrative organization i.e. of communication are challenged and replaced. New players like facebook, Apple, Airbnb, and Uber define conditions of interaction between users of their platform „service“ unilaterally on their business terms eluding to process any political controversy.

The platform as an originally decentralized organizational principle turns out to be an ultra-capitalist instrument for utilization with the far-reaching rather more than side-effect to ascertain and control social connectivity. We therefore prefer to talk of *on-demand-economy* where services are provided when called for. In most cases the nice sounding intentionally misleading term share-economy has nothing to do with cooperative sharing. Indeed we are rather heading for a backward development to a society of servants in which social inequality is strongly increasing. Companies like *Deliveroo*, *Airbnb*, and *Uber* are big enterprises the last one with a worth of 70 billion US dollars.

### **Click- and crowd-working in platform-capitalism**

„Crowdsourcing“ is a mixture between „crowd“ and „outsourcing“. Jobs are no longer deferred to employees of a company, but dumped on an army of digitally working nomads. The crowdworking-platform *mechanical turk* by Amazon is one of many that offers minimal assignments. 500.000 people in 190 countries stand in wait for assignments like the editing of websites, texts, product descriptions, or the transcription of audios.

The starting signal to use the swarm of "clickworkers" was given by Amazon in 2006. when the corporation started to sell CDs. Hundred thousands of CD covers had to be checked for sexual content before they could be uploaded onto the digital platform. A task a computer wasn't good at accomplishing because of its nebulous criteria. In imitation of decentralized distributed computers in the cloud, Amazon thus invented the *crowd* - a kind of „massively parallel“ human computer: twisting the human-machine-relation the computer now asks people to help it with its work. Everybody could sign in on a digital platform to check CD covers for a couple of dollars per hour. Succeeding this specific task Amazon elaborated its job platform. Amazon charges 10% of the total fee paid by any „employer“ for the accomplishment of a task mediated by amazon. What is paid is left to the employer. The status the micro workers assume in a job like this is that of a modern day labourer. The question of working contracts or social security is obsolete. The unilaterally defined terms of the service platform rule in favour of the employers' despotism. Isabella Mader put it this words: „*wage theft is a feature, not a bug*“. Payment is often considerably delayed – sometimes deferred. How the balance of power looks like Amazon clearly states on its website: „*If the work performance does not meet your standards reject it and don't pay the worker.*“

In Germany also, crowdworking platforms are growing, like the Berlin company CrowdGuru or Clickworker GmbH from Essen and there is no saturation in sight. As soon as a task can be precisely framed and modularized it can be outsourced to „non-employees“. For most tasks a minimum fee is determined - most of the time announced as competition: The only one paid is the winner of this competition – all the others will go empty handed. Platforms that pay per hour offer an app for download. The crowd worker has to use it to log in when they are working on a billed task. But not only the working time is scored. In irregular intervals (six times per hour) screenshots are made and keyhits and mouse movements per minute are registered. „We don't control, we facilitate the framework for protection and trust“, says one platform manager. „Trust“ is generated by accessible evaluations, similar to those of online delivery services. Employers evaluate the work of their digital nomad visibly to all potential future employers. To keep up the appearance of balance micro-jobbers may also pass judgement on their employers that will not have any effect though.

Even if a small bohemian world thinks they can design their lives in a more flexible and autonomous fashion as freelancers „*in the name of enhanced autonomy*“ (Burawoy) and push the fusion of work and free time under conditions of maximized independence of location to the limit: the popping-up digital sweatshops will ultimately serve to weigh down wages – in every branch of business. The german trade union *Verdi* rightly states a „cannibalisation of the employment market“: Freelancers will do the same work on worse conditions. The DGB

(German Trade Union Association) sees that as a „modern type of slavery“ where everybody tries to underbid everyone else to gain acceptance of a bid. In case of sickness and age things get even more ugly for crowdworkers. There is (currently) no social security or reliable work regulation which heed this kind of labour without rights. To be able to reject any claims made on them Uber and Deliveroo avoid calling their drivers “employees” speaking of them as self-employed instead. *Welcome to a smart new world of slaves.*

### **Permanent evaluation through digital recording**

All digitally recruited on-demand-service-providers share a common fate. Their work performance is constantly rated and assessed. Digitally received benchmarks that are highly differentiated allow algorithmic measuring of the individual engagement of anybody working on demand. Thus immense pressure is created to adapt behaviour to tap into enormous reservoirs of self-optimization and self-ratification by means of competition.

The accessibility, speed of approach and friendliness of Uber drivers is evaluated in each fare. Those who reject fares on their drivers app will score less. Those who get stuck in traffic jams and are replaced with a click by impatient customers not only lose their fare, but run a risk of losing their so far high scores. The number of points gained, determines which drivers are preferably assigned, and thereby what these mostly precarious drivers will earn. The price of fares from Uber is about 25% less compared to common taxis anyway. Additionally another 20% from this dumping price will go off and be transferred to Uber for acting as agent. What looks like a computer game from the outside, hackling after high scores, is inevitably internalized as one's livelihood.

Companies like Foxconn and Amazon even manage to generate a next to all-encompassing registration of all off-line working steps through consequential application of high tech surveillance. The rating of employees in some of the Amazon plants is even more insidious (see the passage on *efficiency-training of humans to become machines*). Because of the high rates of sickness of up to 20% the gigantic online retailer introduced a presence bonus. Not only for every single employee, but for team-rating. Especially robust teams that called in sick less than others received a bonus of 70-150 Euro a month per person. This not only poisoned the atmosphere at the workplace, it also negated sickness as a normal part of life especially as a result of a monotonous one-sided work induced stress.

Industry 4.0 is the term for smartification of yet to be optimized work sequences that will be divided into small portions and rated to be reorganised with the help of artificial intelligence by the employer.

### **Flex-workforce - modern on-demand day labourer also available offline**

Dependency in the working world has peaked since flexibility of workforce through digitalisation has flooded the working world of the on-demand economy even outside those ultra capitalist platforms. Since „supplemental“ jobs without any guarantee became normal, a scandalous erosion of legal standards in classic offline job branches can easily be enforced. The upheaval promotes new kinds of employment. More and more people work as *flex-workers* on demand. Increasingly in Germany also – already around 1.5 million „employees“. Meanwhile the average employment at H&M is anything but a normal employment contract. The company calls them „flex-workers“, we call them modern day labourers. You are granted ten hours per week by H&M. The rest is flexible excess work. In some months people work only ten hours per week, 40 per month, in others up to 150. Fifteen years ago 40% of the workforce had a fulltime job at H&M, only 22% worked on short notice according to the company; now the table has turned: only 26% of the retailers work in a regular fulltime job, 42% as flex-workers.

The new day labourers are not only found in sales, but also in catering, in care, and among couriers, in the media and even NGOs. A lot of them describe their work experience as a state of permanent standby mode. Legally companies are forced to announce work four days ahead when they want to hire an employee. A safety clause that is frequently ignored. The institute for employment market and profession research has found out that only 27% of all employees on demand actually know four days in advance of their assignment. It almost seems “consequential” that the federal German employers association asks politics in a strategy document to kip the four days rule in order to alleviate „transition to flexible working hours“.

The German post also employs around 5000 employees on short notice. Their assignments are settled in a framework agreement – for each assignment there is an independent single contract. Some have several hundreds of such single contracts. Often the employee is informed only the night before that they are required to work the next day.

Work on demand is according to the federal Department of Labour acceptable. It allows for „the aspect that a dynamic economy needs flexible jobs to an extent“. As usual the acceptance of such a contract is „voluntarily“ and therefore supposed to be unproblematic. A recurring pattern - we shall call the phenomenon of liberty wearing bonds „*participatory enforcement*“. We comply under mandatory voluntariness. Thus a frictionless transition to a society of servants will be successfully managed.

### **Efficiency-training of humans to become machines**

Amazon employees work under enormous stress. In contrast to their contract of employment most of them work overtime and on Saturdays. Strictly hierarchically so-called *leaders* pass down pressure by listing their mistakes to the *pickers* and *packers* of their team. Pickers „pick“ the ordered articles from the shelves walking up to 20 km a day – trackers record their walking performance to the split second by allocating exactly wherever they are, while a hand scanner records all the work sequences involved determining the next step. If a picker is delayed the system triggers the alarm: leaders automatically receive a message on their screen. A so-called feedback ensues. „For the sole reason of optimizing the process“, of course. Packers also have a minimum to perform: to pack 200 individual parcels or 100 multi-parcels an hour. But the constant rating of the employees is not without consequences: a green card means praise, a yellow card is the equivalent of a written warning. Three yellow cards mean dismissal.

The requirement: Everybody is supposed to be above the average. What is mathematically impossible is the dynamic principle of continuous re-enforcement of work pressure by competition within the staff. The consequence: an overall coercion to self-optimize.

Even if employees want to rationalize their tasks to avoid unnecessary walks penalty points are dealt out. Any deviation from the algorithmic allowance will be sanctioned – for the sake of standards. Any trace of individuality means a loss of control – loss of replaceability. Amazon wants every employee to be replaceable by a colleague anytime – without losings at handover. An informant from the administration reports: „*My working instructions dictate the exact position of my keyboard and mouse on my desk. And also where my waste-paper basket sits under my desk. It is absurd and oppressive*“.

### **Dequalification by digital production lines**

What production lines have only managed rudimentarily, the algorithmization of the working process manages to take to a whole new level of perfection: the complete quantification, standardization and thereby compulsory acquisition and devaluation of work - formerly only in production, now also in administration and development. In more and more office jobs the individual work load is also rated and controlled by a ticket system. What is already standardized by exactly defined specifications of performance in service and typical call center jobs now expands to the more freely organisable office job settings. In future the office person will work like at the production line. Companies will try to concentrate the unavoidable creative work on a few well-paid employees.

The result: *A few jobs in the development department where people tell computers what to do. And more and more devalued jobs where the computer tells people what to do.*

The separation of creative assignments that will remain the prerogative of people in the long run is a necessary requirement for (future) “robotization” of thereby other tasks devalued. Amazon’s pickers i.e. will no longer exist in its most modern german plant Winsen near Hamburg in Lower Saxony. At the end of 2017 robots will bring the required shelf segments to the packer, who will pick the required product to pack it.

### **Industry 4.0 – running the world as a company**

Industry 4.0 is the term to describe the whole of production. A new regime of production that aims to control all global production and cash flow, as well as the workforce behind it with the help of a digital infrastructure. There is the talk of a fourth industrial revolution after mechanizing in the 18th century, electrification in the 19th century and automation of the 20th century.

The propagandists of industry 4.0 are designing a scenario in which humans, machines and intelligent systems are transformed into an *integrated digital-human workforce* and become parts of a global, highly efficient, self controlling production process applicable at will. Supposedly needed therefore is an „architecture and a system of regulations consisting of millions of inter-linked instances adding value worldwide [...], *that is safe, robust and highly accessible.*“

The emphatically launched virtually necessary hype already has left huge traces. *Compass*, a German start-up in Silicon Valley analyses procedures of companies to automate the working process. Artificially intelligent controlling systems are supposed to ensure a seamless integration of robots into the working process. Competition with robots devalues human workforce at a tearing pace. Foxconn wants to automate some of its plants in China completely, and replace all human employees by robots. In Kunshan, China, Foxconn has dismissed 60.000 of the once 110.000 employees in 2016 for the fabrication of iPhone7, and replaced them with robots. According to South China Morning Post 600 companies in Kunshan are supposed to add robots to their production line which will result in a wave of mass layoffs.

The losers of this „revolution“ will not only be the workers that execute recurring manual operations, but also employees of insurance companies and financial service providers in a big way. Goldman Sachs has until recently had 600 stockbrokers on the trading floor. Now there are only two left. Algorithms have replaced the other 598. In the British financial industry alone half a million employees are threatened to be replaced according to a study of the consultant *Deloitte*.

### **Surplus in abundance**

There are not only plenty of redundants in the digitalized abundance, they are constantly growing in numbers. How does the employment market look like i.e. in Germany? In spite of the increasing number of people working, the total amount of actually rendered working hours is shrinking. Explicable only through increasingly slight work. The suggested line of action *Work 4.0* by the Secretary of State for Employment Nahles, with its embedded transition to flexible work, will only reinforce that tendency. This trend applies to most Western countries. It is no surprise that in 2016 a research study by the International Labour Office (ILO) showed that for 40% of the crowdworkers crowdwork is the main source of income.

In the US part of the extinguished jobs have been replaced in the deindustrialization, but mostly by such that are no safeguard to poverty: Since Wal-Mart opened its first super center in 1988 six million jobs in the US industry have been destroyed. At the same time two millions have been created in transport business and three million in retail. But while industry workers receive around 42 000 Dollars per annum, employees now get 23 000 Dollars.

Although political propaganda in Europe right and „left“ like to promise full employment, work could actually get scarce in the industrial nations for the first time, because of the new technologies: The world economic forum in Davos has already discussed the falling away of millions of jobs in the framework of industry 4.0. Research by Deutsche Bank announces a crisis of employment to an up to now unknown extent. For the first time in history more jobs would fall away than new ones could be created. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) foresees that a third of all jobs will be under threat in England within the next twenty years. The most cited Oxford study from Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael Osborne predicts that half of the jobs in the USA might become redundant until 2030. In Carl Benedikt Frey's and Michael Osborne's view (and also Brynjolfsson's und McAfee's 2014) the ruling pattern of technology induced employment market development will change. The observed pattern of polarization in the employment market in the US as well as in Europe will not continue. Instead medium and slight work will vanish to an extent that up to now has been limited by the confinements of automation. Under the strongest threat are people who do telephone advertising, research assistance and tailors. The most secure jobs are held by physiotherapists, followed by foremen, officers-in-charge in emergencies, and social workers. In total 47 % of work places are under threat in the US according to Frey and Osborne. Carsten Brzeski, chief economist of ING-DiBa, estimates on the basis of the Oxford study that in Germany even 18 million from 31 jobs are threatened, that would be 59%. Not only manual or mechanical work, meaning physical work or handling machines – but particularly administrative work like data processing – and also so called „brain worker“ jobs.

That this is not all scaremongering might be detected from the fact that even conservative economists have started to discuss an unconditional basic income to maintain social peace. To enable those who will be constantly cut of from employment to get along on a minimum level. No one should delude themselves though that there will be an

„unconditional“ basic income for the redundants – the humble amount of it will be a condition in itself that will exert control by means of dependency and conformity.

What will be the consequences of this forecasted breaking down of employment? There will certainly be an increasing inequality. Even in San Francisco, that self-declared prototype of a Smart City that produces such extreme wealth with the help of the high tech industry of Silicon Valley in its neighbourhood that the monthly rent of a 3-room flat may easily cost up to 8000 dollars – even there poverty is increasing rapidly: 20 % of the population in San Fransico lives from less than one dollar a day. The number of homeless has risen around 25% the last two years. Evictions are the order of the day.

If less and less people work and the necessity of labour as a normative force of order only applies within strong limits then disciplining by labour will no longer be sufficient to maintain (self-) governance. The solution for the ruling class is already percivable. The future order will not only be based on the evaluation of work, but by judging and adding value to any individual activity and life-expression. Self-employment will be extended to every area in life. People have long since stopped being bearers of their workforce only. Their assets as a whole are so much entangled with themselves that they themselves become added value. We sell ourselves, not only our manpower. The social value determined by the rating and scoring of networks like facebook advances to the real economic (self-)worth.

The effort to self-optimize will be priced. A research by OECD defines human capital as the totality of skills, qualifications, competences, and individual characteristics of every person. For a scoring approach that is currently the most advanced we refer to the article „The Sesame Credit System“ in this volume.

### **How to deal with all of this?**

Some followers of orthodox beliefs think that liberation of society is the more probable the higher the ( technological) level of productivity is developed. That means to wait and enjoy the prospect that with each innovative “push” the revolution comes closer. For social revolutionaries this is a questionable view drawn from a macro perspective with even more questionable ideas on revolution; one that believes it is only necessary to rid oneself of the misguided capitalist use of technology that is in itself welcome and supposedly neutral. As if people would remain unimpressed by the change of their basic living conditions – totally immune to the control of an omnipresent economy of behaviour.

Even without any projection into the future the basis of a fundamental critique (as the elder sister of the revolutionary) is crumbling in significantly increasing heteronomy and growing dependence. That is why we are fighting against growing inequality and the recovery of a minimum of autonomy in the battle against the technological attack. This not only concerns the erosion of safeguards and agreements in our working environment but encompasses far more like the most invasive form of technology-driven heteronomy including the way we gather information, our communication and our thinking.

We have to attack the evaluation process and the participative enforcement of ourselves through permanent (self-)measuring as a basis of beeing (heteronomouly) steered.