We are no machines!

We have a practical proposal to support the striking employees of Amazon against the heteronomy algorithms have enforced on their workplace. They are not only fighting for a normal tariff in retail instead of being paid in alignment with the lower logistic tariffs. It is the working conditions themselves that are in the focus of an ongoing labour dispute that lasts for four years now. Amazon's self-learning logistics software dictates the pace and the course of every single move the workers make to the last detail – even its administration.

Amazon agenda is defined by the complete expropriation of the working process via the latest technology. It is a foretaste of what to expect of optimised human work by means of the computer in the upcoming „fourth industrial revolution" that will include far more than the so-called industry 4.0. But more about this further down ...

Our proposition of action: openly offensive

Parallel to the strikes around the pre-Christmas **Black-Friday, the 24th November 2017**, Amazon's most important sales day, we will block an Amazon plant. The distribution centre in the Kudamm-Karree in the city of Berlin for instance would be a reasonable choice. Amazon guarantees a delivery of products that are stored there within two hours (even one hour for prime customers). An easy-to-attack promise in those small side roads! In the company of further analogical and digital resistance the enduring ignorance of Amazon's CEO Jeff Bezos towards his employees and other critics might suffer at last. During the whole week between the 20th and 26th of November around Black Friday there will constantly be sales on offer and with them a noticeable increase of orders and deliveries – this should be the week to take action! And this is how it might look like:

Strikes will take place in several mayor Amazon distribution centres all over Europe. The banners will say: „We are no machines!" The access to the distribution centre in Berlin at the Kudamm-Karree will be blocked. Neither will lorries be able to deliver goods nor will Amazon transport-bicycles and delivery-vehicles be able to leave the premises. While an announcement will be made at the headquarters in Munich the Germany's CEO Ralf Kleber will be pied. Amazon's home-page won't be available. Throughout the week solidary Amazon customers will send increasing amounts of orders (those that are free of shipping costs) returning them adorned with messages of solidarity for the employees. The perceivably bad publicity and the serious disruption of delivery that relies so much on the smoothness of the last couple of steps will hit the company on a sensitive spot.

We have enough time to discuss the proposal and to bestow a truly Black Friday on Amazon

Efficiency training: people to machine

Amazon employees are under enormous pressure. In opposition to their working contracts most of them do a lot of overtime and work on Saturdays. So-called leaders pass on the pressure strictly hierarchical to the *pickers* and *packers* of their team. Pickers „pick" the ordered goods from the shelves and in doing so easily walk 20 kilometres a day – a tracker evaluates their walking performance by recording their whereabouts every second, the scanner records all the work done indicting the next step. If a picker is slow the system strikes an alarm: his leader automatically is given notice on his screen. Then a so-called *feedback-interview* is given. Of course only to „optimise the process". Packers also have a defined minimum quote: 200 single packages per hour or 100 multi-packages. But the incessant evaluation of the employees is not without consequence: a green card means praise, a yellow card equals a written warning. Three yellow cards are a threat of dismissal. The requirement:

Everyone is supposed to be above the average. What is mathematically impossible is the dynamic principle of continuous congestion of work within competition among the staff. The consequence: an omnipresent coercion to self-optimise.

Even if employees bundle their work assignments sensibly to save themselves unnecessary routes penalty points are dealt out. Any deviation from the algorithmic requirement will be sanctioned – for reasons of standardisation. Any trace of individuality means a draw-back on replaceability. Every employee of Amazon is supposed to be replaceable by a colleague at any time - without any loss of efficiency due to handover. An informant from the administration reported to us: „*My work assignment tells me the exact position of the keyboard and mouse on my desk: and where my waste-paper basket is supposed to stand under my desk, that is absurd and oppressive*".

Downgrading by digital assembly lines

What was only rudimentarily achieved by the classical assembly line is perfected by Amazon's algorithmisation: the complete quantification, standardisation and thereby expropriation and devaluation of work – formerly only in the production department, now also in the administration and development departments. The „smartification" of all working procedures, meaning the digitalised networking of all work units is the core of the so-called industry 4.0. This is similar to the algorithmically optimised allocation of user and provider of services in the ultra capitalistic share-economy or rather the on-demand-economy like Uber or Airbnb. As a footnote that is by no means marginal it has to be said that not only the conditions of production, but also the product or service itself is drastically changed. In this fully automated network it is not uncommon to shift on responsibility to the customer – i.e. for booking and banking.

In more and more office jobs the individual job performance is evaluated and controlled by ticket systems. What is already standard in service and typical call centre jobs - exactly defined goals – now encompasses „creative", and free and self-organised office jobs. The office employee will in future work as if at the assembly line. Companies try to pack needed creativity onto a few well-paid employees.

The result: Very few jobs in the development departments where people tell computers what to do. And more and more down-rated jobs where computers tell people what to do.

The separation of creative job-units that are reserved to humans in the long run is a prerequisite for (future) robotisation of devalued other tasks. Amazons Picker i.e. will no longer exist in the most modern plant in Lower Saxon Winsen near Hamburg. Here by the end of 2017 robots will take the required segments of shelves to the packer who will pick and pack the item in question.

Digitale Arbeitsnomaden – Crowdworking

The low-paid, but also professionals in digital services can rent themselves out on Amazon's platform *Mechanical Turk*. There are no borders between branches of business. Companies can seek out the cheapest and most talented „crowdworkers".

The signal to use the swarm of „clickworkers" and digital freelancers was given by Amazon in the year of 2006, when the company started to distribute CDs. Hundreds and thousands of CD-Covers had to be checked whether they displayed erotic content before they could be uploaded onto the platform. A kind of work that couldn't be done by a computer since the criteria were not clearly defined. Following the decentralised distributed computers in the cloud Amazon invented the so-called *crowd* – a kind of „massively parallel" human computer. Inverting the traditional human-machine-relation computers ask people to support them in their work. For a couple of dollars per hour anybody can log in on a digital platform to check CD-covers. Apart from this specific task Amazon has elaborated its job platform. Amazon now invoices any employer 10% of the wage that will be paid for the execution of the micro-job for advertising their job-offer on Mechanical Turk. What is paid is left to employer.

The status the micro worker who takes on a job like that via Amazon is that of a modern day labourer. There is only work if offered. The question of contracts and social security is obsolete. Here the general terms and conditions of the platform that can be unilaterally modified and the arbitrariness off employers rule. Isabella Mader stated what the practise of systematic payment cheating is: „*Wage theft is a feature, not a bug*". Payment obligations are more than often considerably procrastinated – sometimes not fulfilled at all. The way the power balance is defined is clearly stated by Amazon on its website: „*If the working performance doesn't meet your expectations reject the job and don't pay for it*."

Amazon-go – fully „smartified" food market as a pioneer

A foretaste of Amazon's vision of the future as an allegedly „smart" handling of our daily affairs is provided by its latest business area. At the beginning of 2017 Amazon opened its first Supermarket that renders cashpoints superfluous - taking the concept to a whole new level. Amazon calls it „*just walk out technology*":

Customers entering the supermarket are registered by an Amazon-app on their Smart phones. The shelves register via pressure and infrared sensors which product has been taken from it or put back onto it. The allocation of what product has been grabbed by which customer is undertaken by a self-learning algorithm that is helped by an army of *tracking*-cameras that include face recognition as well as the calculation of preferences and accesses the individual history of all items bought from Amazon by any individual customer. When the customer leaves the shop the Amazon-app will cashpointless book the sum in question from the customer's account.

Amazon plans to open 2000 of these supermarkets in the US. Does Amazon take on all that technical and financial investment of locating customers and products simply to render cashiers superfluous? No. Although this certainly isn't an „effect" to be underestimated since this branch is the second biggest job provider in the US. With its high-tech supermarket Amazon nevertheless expands its scope of personalised data-analysis of its online service platform onto the (previously) offline shopping-world. Apart from tightly-focused advertisements and data processing for insurance companies and other paying clients this is a crucial requirement to introduce individual prices. Retailers have already announced that in the medium term beer for instance will not only be more expensive in the evening than during the day, but everybody will pay an individual price for it. The idea is to find out who will be willing to pay what price at what time for a specific product.

Amazon merely gives the instruments in a particularly consequent manner. German retail has also promised individual prices and wants to get rid of annoying anonymous cash.

Amazon considers to rent the early-on patented self-learning high-tech supermarkets (similar to its fastest growing branch of business, web services) including data management to other participants of the business branch. After Amazon has roughed up completely the world of online sales and thereby the

book-trade, the publishing industry, and a lot of other branches, and has rebuilt them under its destructive predominance, the company now advances to become the radical mastermind and trendsetter in classic retail.

Amazon's algorithmisation of more and more areas of life – far beyond working conditions - provides a rather bleak outlook on the future of so-called "smart cities" in which social participation will be linked to the ability to account for convincing *timeline*-data. Those who are declared „not creditworthy" will be excludes. Barred from the shopping mall, the housing-market in the centre of cities, from attractive jobs, from further educational opportunities and advanced health insurance, …

Advanced incapacitation by language assistants

Amazon's technocratic power-seeking is expressed in many of its innovations. Since 2016 Amazon's digital assistant Alexa is offered around here in a gadget called „Echo" that possesses a loud-speaker, highly sensitive microphones, a processor and wireless LAN. The user has the gadget somewhere in his living-room and can talk via Alexa to the internet. Apart from the disturbing fact that Amazon's artificial neuronal networks for voice and speech identification are listening in permanently („to optimise the self-learning system") and react to calls, there is another simple difference to conventional interaction with the internet:

Research done with a search engine provides the user with a list of results from which he can make a choice. The algorithm of the search engine determines the sequence of results and thereby already allows a considerable guidance of the user. Alexa on the other hand will provide only *one single answer* to any searching request made. Perhaps it will be one from the search engine Bing, perhaps from wikipedia, or perhaps from the highest-bidding client, in any case 'Alexa's verdict will be taken for granted – without any further option offered.

Voice control enables a new closer relation between humans and machines and it will change the balance of power. If voice becomes the interface of everyday life then communicating computer assistants will be a kind of universal operating system. The interface of the smart fully capitalised future is an open ear. To those who occupy it not only a world market will be opened up to, but an enormous opportunity of control and manipulation. Amazon jumps in and offers it's voice identification as a free service in the cloud to other software developers to quickly advance to become the standard agreed on. Its greatest competitor tries to win market segments with its equally eaves-dropping assistant *Google Home*.

Destroying Amazon's vision of the future!

We should understand and attack the transformation from Orwell's controlling modernism to the more subtle steering postmodernism. Its *seductive power* is less obvious, distributed to several private economical agents and infuses us more profoundly as the *prescriptive power* of classic surveillance by the state. We see ourselves confronted with a massive technological attack on our lives. It tries to transform us into smartly interwoven citizens 4.0. The conditions of this interconnectedness are determined by misanthropists and technocrats like Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos.

- *against the algorithmisation of work and life*
- *against the compulsion for smartification in fear of being left behind*
- *autonomy instead of intrusive heteronomy basking in would-be self-realisation*

friends of autonomy