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Exhibition

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EXHIBITION SPACE

UNDER PRESSURE

28.09.18

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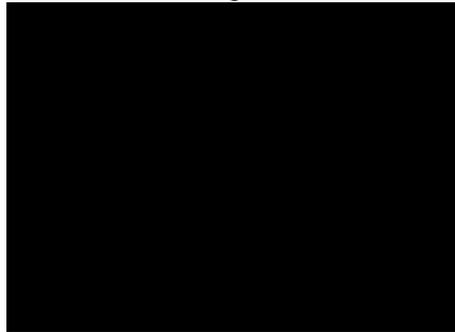
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UNDER PRESSURE

On Forms of Authority and Decision-Making Power

curated by **Sabine Winkler**



- _____ Rod Dickinson
- _____ İnci Eviner
- _____ HARD-CORE
- _____ Minna Henriksson
- _____ Bernd Hopfengärtner and Ludwig Zeller
- _____ Vladan Joler (SHARE Lab)
- _____ Isabella Kohlhuber
- _____ Stéphanie Lagarde
- _____ Liz Magic Laser
- _____ Daniela Ortiz
- _____ Olivia Plender
- _____ Sebastian Schmieg
- _____ Stefanie Schroeder
- _____ Superflux
- _____ Nick Thurston and Steven Zultanski
- _____ Pinar Yoldas

Under Pressure

The point of departure for this exhibition is the authoritarian tendencies that have been increasingly apparent in recent times and which are manifesting more and more in political and economic fields and around AI development. Authoritarian politicians attracting majorities, a manifestly authoritarian financial market, authoritarian structures in IT systems and authoritarian tendencies in AI development—they all prompt the question of whether new forms of authoritarianism are distinguished by the fact that they allow individual freedoms, or at least give the impression of doing so. In which areas are we free to decide, where have we already surrendered decision-making power, unknowingly or even voluntarily, and is free will an illusion as neuroscientific studies suggest? Is our freedom primarily restricted to a choice between products and thus to our consumption behaviour, to what extent do we actually determine our own lives and what promises and pressure scenarios have been and are being used to legitimise the loss of social security and control—that is, restrictions on our scope for decision-making? A belief in the problem-solving abilities and efficiency of individual persons, the dogma of competition-based free/unregulated market forces as well as trust in the absolute efficiency of algorithms are instrumental here. The works exhibited address the relationship between freedom, control and self-determination, and above all processes that often elude our awareness.

The exhibition looks at the mechanisms, strategies and tactics that are used to restrict decision-making freedom, and the way security/protection, economy/finance, nation/cultural identity or the declared necessity of competition and efficiency are defined and fixed as decision premises. Pro-

**On Forms of
Authority and
Decision-Making Power**

ceeding from the dogmas of neo-liberalism and neo-nationalism, the exhibition is concerned with authoritarianism in politics, the economy, technology and art. The marginalisation of the political driven by neo-liberalism, as well as the financial crisis, have led to an accelerated authoritarian capitalism. Authoritarian neo-nationalism, on the other hand, can be seen as one reaction to this development.

These control regimes arise with a promise to counteract individual loss of control over one's own biography, over social relationships, but also a supposed loss of control through immigration. For authoritarian regimes, however, it is only their own accumulation of control and their own concentration of power that counts. It is no longer the democratic state and parliamentary decisions that are at the fore, but the nation and the decision-making power claimed through personalisation.

8 On the other hand, control over future decisions and actions, as well as influence, are the goal of pre-emptive algorithmic systems and forms of government. Information technology anticipation and technical assistants, such as Siri, Cortana and Alexa, internalise action programs and the ‘needs’ of users, and either anticipate or make decisions. Data analysis, the creation of profiles—these things aim not just to guess at but also inform our future decisions through technical systems. To achieve this, subjectivity is to be avoided; it is not the individual who is addressed, but rather profiles and socio-technical systems. When algorithms know more about us than we know ourselves, does this mean they can decide on our respective needs in a more rational and thus more appropriate way, and what does that mean for the conception of the autonomous self? Decisions are linked to selection processes, with freedom to choose increasingly characterised as being ‘spoilt’ for choice or as a risk factor (unpredictability). Search engines decide for us, AI systems have advanced knowledge because they have access to our personal data as well the latest scientific research findings, and are able to link them together. Günther Anders was already describing the gap between the imperfection of humans and the increasing perfection of machines in the 1960s, referring to it as “Promethean Shame”. It is a kind of inferiority complex driven by the desire that we ourselves might be machines. Transhumanism, for example, aims at the “algorithmification” of humans in the form of upgrades and downloads of brain capacity, so we can reach something like the efficiency of machines. This is associated with a marginalisation of the subject. The cards are being reshuffled—no longer are people seen as the centre of the world, but rather artificial intelligences. On the one hand this opens up opportunities for the breaking down of hierarchies and for equality, on the other there is the fear of new hierarchies forming along

with forms of oppression if humans lose their value as determined by their efficiency.

But for now efficient machines (automation) compete with people, not just in terms of work itself, but also in making decisions. What are the consequences of transferring decision-making power to neuronal networks? Are we at risk of having our scope for action and thinking increasingly controlled and programmed through surveillance, Big Data rankings, social credit systems (see the Bureau of Honesty in the coastal town of Rongcheng, China), and are we on a path that is leading us to digitally structured totalitarianism? Without us noticing, scope for decision-making and responsibility is disappearing in the disintegrating action continuities of the real and the virtual (hyper-reality). When it is no longer the political sphere that conceives social visions and models of living but Silicon Valley corporations,

always in light of the value of their own shares, it raises the question which strategies and collective practices we might use against techno-capitalism, methods of employing technology in the interests of the commons.

This exhibition investigates dispositions of decision-making as well as forms of involvement and complicity in authoritarian political and algorithmic systems. What decisions will be required of us, how will decisions be automated, in what form do we ourselves consciously or unconsciously contribute to economic, algorithmic and state systems making decisions for us, and to what extent are we ourselves acting in authoritarian ways? Should we leave certain decisions to algorithms? If it is possible to transfer perception to algorithms and neuronal networks, people are confronted with the situation that a world can be thought without human consciousness according to Quentin Meillassoux.

Proponents of speculative realism assume the existence of a reality without reference to human thinking, a reality that is not pre-moulded by human thinking or its discourse. What consequences does that hold for conceptions of subject and identity, and for the conception of multi-perspective entities?

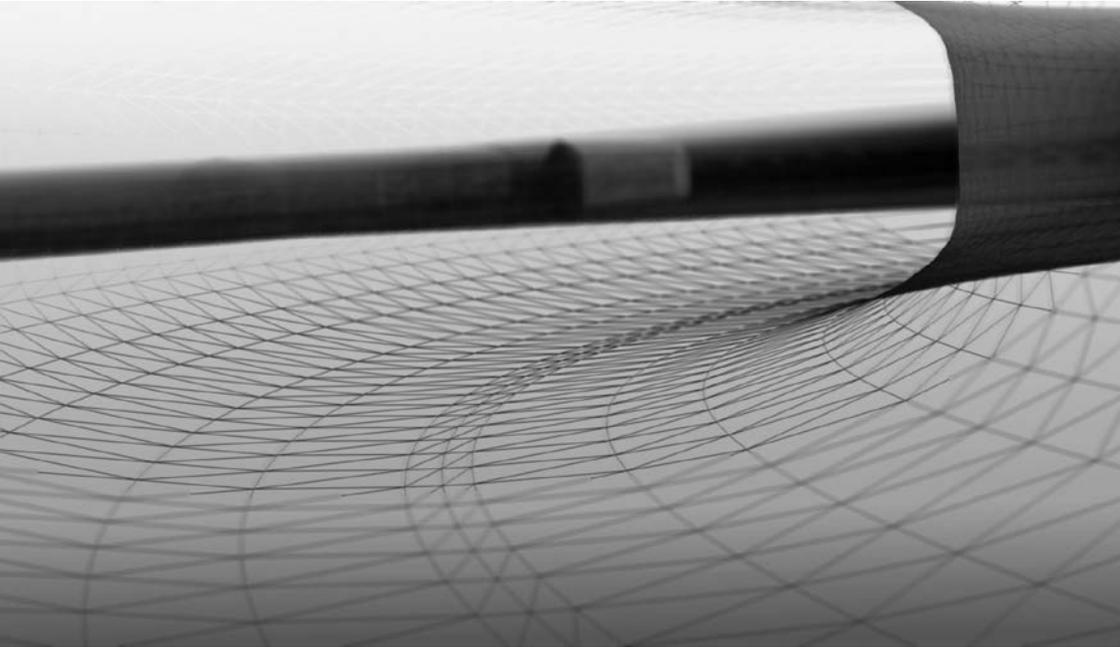
Could the resulting marginalisation of the subject (or the disengagement of subjectivity from subject, persona and person) bring an opportunity to effect change, and prevent authoritarian tendencies, or should we fear that this will merely displace or automate them, without ridding us of them? In art, new dispositions are emerging through the questioning of the artist, curator and viewer subject. Whether authoritarian structures in the art system are thereby abolished or only shifted remains speculative.

Rod Dickinson

Zero Sum

Video, 40 min., 4 audio channels,
3D print objects, tables and chairs, 2015

Zero Sum consists of an instructional film and a role-play installation with four synchronous audio channels. Rod Dickinson investigates how software-controlled computer systems impact human behaviour and how computational and mathematical models can be used to predict behaviour. Visitors are invited to take part in a classic game theory dilemma situation, guided by a virtual moderator. Cooperation and non-cooperation are modelled in this simulated dilemma situation; it's all about how cooperation and non-cooperation arise through application, and assessment of benefits and risks. Through audio channels, visitors hear actors reading reports from employees who work in call centres, supermarkets and sales centres. They talk about their integration in automated work processes, and describe the associated emotional impact on the workforce. The reports are based on interviews, and in their links to a classic game theory dilemma (the volunteer's dilemma or the "free-rider problem") show that in automated work environments, decisions are highly restricted, or programmed. Rod Dickinson connects the experiences of the employees with those of exhibition visitors by ensuring that their decisions in the role play are not just limited, but sketched out beforehand or even made for them in the script. Rod Dickinson investigates how integration into automated systems restricts and controls individual scope for action, legitimised in the name of optimisation (optimised decisions) and masked as an increase of freedom and efficiency.



Rod Dickinson was born in **1965** in Southampton; he lives and works in Bristol.

www.rod Dickinson.net

Nursing Modern Fall

HD video installation, 3 min., 2012

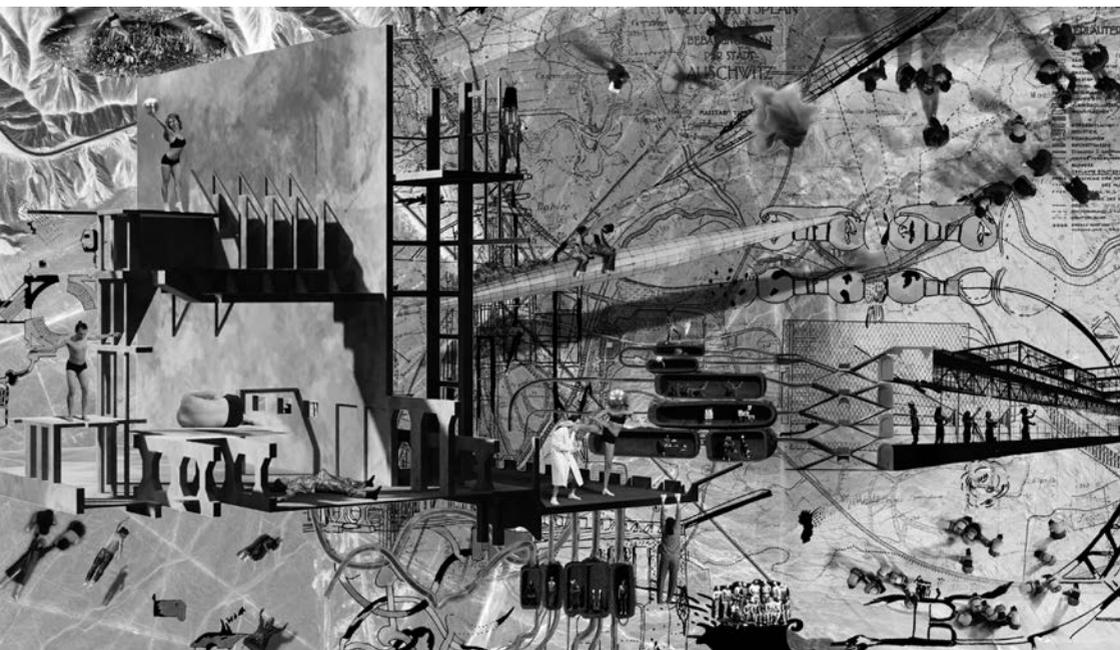
Courtesy İnci Eviner and Galerie Nev, Istanbul

In *Nursing Modern Fall*, İnci Eviner investigates

contradictions of modernity—rationalisation and progress, destruction and annihilation. The architecture of modernity doesn't just mirror these contradictions between utopia and dystopia, it also materialises them. İnci Eviner represents the failure of modernity as a cosmos of numerous parallel mini-scenarios located in space and time between architectural quotations and ideological sites of destruction. Real maps and building plans, such as the layout of the concentration camp at Auschwitz, are combined with a perimeter fence, underground tunnel system, battlements, architectural fragments from the aviation engine factory Pratt & Whitney (built in 1941 by Albert Kahn & Associates) and interior sketches by Andrea Palladio. İnci Eviner presents remnants of the rational understanding of universality as a space of (architectural) history, which she repurposes as a stage and area of activity for those excluded from it, for people without rights. According to Zygmunt Bauman, "Modernity [was] obsessed with the idea of an absolute order of the world and had to exclude anything ambiguous and other in a merciless 'battle against ambivalence.'" To what extent does this authoritarian/totalitarian character of modernity, especially in regard to mechanisms of exclusion, impact our present-day lives, and/or to what extent does neoliberalism represent an irrational variety of instrumental reason?

On İnci Eviner's stage, young women, nurses, those fleeing their homelands and other actors carry out the same actions and gestures, over and over again. These repetitions recall the mechanical motion sequences of an apparatus in which actors are assigned to pre-determined actions, or fight against them. At the same time, things begin to develop that had been suppressed

* Ludger Heidbrink, Der Kampf gegen die Ambivalenz, Die Zeit, 6th November 1992, zeitonline:



by the dominance of classic modern Western architecture. İnci Eviner understands the actions of the young women as the unconscious of reason which opposes any form of dominance and suppression, whether patriarchal, Eurocentric or economic. The actions of the young women reflect the ambivalence of modernity between progress and destruction and function as the unconscious of this conception of reason. The artist attempts to dissolve the dualistic system of conscious and unconscious, relying on emancipatory capabilities and demanding equality. The goal is to generate complex and universal pressure against authoritarian mechanisms and structures.

The Universal Blob (2)

HD video, 13:24 min., 2016

HARD-CORE experiment with curatorial methods, particularly robotic curating, and has developed the software Asahi 4.0 which can automatically curate exhibitions. Asahi 4.0 selects artworks through a random generator, de-subjectifying and collectivising decision-making processes. In the video *The Universal Blob (2)*, five personified entities reflect on a collective self and curatorial practices which when separated by aesthetic experiences and decisions—through Asahi 4.0, for example—can be freed from hierarchical concerns. The five characters are part of a collaborative self—they are HARD-CORE, an entity that has grown external to bodies and fused into a universal blob. This blob can assume many forms—we see a robot, an algorithm, an organisational structure/form, and so on, which can act as a magnetic force that can attract or repel things, or which can function as an aid to decision-making. All the entities are focused on connecting things with people and people with people. As a collective “I” or a collective that has fused into a blob, it sees itself as a possible model for overcoming hierarchies and mechanisms of exclusion, and discussing how that might work in art. This is where Asahi 4.0 comes into play—software that can select artworks without aesthetic experience or decisions. Or is Asahi 4.0 dominant in its random decisions as well, not really as collaborative as the algorithm asserts? Are decisions based on chance autonomous or open to manipulation? Are decisions made collectively the solution, or can even decisions made communally be authoritarian?



Minna Henriksson

Works on Paper

Series of 40 linocuts, 21 × 29.7 cm, 2015–2017

Minna Henriksson investigates both lobbying and political engagement around the Finnish paper industry and its trade with South Africa after the Second World War. The linocuts relate efforts by Finnish industrialists to counter the left-wing politicisation of their workers. While left-wing unions opposed trade with the increasingly despotic apartheid regime, the association of Finnish paper manufacturers supported a continuation of trade. Finnish paper producers were major suppliers for the overwhelmingly white print industry of the apartheid regime. The Finnish government protected this trade by maintaining diplomatic relations with South Africa. It was only in 1985, when the transport workers' union decided to stop the exchange of goods between the two countries that this trade ended amid a broad-based anti-apartheid movement, both domestic and international. This act of solidarity from the working class – a commitment that put the Finnish economy and political sphere under pressure to declare solidarity with black Africa – is often concealed. There are numerous examples of economic relationships with authoritarian governments or economic exploitation with authoritarian means from history and in the present day. The fear is that if authoritarian systems deliver larger profits in global competition, authoritarian capitalism will become standard.





Life Is Good For Now

HD video, 3D rendering, 14:42 min., 2015

Bernd Hopfengärtner and Ludwig Zeller stage a speculative view of a Switzerland that has decided to completely implement the right to informational self-determination. Mont Data, a cooperative, coordinates the mountain of scientific and commercial data, confronting citizens with new decision-making opportunities and tasks. The model of the data management headquarters is presented in a fictitious telephone conversation; in three further scenarios other people report on their related experiences in the areas of medicine, culture and day-to-day life. These reports from the future are visualised with animated object arrangements that represent a computer program's speculative perspective of certain situations and can represent both a class of objects as well as actions. How would we treat inherited data sets or evaluations of personal data, and how could a self-determined future be shaped by the right of disposal over personal data? What would we do to ensure that prognoses hit the mark, or not? One of the scenes plays out in a sanatorium that specialises in the treatment of a paranoid mental state caused by medical forecasts such as probability percentages for developing certain illnesses through genetic disposition. Patients aim to regain control over their lives by deciding for themselves the medical conditions that will lead to their deaths. Bernd Hopfengärtner and Ludwig Zeller stage fictitious reports that present options for countering digital control and exploitation with discretionary power over one's own data, but also touch on the issue of the relationship between author and reader as data producers in the context of creation and depiction of reality.



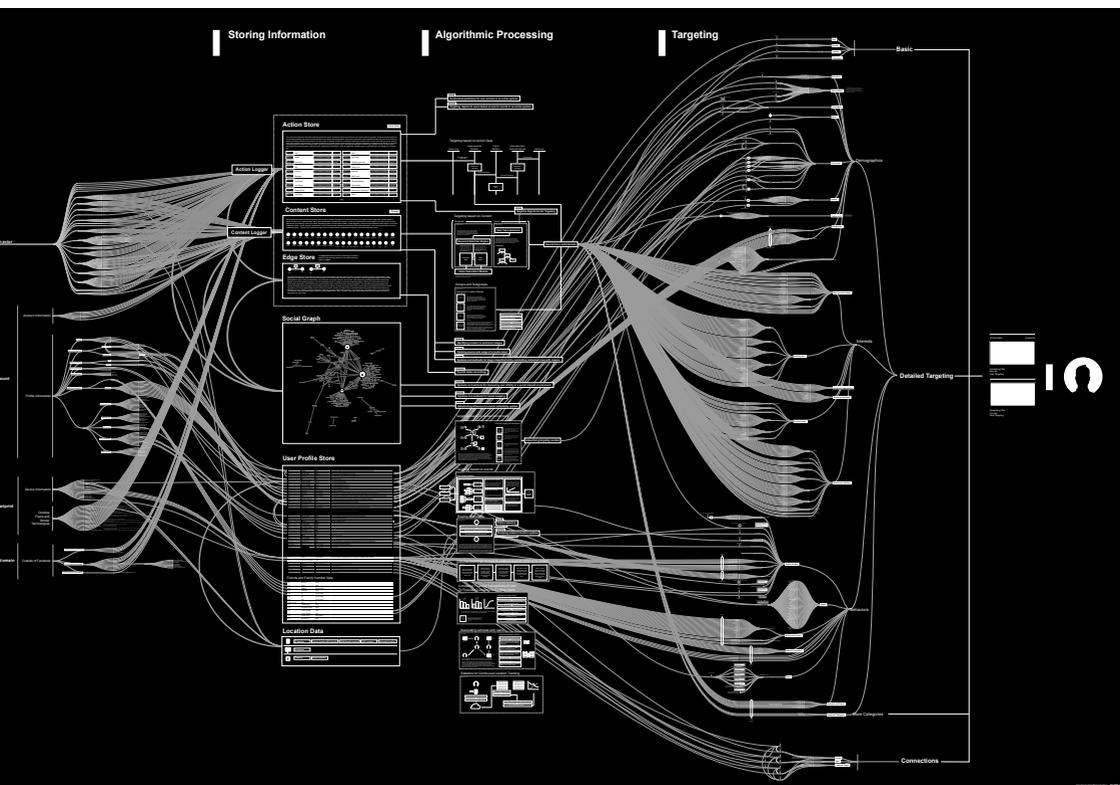
Monologue of the Algorithm: how Facebook turns users data into its profit

Video, 5:40 min, 2017

In cooperation with Katarzyna Szymielewicz (Panoptikon Foundation)
Based on SHARE Lab research: Facebook Algorithmic Factory

In a monologue, a voice describes Facebook's conduct from the company's perspective—how data is evaluated, behaviour patterns and profiles created. The video uses diagrams to describe how these mechanisms function. Vladan Joler (SHARE Lab) analysed the black boxes of the company whose invisible data evaluation and exploitation processes form the basis of the social media company's business model. Using data visualisations and graphics, Vladan Joler (SHARE Lab) illustrates Facebook's quantification methods, showing how profiles of each user are created, data evaluation which the company sells for product advertising, micro-targeting campaigns, etc., and which in turn informs users' decisions. Vladan Joler asks to what extent can we evade this system, if Facebook accounts are checked for visa applications and jobs, with non-presence seen as anomalous or suspect behaviour. The absence of a profile, a virtual narrative on social media channels, is disturbing in its non-traceability and its non-assignability. The collected knowledge of our preferences, social and financial status, health, etc. can be used as leverage against us. Along with the pressure to be present on social media, there is also increasing pressure on the company to delete hate, violence, racism, etc. from forums. "Content moderators" employed by the company decide how content is categorised, with all the problems that come with this. But users themselves, trapped in echo chambers, increase the pressure by the need to perpetually comment on everything, something that is frequently mistaken for participation, yet which can exert enormous pressure on others.





Isabella Kohlhuber

The Substance of Value

Karl Marx: *Capital: Critique of Political Economy*,
book linen, lasercut, cardboard roll, 1 × 10 m, 2017

Isabella Kohlhuber has designed a font called

Bastards, whose letters confront the fixed system of the alphabet with an unstable, continuously changing one. *Bastards* consists of compiled fragments of various letters that keep the script open as a system. Hybrid letters are woven into a network-style text strip and materialised as an object. Isabella Kohlhuber analyses the relationship between the object and its representation by investigating its systems of rules and conditions for production of meaning, and consequently its associated value. How are meaning and value generated in this zone of representation, abstraction and reality, and what power relations does this express?

The Substance of Value concerns a text passage selected from *Capital* by Karl Marx, and it translates the beginning of the first volume using the font designed by Isabella Kohlhuber in form, material and space. The text of the scroll relates to Karl Marx's concept of value substance. "According to Marx, value consists in the 'abstract work' represented in goods, which forms the substance of the exchange value accorded the goods. Work that builds exchange value differs conceptually from concrete, real work that creates the usage value of goods. Here the market functions as a measurement system that is determined by the prevailing 'silent pressure of competition' (Marx)."^{*} This gives rise to contradictions and pressure scenarios such as that which posits the unrestrained accumulation of value as the goal, or that which, conversely, continually undermines the value substance of goods. The highest level of productivity asserts itself with brutal wastage of the workforce, "optimisation measures", automation, etc. On the one hand we can observe a devaluation of the workforce; on the other, work continues to determine Western value concepts, meanings and identities. Isabella Kohlhuber

explores power structures, dominance relationships and hierarchies in the economy and in art, dismantling modes for generating meaning and value and putting their definitions up for discussion. She refers, for example, to exhibition texts and how they function between mediation and paternalism, and poses the question—do texts, such as this one for example, represent a barrier between the observer and the work, or do they facilitate access? Does a formulated thought or the fixing of an idea entail its restriction, or does it stimulate associative possibilities, contradictions, interpretations?

* Robert Kurz, Die Entwertung des Wertes, 2005, www.exit-online.org/suchen/link.php?tab=autoren&kat=Robert%20Kurz&ktxt=Die%20Entwertung%20des%20Werts&suchtext=ware%20geld%20mehrwert



Isabella Kohlhuber was born in **1982** in Bad Ischl, she lives and works in Vienna and Hamburg

www.isabella-kohlhuber.com

Déploiements (Deployments)

Digital Video, 16 min, 2018

In Déploiements (Deployments), Stéphanie Lagarde

shows stagings of state control systems in public space in the form of two simulation processes that, from a potential future, play out deployments in the present.

We see pilots of the French air force rehearsing an aerial display for the French national holiday. With gestures, hand movements and a coded language they simulate the choreography of the upcoming air show. These images are combined with police training software that is used for monitoring demonstrations and crowds of people. This simulates a protest scenario and shows police tactical strategies, such as kettling. Both scenes anticipate future sequences/deployments of forces, one as conceptual and physical and one as algorithmic simulation. On the one hand, motion sequences and procedures are trained and automated according to certain patterns, on the other hand, future behaviour is both informed and controlled by pattern recognition in order to directly and indirectly restrict decision-making and the scope of action. The training software simulates authority, although there is neither physical contact nor violence in the simulation. The demonstration of the power of the nation state is conveyed through the rehearsed order of formations, mastery of technology and symbols (such as the smoke from the planes in the national colours). Demonstrations, on the other hand, are represented as disorder (chaos).

Stéphanie Lagarde is interested in the relationship between citizen and state, and she investigates identification and identity of citizens as patriots at the national air show, or as protesters in demonstrations. The increasing identification with the nation or the overvaluing of national identity or even nationalism seems to run in parallel with the growing mistrust of state institutions in many countries in Europe and in the USA. When tasks of the

state are concentrated in the mandate of internal and external security, as the neoliberal agenda requires, the national (from the nation state) asserts itself as cultural identification and is subject to authoritarian claim. The surveillance state, on the other hand, simulates security.



Liz Magic Laser

Primal Speech

Mixed media installation, HD video, 11:50 min;
polyurethane foam, vinyl, mirrored dibond, porcelain,
plexiglass, felt, synthetic fiber batting, 2016

Courtesy: Wilfried Lentz Rotterdam, VSF Los Angeles

Liz Magic Laser stages a therapeutic situation

with actors, in which participants are prompted by a therapist to bring personal experience into association with current political frustrations. Based on the method of primal therapy, the aim is to have participants relive traumatic experiences and thus reduce their impact. The work can be understood as commentary on the US campaign and Brexit in 2016. The patients associate traumatic family situations with politicians. Donald Trump is associated with a homophobic and abusive father or turned into an ideal father by another patient. Meanwhile another patient associates Nigel Farage and David Cameron with a tyrannical teacher. This therapeutic process trains participants in managing personal and political trauma, in defending themselves against feelings of powerlessness in the face of authoritarian figures—fathers, teachers, politicians—and against heteronomy. In primal therapy, patients are asked to bring stuffed toys to the therapy session for releasing aggression or for hugging. Liz Magic Laser adopts this idea, developing stuffed animals that reference the party logos of the countries in which the installation has been seen to date. The donkey stands for the Democrats, the elephant for the Republicans, the rose symbolises the British Labour Party, the oak the conservatives Tories, while the fist with the rose references the Socialist party of France, the stylised flame the Rassemblement National (formerly Front National). Padding, stuffed toys and mats function as therapeutic props for working off stress while reliving suppressed trauma. The porcelain vase references the Japanese “screaming jar”; a plastic vessel that functions as a muffler, bringing loud cries down to normal volume. “Screaming jars” are marketed as instruments of stress relief and can be seen as a pop cultural implementation of primal therapeutic methods. The mirrored ob-

ject with the inscription “What’s been bothering you?, Why?” represents a reflecting self that characterises the new political therapy method that arises from Liz Magic Laser’s adaptation of primal therapy. The second reflecting mirror object shows a yelling mouth as a reference to Arthur Janov’s 1970 publication “The Primal Scream”, in which he first presented his psychotherapeutic methods for handling trauma.



Photo: Paula Winkler

Installation view: Wilfried Lentz Rotterdam

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Liz Magic Laser was born in **1981** in New York City; she lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

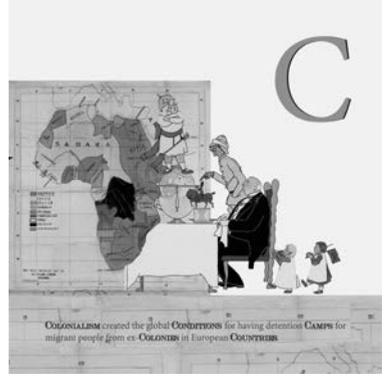
www.lizmagiclaser.com

The ABC of Racist Europe

26 digital prints of a picture book, 30 × 30 cm, 2017

In her works, Daniela Ortiz explores concepts of nationality, class, race, policies of equality and civil rights, investigating how the European system of migration control and colonial racism are based on patterns of exclusion. Daniela Ortiz's work, conceived as a picture book, contrasts eurocentric narratives with narratives from anti-colonial and anti-racist perspectives. Through certain terms she deconstructs stereotypes and presentation methods in connection with asylum and migration, discusses along alphabetical letter order, as well as the history of oppression and the history of resistance. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) Frantz Fanon analysed how decision-making opportunities (over life and death) depend on the position a subject assumes in the world because of its racialisation* and territorial affiliation. This determines whether one is seen or treated as a human being, or not. The colonial power decided on the life or death of the oppressed colonial subject, who was denied the right to self-determination. Those fleeing their homelands have as similar lack of decision-making power over their own lives, but decisions are made about their existence (life or death). Whether they are saved from drowning or not, whether they are deported or not, whether they can stay and if so, how long, what conditions are attached, etc. The authoritarian rejection of migration manifests the demand for cultural/societal decision-making power of a white middle class which appears to be losing political decision-making options. The securing of European privileges is claimed through national (or even nationalist) mechanisms of exclusion and defined in an authoritarian way as a claim to cultural dominance. Daniela Ortiz deconstructs these hegemonic narratives and practices, making their hierarchical structures visible and radically demands equality.

* Racialisation, derived from race, refers to the categorisation of supposed characteristics of a group of people as intrinsic or identitarian. Racialisation thus describes social processes (process of racialization) that construct "race" and "ethnicity": Cf. Maureen Maisha Eggers: Black Identity, Transculturality and the Task of Political Education. In: AntiDiskriminierungsBüro (ADB) Köln von Öffentlichkeit gegen Gewalt e.V. and CyberNomads (cbN) (Ed.): *TheBlackBook. Germany's Moults*. 2004, p. 155–159.



Set Sail for the Levant

Installation, board game (50 × 50 cm), hay bales, 2007

Olivia Plender's work *Set Sail for the Levant* is

based on a 16th-century board game entitled "The Game of the Goose", which can be seen as a forerunner of Monopoly. In this dice game, the players are put in the position of peasants who, because of the closure and privatisation of their fields, have to make their way to the city to earn their livelihoods. Despite promises they find few prospects on the way there, and the journey usually ends in prison, in the factory, or in death. In Olivia Plender's game, only players who steal money from other participants and flee to the Middle East to evade criminal prosecution win, or avoid debt.

The narrative of the game is a depiction of capitalism, its structures and repercussions, and shows the ensuing consequences for both the individual and for society. Decisions are only possible in restricted form, the starting situation is precarious, fraud and escape are the game's only methods for securing survival in the competitive situation.

Olivia Plender is interested in board games as a narrative and political format, and how these can be used as didactic elements. She satirises ideological narratives such as those of Monopoly, which teaches people how to act in a capitalist system, by pointing out contradictions inherent in the system. Privatisation of public commodities, the use of debt as a means of pressure, competition as a way of life, etc., have been perfected in neoliberalism. The more radical and authoritarian its implementation, the more the promises of neoliberalism such as self-actualisation, success and free choice are combined with traditional narratives, national mythologies or cultural identity. Proceeding from social history research, Olivia Plender investigates how official, historical and contemporary narratives are constructed and the hierarchies that stand behind the "voice of authority" which is

traditionally (re)produced in institutions in the public space such as the museum, the academy and the media.



Sebastian Schmieg

Decisive.Camera

Installation, screen, webcam, software, photo wallpaper, 2018

Dataset: <http://this-is-the-problem-the-solution-the-past-and-the-future.com>

Sebastian Schmieg, the photographers, the visitors, 2016–2017

Commissioned by The Photographers' Gallery. Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

In his project *Decisive.Camera*, Sebastian Schmieg

investigates human and automated processes of categorisation, and deals with photography and machine learning. Machine learning uses algorithms, which can use data sets to learn how to make predictions, to classify and to make decisions. The *Decisive.Camera* software analyses photos taken in the exhibition space and decides the extent to which they represent the problem, the solution, the past or the future. These decisions are made automatically and are the result of a learning process that Sebastian Schmieg outsourced to visitors to the Photographers' Gallery in London in a previous project: they could assign the photos in the gallery's archive, including shots by Cindy Sherman, Valie Export and Trevor Paglen, to the above categories and thus trained the machine-learning system that is now being used in *Decisive.Camera*. How do we influence AI systems, which in turn change our perception? What decisions will AI systems take and who will control them?





Stefanie Schroeder

40 hrs., max. 2 months

2-channel HD video, 45 min, 2017

To accelerate development of her career independence as an artist and to get off welfare, Stefanie Schroeder was encouraged to take part in a company optimisation measure. A development prognosis used in this context determines the retention or the (forced) surrender of her independence. Her request to document the process on film was rejected. The script of the film is based on recordings of discussions, hand-outs and correspondence that document the work on the artistic entrepreneurial personality. Here the roles of artist, entrepreneur and welfare recipient meet—all embodied by Stefanie Schroeder. The artist analyses structures and functions of the optimisation imperative, explores how optimisation and efficiency are used as measures of value and generalised as criteria for decision-making. With profit evaluation, now a standard, exclusion and stigmatisation become formalised, raised to the level of dogma, to an authoritarian structure, as Margaret Thatcher expressed it in the 1980s with her statement “there is no alternative”. Austerity measures and Hartz IV have mutated into permanent conditions and represent the flip side of unregulated financial feudalism which is defined as a necessity. With debt as a means of pressure and with the withdrawal of funding or unemployment benefits, authoritarian acts in relation to financial dependencies and social mechanisms of exclusion become visible and experiential. The authoritarian claim to optimisation and efficiency becomes a primary decision-making criterion. When it is only the ability and willingness to self-optimisation as well as its staging or optimised self-presentation that count, other qualities and characteristics, such as deliberation and calm, lose their value. It is permanent discovery of the self and faked self-presentation that is demanded to—paradoxically—convey the appearance of authenticity.



Our Friends Electric

Film, MP4, 6:17 min, 2017

In their film *Our Friends Electric*, Superflux explore alternative forms and interactions with speech-based AI assistants. Superflux designed three AI devices to imagine potential relationships with speech assistants. These fictitious AI assistants, *Eddi*, *Karma* and *Sig*, are not real products, rather they represent archetypes of potential qualities of such devices. *Eddi*, for instance, constantly asks why a question or command is being issued, while *Karma* poses questions of security technology and legal concerns that arise when speech assistants speak and act on behalf of users, and *Sig* mirrors personalisation trends. His system has been hacked and trained for ideological conformity to enable control over him as a dialogue partner. The three devices reflect questions of mutual control behaviour that interaction with AI assistants raises. Superflux explore how command structures determine dealings with technology and what other forms of interaction might be possible. But the work also addresses control functions of AI systems in relation to the unforeseeable development of self-learning machines. What assumptions might AI systems make of us in the future based on collected and analysed data, and what automated decisions might they make as a result?

Credits: Research & Design: Superflux, Commissioned by: Mozilla Open IOT Studio, Projects Leads: Anab Jain & Jon Arden, Prototyping: Lorraine Clark & Martin Skelly, Film Script & Direction: Anab Jain & Jon Arden, Designers: Vytautas Jankauskas, Matt Edgson.



Anab Jain was born in **1976** in Ahmedabad/India; she lives and works in London and Vienna.

Jon Arden was born in **1978** in Lancaster/UK; he lives and works in London.

Nick Thurston and Steven Zultanski

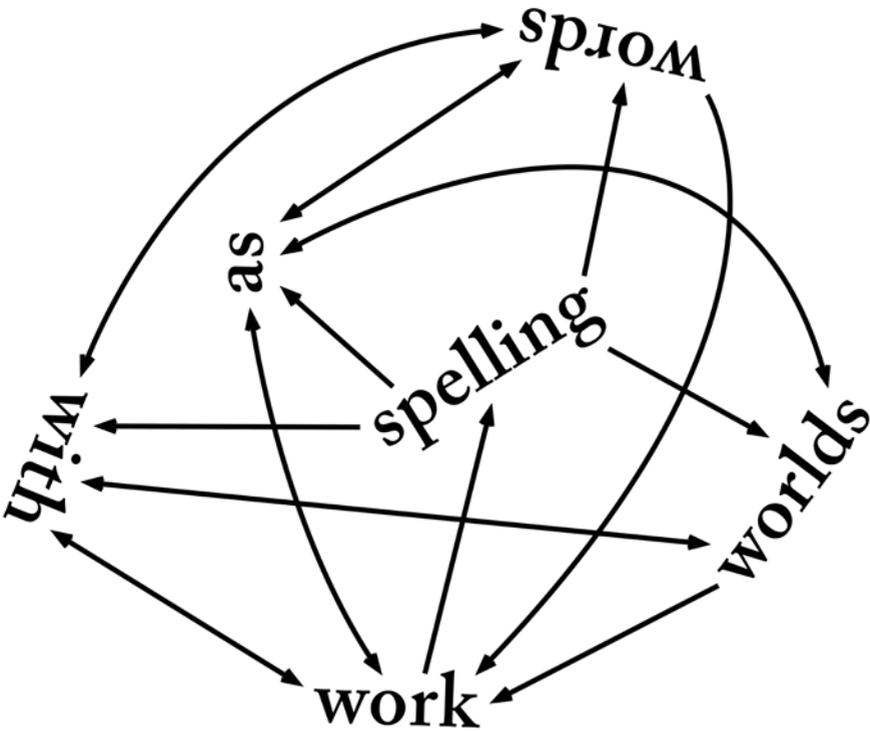
Authority

Installation, 4 text blocks, diagram, vinyl, 2018

The paragraphs on the wall are developed from Zultanski's new book-length poem-essay, "On the Literary Means of Representing the Powerful as Powerless", commissioned and edited by Nick Thurston.

In his collaboration with writer Steven Zultanski, Nick Thurston has designed a text-based room installation that is concerned with the relation between power, authority and the author in literature. The four text blocks describe how literary speech can create and dismantle ideas and images of powerful characters. What images are our conceptions associated with, what authorities decide which meanings are ascribed to them, who has power over the narrative and how is power personalised? In the text blocks, Steven Zultanski reflects on how images of the indivisibility of power or concepts of heroes and heroines can be dismantled especially in literature, through the non direct representation of political reality and the openness of interpretation. In literary texts, on the other hand, figures with power often play auxiliary roles, are described as psychologically complex characters or form just one potential conflict centre in interwoven strands of narrative, and so they have no authority from their position of power. The diagram on the floor shows six words that come from a three-line poem by Nick Thurston: "Spelling worlds/With words/As work". In the pictorial form of the diagram, the monolinear structure of language is exchanged for a cartographic representation, visually referencing potential word and meaning combinations of the six words. The diagram makes visible the various plays of meaning with the different meanings of the word spelling, by combining linguistic and figurative qualities of the poem and showing its effective force in every direction. The diagram refers to text passages on the wall which claim that literature can imagine complex worlds in our imagination with minimal means, create spaces of meaning, dismantle (power) fantasies. The combination of the two texts gives rise to a tension between directness and ambiguity, argumentation and

indecision. The two authors play with indecision in the context of language and understanding/interpretation, satirise black-and-white ways of thinking and writing by visualizing gray tones through speculative approaches.



Nick Thurston, Diagramm of his poem »Spelling«

Nick Thurston was born in **1982** in Gloucester/UK; he lives and works in York.

Steven Zultanski was born in **1981** in New Jersey/USA; he lives and works in Copenhagen.

Kitty AI: Artificial Intelligence for Governance

Installation, HD Video, 12:40 min, 2016

In her work *Kitty AI: Artificial Intelligence for Governance*, Pinar Yoldas imagines artificial intelligence (AI) has taken over the world. In the video, a 3D-animated cat talks about itself and its functions as ruler of a megalopolis in the year 2039. As a consequence of humans' inability to manage gigantic infrastructures, AIs like *Kitty AI* have assumed the positions of politicians and other professional groups in this imagined future. *Kitty AI* appears as an emotive representative of an all-powerful AI regime, in which "kitty-love" and technology are intended to replace politicians. If algorithms can decide a lot of things better than humans, this is associated with both hope and fear. Do AI systems make better decisions because they can collect and evaluate more data? China, for instance, is testing an AI system for the optimisation of foreign policy decisions to allow it to react more quickly in strategic situations. The technical solution skills of AI are highly promising, but the associated control functions as well as the loss of decision-making freedom are often concealed. When AI systems replace human powers of judgement, automated optimisation of decisions comes to the fore, in which efficiency is achieved primarily through amoral optimisation, without filters of any kind. *Kitty AI* presents itself as an agent of optimised governance in the form of emotional care.



42 **Under Pressure**

On Forms of Authority and Decision-Making Power

Exhibition: 28. September 2018 to 25. November 2018

frei_raum Q21 exhibition space

MuseumsQuartier Wien

Museumsplatz 1, A-1070 Wien

www.q21.at

#underpressure

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Booklet

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ON FORMS OF AUTHORITY AND DECISION-MAKING POWER