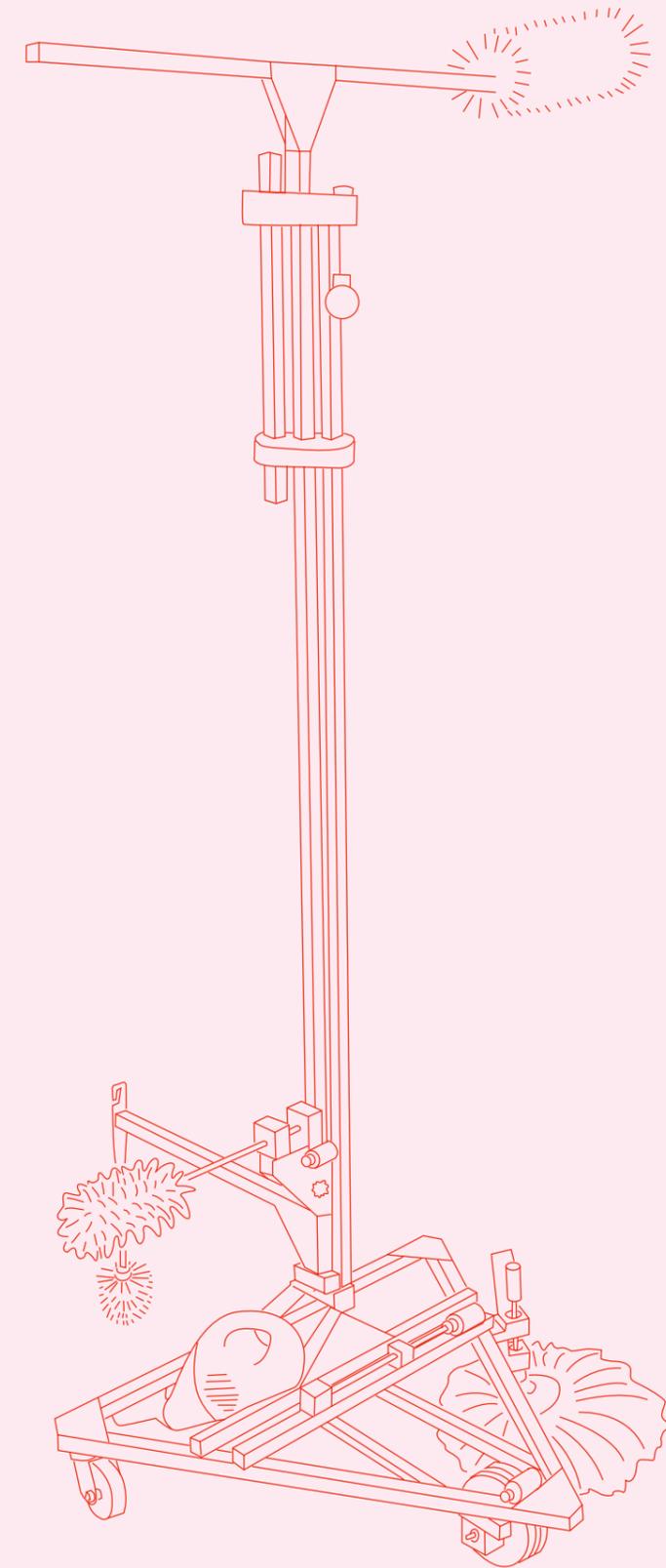


WHAT DO
YOU DO?

From Labour to Work



Designing the Transition.
Ottonie von Roeder 2017

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With the inexorable progress currently being made in technological and digital development, labour is continuously and increasingly subject to automation, subsequently leading to a discourse around an alleged impending crisis of our culture. However, rather than facing this challenge as a threat, we could alternatively treat this trend as an opportunity to rethink labour and transform it into a notion of work, a free activity performed outside of the boundaries of employment. The following text takes us on a journey through just this transition of perception.

This project reflects on our labour-centred culture, attempts of liberation from labour and the consequent cultural challenges. It explores ways of shaping this transition collectively and aims to trigger a corporate discussion to co-create our future.

Labour means everything to us. It is so deeply embedded in our culture that it seems dangerous to question it. At the same time, we are facing a rapid automation of labour that forces us to re-think the common purpose, value and social organisation of labour. It allows us to create a transition from labour to work, from an activity we mainly sell in order to satisfy our basic needs in terms of food and shelter towards an activity we deliberately choose for benefits such as social interaction, participation and self-development. The main challenge of this transition is to overcome our poverty of desire. We must discover what we would like to do with our free time if we no longer had to work in order to satisfy our basic needs.

Liberate from labour, free to work! This thesis aims to take the reader on an exploration of the transformation of labour. It explains the progress of automation, its foreseen impact on society and the chance to turn it into an opportunity for cultural change. It reveals why the abolition of labour is desirable and how it could allow us to overcome existing power structures and the alienation of labour, our day-to-day activity. A post-labour future is considered, the tools to generate the said transition are explored, and possible responses to the emerging cultural and social difficulties are presented. It introduces the motivation and aim of my design proposal as a response to the crisis of labour.

When embarking on an expedition, the explorer usually not only needs to open up to a new way of thinking but must also prepare him- or herself with all necessary equipment for the adventure. It is important to understand your own culture to be open-minded towards the culture that is to be discovered. But it is also recommended to inform yourself thoroughly before stepping into an entirely unknown terrain, to research the beauties and the possible dangers, to embrace the differences and to detect the similarities to the known. This thesis provides the needed guide to prepare for non-labour, an unfamiliar adventure to come.



DHL Parcelcopter.
DHL Germany 2013 (fig.01)



Lexus RX450h. Google 2012 (fig.02)



YuMi.ABB Robotics 2015 (fig.03)



Watson AI. IBM 2011 (fig.04)



Ekso GT™ Robotic Exoskeleton. Ekso Bionics 2013 (fig.05)



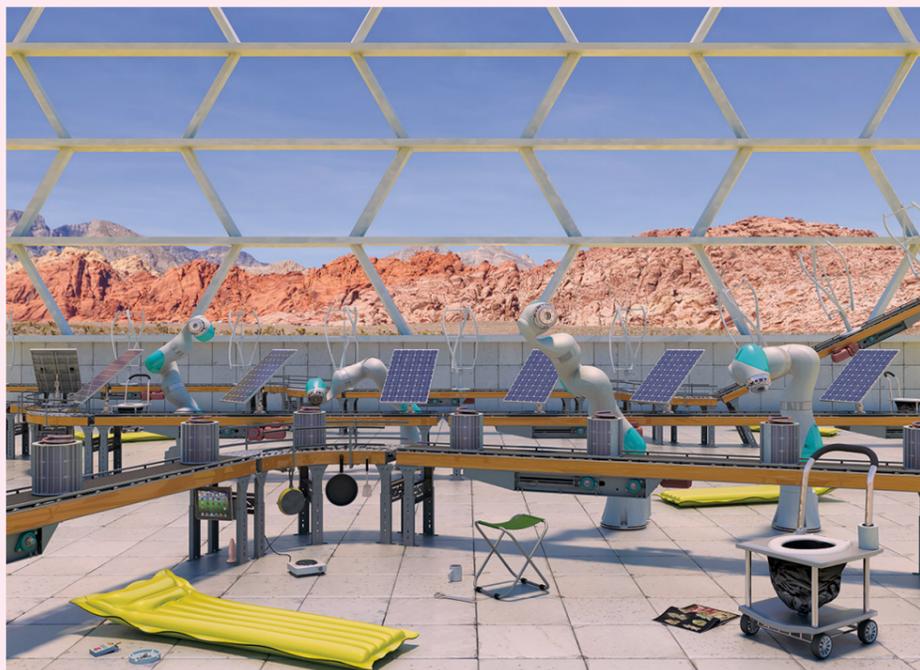
Automated Warehouse. Amazon 2014 (fig.06)

Currently, we find ourselves amidst a technological revolution. Robots are progressively performing jobs previously conducted by humans; this will fundamentally transform our lives. According to researchers, 47 up to 80 percent of current jobs are likely to be automatable within the next twenty years.² To calculate the susceptibility to automation of each task, researchers at Oxford University consider nine essential skills required to perform labour – “social perceptiveness, negotiation, persuasion, assisting and caring for others, originality, fine arts, finger dexterity, manual dexterity and the need to work in a cramped workspace.”³

Experts talk about a “second machine age” that is brought about by currents of automation. In 1970 there were 1000 robots employed globally in the industrial sector and in 2014 this figure reached over 1.6 million industrial robots worldwide.⁴ The present development of automation is based on algorithmic improvements, rapid evolution of robotics and exponential progress in computational power. The actual state of automating technology involves both routine and non-routine tasks. Through the advancement in robotics, technology can perform better than humans at a broad variety of manual labour tasks while sophisticated communication technologies create computers that are better at specific skilled-knowledge tasks.⁵

Robot technology – drones, care robots, self-driving cars, intelligent algorithms, exoskeletons, automated warehouses or cooperating industrial robots amongst others – are becoming part of our daily lives and are changing them substantially. Automation incorporates every component of the economy – data collection, new means of production, services, decision-making, financial allocation and, especially, distribution and logistics. It will therefore transform the distribution of labour radically.⁶ Also, it leads to a substantial diminution in demand for workers as automation promises tremendous progress in productivity.⁷ Since the manufacturing employment culminated in 1979, the US lost 7 million factory jobs while factory output more than doubled over the same period.⁸ Through the enhancement of technology productivity rose, which has resulted in a tremendous increase in profitability per worker in the last 50 years. In 1960 General Motors was the most profitable company worldwide, employing 600,000 people and generating an annual profit of \$7.6 billion, in Dollars today. Currently, the most profitable company is Apple, holding 92,600 employees and boasting a profit of \$89.9 billion in 2015. If we compare General Motors and Apple, the profitability per worker multiplied by a factor of 76.65 since 1960.⁹ A further example is provided in Foxconn, the largest contract electronics manufacturer globally who succeeded to reduce the workforce of one plant near Shanghai from 110,000 to 50,000 people and is planning to automate a third of its overall positions by 2020.¹⁰

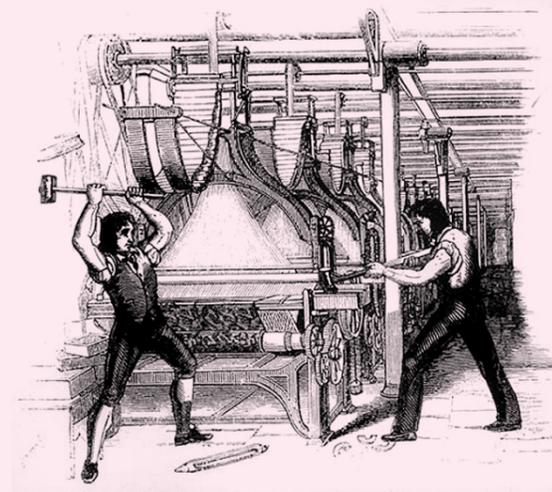
While these trends are observable, there are also limits to the development of full automation due to economic, technological and ethical reasons. Robots are only developed if the costs of equivalent human labour exceed the expenses of the machines and if it is, therefore, profitable to invest into the development of robotics. The more difficult it is to break down standardized tasks, the more expensive automation becomes, approaching the unfeasible.¹¹ But if wages for human labour rise, as it is currently the case in Chinese production plants, the economic incentives for automation increase. And if, due to automation, the value we attribute to human labour should shift, today's less attractive jobs would have to be better paid and would, therefore, more likely be automated. This process would be reinforced by a political shift towards an Unconditional Basic Income or a post-labour society.



Going Green. Shawn Maximo 2016 (fig. 07)

fig. 01

The scene shows a production hall with autonomous robots working on a production line while in the foreground we see scattered camping equipment devoid of humans. Shawn Maximo's vision questions the role of the people in a post-industrial scenario.¹



**Destruction of a loom.
Luddites 1812 (fig. 08)**

From a historic perspective, human jobs are not endangered for the first time due to this technological development – the “threat of a jobless future” is an old one. In the late 16th century, Queen Elizabeth I. refused to grant the patent for the first vestigial knitting machine invented by William Lee due to her concerns about putting hand-knitters out of work. Later, in the early 19th century, a more sophisticated version of the knitting machine was developed. At that time, the Luddite movement, a group of English textile workers and weavers, protested against a threatening social pauperization due to industrialisation. They destroyed weaving machinery and looted textile mills in northern England as a form of protest.¹²

Each wave of technological development in the past has displaced a specific cast of workers. But new industries also created new types of jobs – “employment migrated from farms and mills to factories and offices to cubicles and call centres.”¹³ Even if technology eliminates jobs, new jobs could be created by a sufficiently growing demand.¹⁴ 1500 new kinds of jobs have arisen since the introduction of the computer.¹⁵ But according to experts, the current wave of automation and technological progress is running such a speed that a significant amount of our society will not be able to keep up with the necessary skills. Through the rapid development, entire parts of our population might become obsolete regarding labour. Even though new industries might emerge, these will increasingly require less and less labour due to the widening scope of applications of technology.¹⁶ Today's leading companies, such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, don't require jobs at the level that classic firms like Ford or General Motors did. On average, new businesses create 40% fewer jobs than they did twenty years ago.¹⁷

If the current developments and our prevailing system remain unchanged, we will be facing a social crisis in developed economies. Precariousness will increase, mainly for those whose jobs can be automated, and a corresponding extension of compensatory jobs could be doubtful.¹⁸ An undesirable dystopia could become a reality – an economy in which all automating technology is owned and operated by 1% of the population, while the remaining 99% would either be unemployed or could do the left-overs of non-automatable labour.

These are threatening thoughts about an automated future but I believe that we as a society must shape this future through the choices we make. We can observe a tendency to believe that technological advancements take on a life of their own but too often we forget that it is us humans who are controlling our political, economic and social systems that will define whether this wave of automation will have a positive or negative impact on our lives. As our global economy is becoming ever less able to produce enough jobs, we cannot continue to depend on employment for our living.

fig. 09

The animation film imagines a similar dystopian future. In the scenario, all human labour has been eliminated and is now the task of computers or robots. For now, the protagonist still has a job, accompanying her on her way to the office one is confronted with the price of this “brave new world”: growing inequality, slums, people left behind by the pace of progress, and the problem of providing for a population condemned to idleness. It raises the question whether a society without employment is desirable and how we would have to design a transition towards an automated future to prevent the mentioned societal problems.¹⁹



The Last Job on Earth.

Moth Collective and Box of Toys Audio Ltd. 2016 (fig. 09)

Instead of seeing the automation of labour as a threat, I suggest to embrace it as an opportunity to re-negotiate the value of labour and work and to liberate ourselves from the necessity of labour in order to prevent a dystopian future.

We should see the before mentioned forecasts about the automation of labour as a catalyser of a political project towards a labour-free future. This does not mean an idle or work-free future but a decrease of exploitative labour and an expansion of our abilities to do self-guided work. This could include any kind of activity such as more education, creative work or time with one's family. Ideally automation and a new social system will liberate us from the coercion of wage labour. If our basic economic needs were be satisfied, we might increasingly dedicate our energies to non-economic purposes. This shift could initiate an economy in which we would value access over ownership, collaboration and co-creation over competition and transparency over privacy and abolish the current closed system of scarcity originated by capitalism.

The automation of labour challenges us to imagine a world in which our job no longer determines our character, identity, social lives and income. What comes after labour? What would you do without your job as a social imperative, the external discipline and organisation of your waking life?

Most significantly, the impending end of work creates the intellectual opportunity to question what it means to be human. How could technology help us to define human nature? How would humanity transform if leisure becomes a fundamental right of humankind rather than an ancient privilege of the elite? These imageries seem closer than ever as the technological infrastructure is generating the resources to enable a new economic, political and cultural system. The following chapter will give an insight into our obsolete relation to labour and the challenges of a liberation from employment. Furthermore, it will also elaborate on why the emancipation towards increasing autonomy is desirable.

WHAT DO YOU
LIKE TO DO
AFTER YOUR
WORKING
HOURS?

As suggested by Karl Marx, work in its ideal form is the defining activity of humanity. In his opinion, the ability to craft artificial objects and open up a world of new developments distinguishes us from animals.²⁰ In the artistic field, we often use the term “my work” meaning the embodiment of our talent and sensitivity. It can be seen as an expression of our desire to create a long-lasting evidence of our existence. Defining work as a creative activity is problematic when looking at occupations that are, for example, more routine than creative. There is a significant disparity between Marx’ definition of the ideal of work and what is seen as “proper work” in our social context. Domestic work and certain forms of artistic, intellectual or care work are often not categorised as actual work by society, especially when the value of these activities is not measurable regarding social or economic contribution.²¹ In everyday language, we often use the term “work” to distinguish between paid and unpaid activity. In the common cultural understanding in modern capitalism work is an activity carried out for a wage.

As opposed to this the philosopher Hannah Arendt distinguishes between work and labour. She argues that since ancient times there has been a semantic difference between the two words. Arendt describes that “every European language [...] contains two etymologically unrelated words for what we have to come to think of as the same activity, and retains them in the face of their persistent synonymous usage.” Whereas “in all these cases, only the equivalents for ‘labour’ have a connotation to pain and trouble.”²² Labour is necessary for self-preservation and reproduction of the species. It never reaches an end and its output is consumed quickly so there is always the need to produce more. Labour is a cyclical, repeated and partly futile process. In the ancient world labour was performed by slaves whereas today everyone is defined by their labour. As jobholders, we must perform our jobs to meet our needs. Work, on the other hand, has a clearly defined beginning and end. The output of work is a durable object that becomes part of the world we live in and is not consumed. In this thesis, I will follow Hannah Arendt’s definition to build upon the necessary distinction between the two, even if there are still certain overlapping areas, arguing for a transformation of labour to work.

“It’s eight o’clock in the morning.
When you come out it will be dark.
The sun will not shine for you today.”²³



**La classe operaia va in paradiso.
Elio Petri 1971 (fig. 10)**

This slogan is from the movie *La classe operaia va in paradiso* by Elio Petri that plays during the Italian Autonomist movement in the 1960s and 70s. It was shouted in the morning to hundreds of workers on their way into the factory for another day of repetitive and dangerous labour. The slogan illustrates what the Autonomists were fighting for – greater freedom and equality within labour, but also the right of workers to have a richer life beyond their job. They protested against wasted time, lack of variety and excessive administration of life under capitalism. They fought for the right to feel the sun on their skin, to play, and to develop interests and skills outside the factory.²⁴ At the time, a range of social critics, such as André Gorz or the Frankfurt School, raised similar concerns in a more emancipatory manner. They supported a vision of social progress based on a reduction of labour and an expansion of free time. They proposed that it would give people more time and energy for their self-development, without denying the pleasures and importance of productive activity. They have caused provocation through highlighting time for politics, contemplation, conviviality and spontaneous enjoyment, which had been abolished by the capitalist focus on commercial production and consumption.²⁵ But the criticism of labour has a much longer tradition.

“Nature has created neither shoemaker nor smith; such occupations degrade the people who practise them: low workers, miserable nameless beings who by their position are already debarred from political rights. The tradesmen being accustomed to lies and deception will be considered only as a necessary evil in the community, the citizen who degrades himself by commercial business shall be punished for such transgression. If convicted, he shall be sentenced to one year in prison. For every repetition of the offence, his punishment shall be doubled.”²⁶

In Plato’s utopian society, the ideal republic described above, labour is abominated and attacked as something unnatural and evil. The ancient Greeks saw labour as a curse, a basic and menial activity. Because it symbolised necessity – the human enslavement by the physical need for survival – it was condemned and not an exercise that free people should perform. The Greeks had slaves to work instead, while the dignified citizens were concerned with politics, art and quiet contemplation.²⁷ Paul Lafargue joined the ranks of those criticising labour and established the link to the ancient perception of labour:

“A strange mania governs the working class of all countries in which capitalist civilisation rules, a mania that results in the individual and collective misery that prevails in modern society. This is the love of work, the furious mania for work, extending to the exhaustion of the individual and his descendants. The parsons, the political economists, and the moralists, instead of contending against this mental aberration, have canonised work. Blind and limited human beings, they have wished to be wiser than their God; weak and unworthy creatures, they have sought to honour what their God has damned.”²⁸

Bob Black defines a worker as a “part-time slave”: a boss tells him or her “when to show up, when to leave, and what to do in the meantime. [...]how much work to do and how fast.”²⁹ 95% of all Americans working do heteronomous labour, their obligation to perform a predefined job with little variation kills the ludic potential work has. Black compares the modern workplace with police states and their systems of control, surveillance, authority and hierarchy. As Foucault shows, prisons and factories emerged at about the same time and borrowed from each other’s control techniques. These are motivations for Bob Black to demand an abolition of labour – quantitatively by cutting down on the amount of labour and qualitatively by taking what remains useful and by transforming it into pleasurable and playful activities.³⁰

“No one should ever work.

Work is the source of nearly all the misery in the world. Almost any evil you’d care to name comes from working or from living in a world designed for work. In order to stop suffering, we have to stop working. That doesn’t mean we have to stop doing things. It does mean creating a new way of life based on play;”³¹

Kathi Weeks is taking up with the critiques mentioned above. She challenges the naturalised presupposition of labour including a Marxist and feminist perspective. She suggests a post-labour society that would enable people to be creative and productive rather than mercilessly bound to the relations of employment:³²

“If hard work were really such a great thing, the rich would have kept it all to themselves.”³³

All these critics stand in line with a long tradition of questioning labour. Reading them tells us about desire. They remind us how time could be spent differently, in contrast to our current education system that mainly socialises the youth for a future job. While social critics usually discuss important issues such as payment inequalities or working conditions, the moral status of labour itself is rarely questioned. Less still, are questions about what society could look like if it was not constrained by the demands of labour.

We live in a labour-centred society, in different senses. Labour is our primary mechanism to generate income. Therefore it is central for the access to material necessities, like food, shelter, clothing, as well as commercial entertainment. The amount of time we spend working visualises the importance of labour – including the time we prepare for, travel to and from, train for, search for and think about work. For most people work is the main centre of social life outside their families. Since World War II the time devoted to labour in the United States has generally expanded – throughout society, the time spent at jobs has increased. Even though women joined the workforce the amount of individual working hours per week has stayed the same since 1945.³⁴

Labour is one of the most conventional and readily available ways for social participation. And it marks the passage to adulthood. It provides independence and a reputable adult life in which there is not much space for youthful ambitions or playfulness. Cultivating employability from a young age, we manifest the connection between identity and occupation at an early stage of our lives. The primary purpose of our education is to socialise young people to successfully adopt a pre-defined work role. Affluent societies usually measure achievement through labour. “What do you do?” – meaning “What job do you perform?” – is often the starting question of a conversation with a stranger. And clumsy euphemisms like “waste and sanitation management” (describing the work of a bin man) or “being between jobs” (if unemployed) show how occupations are indicators of social status. Labour is successfully promoted as the centre point around which identities are formed, it is seen as a medium of personal fulfilment and growth and designed as a tool to gain respect and social recognition.³⁵ If labour is a central source of sociality, belonging, status and rights, it is essential to understand its social and historical construction.

The attitude towards labour plays an essential role in the discussion around labour. Therefore it is necessary to mention Max Weber’s classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* published in 1904. His analysis focuses on the cultural forces that facilitated the formation of capitalism, emphasising the historically emerging nature of the modern attachment to labour. Weber compares the modern with the pre-capitalist society, which tolerated labour as long as it was necessary. According to Weber, the typical attitude was to earn as much money as needed for a modest life with a minimum effort. The top priority was rather to protect free time than to increase financial reward.³⁷ He argues that this pre-capitalist orientation to labour transformed through the rise of a “Protestant Ethic” which approved of labour as a virtuous end in itself. Weber sees the Reformation as the origin of the ethical commitment to labour, which taught to seek salvation through a dedication to labour. Under this religious morality, zealously working is regarded as a vocation or spiritual calling but financial rewards were not supposed to finance periods of idleness or enjoyment. Weber also discussed the teachings of John Calvin that success in labour was a sign of God’s grace. Commitment to labour was, in Calvin’s opinion, a method of calming personal fears about the threat of eternal damnation. These religious teachings and moral ideas raised labour to the status of an ethical imperative. According to Weber, the puritan values do not remain a conscious source of motivation for workers today but stimulated a legacy of rational organisation. The “idyllic state”, where work was undertaken as a spiritual vocation, became, after all, a “bitter, competitive struggle”³⁸. This process of rationalisation generated the “spirit of capitalism”, and the morality of labour had become incorporated in the framework of capitalist societies.³⁹ The well-known quote from the ethical writings of Benjamin Franklin illustrates Weber’s theory of the Protestant work ethic:

“Remember that Time is Money. He that can earn Ten Shillings a Day by his Labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that Day, tho’ he spends but Sixpence during his Diversion or Idleness, ought not to reckon That the only Expence; he has really spent or rather thrown away Five Shillings besides.”⁴⁰

The importance of productivity and material accumulation in our culture shapes our labour-centred society. It is illustrated by the way we measure the progress of a country. Economic growth and life satisfaction are conventionally treated as one; both measured via the metric of GDP, gross domestic product, per capita. GDP indicates and quantifies a country’s overall economic activity. While economic growth is crucial for less developed countries, the value of GDP growth as a social goal or an index of progress should be questioned in more affluent societies. In January 2017 at the World Economic Forum in Davos a new figure for well-being to replace the usage of GDP as an indicator was discussed. The WEF states in “The Inclusive Growth and Development Report 2017” that an alternative measurement method for national economic performance is needed. GDP should be replaced by the Inclusive Development Index (IDI).⁴¹

Aristotle suggested that we flourish when living justly, wisely and in harmony with the world. In his concept of *eudaimonia* a sense of well-being is achieved – through sensory pleasure, but also good health, security, companionship, autonomy, the feeling of being respected, socially recognised and connected with the community and the environment. He states that these aspects are important as humans are sensing bodies and ethical, social and creative beings.⁴² Spurring economic growth and seeing material gain as the route to prosperity is anti-Aristotelian and will not lead us to a state of well-being and *eudaimonia*. Therefore an alternative way of measuring progress like the IDI is one step towards a cultural shift and necessary.

When re-evaluating work and labour, we need to discuss the experience of labour itself. Labour is the main way we acquire an income, create an identity, contribute to society and make social connections. But for many it has become an unreliable source of such credits. Therefore labour is experienced as meaningless and tiring, performed mainly out of necessity.⁴³ Karl Marx describes this experience as the “alienation” from labour.⁴⁴ This phenomenon is caused partially through the division of labour, he argues. Shrinking the area of responsibility to a narrow task does not allow the worker to have a meaningful relationship to the product of his labour.⁴⁵ The engineer Frederick Taylor developed the optimisation of efficient production, called Taylorism, at the end of the nineteenth century. It perfected the moving assembly line of Henry Ford but also created significant mental costs for the factory workers. Charlie Chaplin satirised the condemnation to act as interchangeable units of labour in his film *Modern Times* in 1939. To keep in pace with the speed and the precision of the machines, Chaplin was forced to transform himself into one.⁴⁶

Alienation from labour has not disappeared. This is not only illustrated at production sites but also call centres or warehouses. An undercover reporter writes about the working conditions at the megastore Amazon:

“We are machines, we are robots, we plug our scanner in, we’re holding it, but we might as well be plugging it into ourselves”⁴⁷



Modern Times.
Charlie Chaplin 1936 (fig. 11)

fig. 12

In his photo story about contemporary China Edward Burtynsky reveals how mass production is organised. In this 450-metre assembly hall of the Cankun Factory, the world’s second-largest manufacturer of coffee machines with 23.000 employees at the time the photograph was taken, we see hundreds of workers. They all wear the same clothing, occupy similar workspaces, and perform nearly identical operations. The photographs show how people become machines to some degree even before machines replace them.⁴⁸



Manufacturing # 10ab, Cankun Factory, Xiamen City, China.
Edward Burtynsky 2005 (fig. 12)

But furthermore, there is a new form of alienation that is not created through the elimination of human qualities but the incorporation and exploitation of these characteristics. The so-called “emotional labour”⁴⁹ is most apparently performed in the service industry, in which the management of emotions is essential for the job. Service workers are always asked to either repress or induce feelings to maintain the outer performance that creates the right state of mind in others.⁵⁰ Through immaterial forms of labour, it gets more and more difficult to quantify the output of employees. They are increasingly measured by their “character”. A good employee masters the social norms of professionalism, shows commitment, enthusiasm and conformation with the aims of the organisation.⁵⁰ Management guides state that employees are more productive and give more of themselves when they are happy and free to be themselves.⁵² When the staff is encouraged to “be themselves”, we can assume that this right to “be yourself” does not include being unhappy or negative. Elements of fun and enjoyment give the workers a superficial form of freedom but do not allow real influence over the labour process. The humanization of the working day might make ethically dubious labour pleasurable on a superficial level but does not necessarily serve humane purposes. In a capitalist context, the supply of rewarding tasks is rather determined by the company’s quest for profit than the human need for attractive work.⁵³

Certainly, we have to acknowledge that labour nevertheless can be enjoyable and pleasant. However, alienation remains one source of today's misery. Globally only 13% of people describe their job as engaging.⁵⁴ This calls for a reconsideration of our working culture, liberating us from being working machines.



fig. 13

The project deals with today's pressure and need to perform in an efficient and productive way in our daily life. Here the absurdity of multitasking and society's expectations is shown in a fictive workplace installation. The tube installation implicates to care for the worker by offering a workout facility, food and coffee, head massages and a pillow for power naps. But as soon the pedals are turned the repetition and speed of the installation drive one mad.

fig. 14

Dream Factory was a performance in a small factory set up. For 36 hours we put ourselves into the position of workers in a production line of candles as souvenirs. While two of us were producing one was sleeping, every 6 hours we changed our position. Our performance followed a set of rules that served the production output alone. A live video stream and the people watching us controlled and maintained our efficiency and duty to obey. Our goal was to produce the amount of 2160 candles. This was supposed to force us to follow the cadence of one candle per 2.5 minutes. We managed to produce only 216 candles during the same time. The performance transformed our factory into a big vending machine that sold our candles. The candles have the shapes of our busts, by using the candle you burn the worker. Through this act, we question our practice, the relationship between production and consumers and today's mass production.

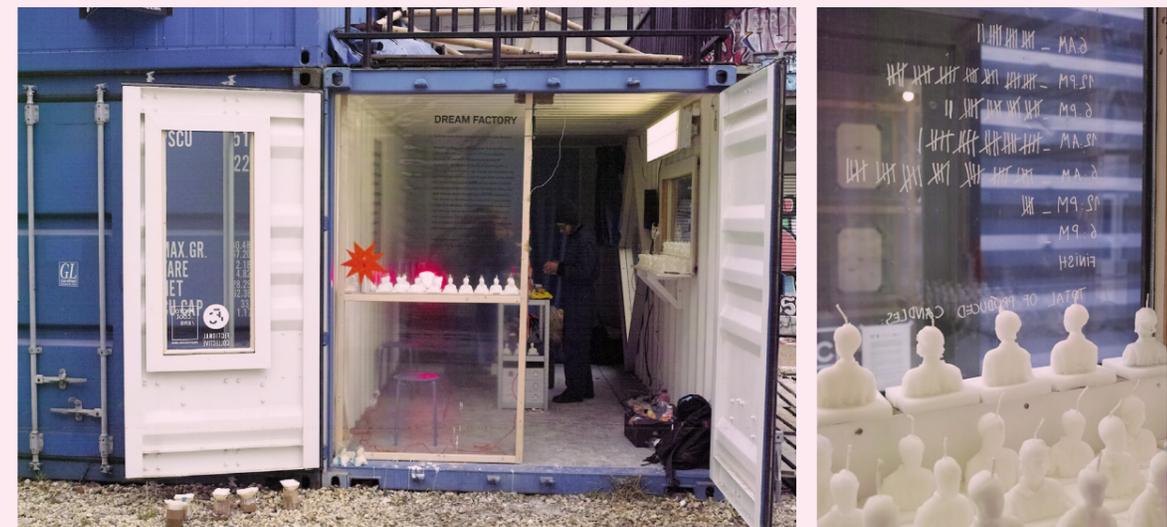
360° 24h Assistant.
Ottonie von Roeder 2015 (fig. 13)

Nevertheless, work and labour can be a great source of enjoyment and achievement. It brings satisfaction, for example in getting things done and using one's hands. Even if the content of a job is meaningless, it can still be enjoyed or valued as an opportunity to escape from constrictions of the private life.

“Work provides an escape from the narrowness and stifling conformity of the domestic unit or village community, a way of meeting people from other places with whom relationships can be freer, less familiar, than with those who first and foremost see you as daughter or daughter-in-law, sister or cousin, and tie you to a carefully regulated world where everyone must keep to their allotted place”⁵⁵

Feminism has partly on this basis fought for women's right to work.⁵⁶ The meaning of escape through a job is something the journalist Leslie T. Chang discovered in her field research in Dongguan, a factory city in the south of China. The female assembly line workers she interviewed left their rural homes to the city to earn money, learn news skills and see something of the world.⁵⁷ Certainly, these aspects have to be taken into account when questioning labour. Nevertheless, organisational aspects of labour can eliminate the feeling of enjoyment or empowerment. In affluent societies where our basic needs can be met, satisfaction, achievement and escape do not need to be sought inside the boundaries of wage labour but rather fulfilled through alternatives to labour. Mariarosa Della Costa and Selma James asked women in the 1970s to resist the legend of liberation through labour:

“Slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink.”⁵⁸



Dream Factory.
Aram Lee, Anais Borie and Ottonie von Roeder 2016 (fig. 14)

Work without Wage

Once talking about the causes of alienation from labour, it is important to include the concept of wages. Wage labour and today's understanding of unemployment are inventions of capitalism. In pre-capitalist times of subsistence farming, peasants were self-sufficient, working for somebody else was not necessary in order to survive. Capitalism altered this through the process of "primitive accumulation" – pre-capitalist workers were expropriated from their land and means of subsistence. They became the "proletariat" that required wage labour, selling their labour power for survival.⁵⁹

Since most of us today sell our labour power to live, it is important to question the effects of incentives like wage on our motivation to work. Psycho-analysts discovered an overjustification effect that eventuates when an expected external incentive, such as money or prizes, lower somebody's intrinsic motivation to perform a task. Offering a reward to a previously unrewarded activity creates a shift towards an extrinsic motivation and weakens the prior intrinsic motivation. Once the reward is not offered anymore the interest in the activity is lost, and in order to maintain the activity, extrinsic rewards must be offered continuously.⁶⁰ This effect was shown in field studies with children's activities like drawing⁶¹ but also within the working environment. Conditional rewards like a salary that is paid for completing a task are experienced as control and therefore have a negative effect on intrinsic motivation. One study executed in a non-profit organisation documented that the introduction of a merit pay program decreased intrinsic motivation and feelings of autonomy. Another study discovered that pay-for-performance plans lead to a lower well-being of blue-collar workers, in particular for the ones that described their jobs as monotonous.⁶²

This idea triggers the question of what would happen if wage and labour were separated. The concept of a Universal Basic Income could provide this shift on an economical and social level.

Labour for Free

Activities, thoughts and behaviours related to our occupation fill our leisure time. Around 20% of the UK workforce regularly work unpaid extra hours, within these 20% an average of 7.7 hours per week.⁶³

"The only thing 'free' about so-called free time is that it doesn't cost the boss anything."⁶⁴

But even if we leave the office we are still working. The possibility to always be connected through communication technology has had a tremendous effect on today's plugged-in workers, who perceive the pressure to always be available, present and responsive even if out of the office.⁶⁵ According to Theodor Adorno, free time is not free at all as long as it is shaped by the forces that people are attempting to escape. It often has a similar quality to labour and is a "continuation of the forms of profit-orientated social life"⁶⁶ But also when unemployed we are not free from labour as job seeking is itself a form of labour. Whether looking for a job, studying or building up a career, we are always working on our employability – improving prospects by training, collecting educational certifications, establishing and fostering a network, learning how to present the right type of personality, and acquiring life experiences matching to the demands of employers.⁶⁷ The idea of employability occupies even school children and illustrates the condition we are living in. In addition, we have to speak about what André Gorz calls "generalised insecurity". Today's society is always aware of the possibility of being unemployed, under-employed, subject to insecure or temporary employment.⁶⁸ A re-evaluation of the current work-dogma could free us from this social condition of generalised insecurity.

When criticising labour and suggesting an abolition or reduction of labour we also have to take into account the moral objections to such ideas. When shorter working hours started to seem realistically possible in the United States in the 1920s, business leaders convinced people that paid employment is a human need through a pro-labour propaganda, documented by Benjamin Hunnicutt:

“They spoke of work as a ‘joy’, a ‘critical factor of human evolution’, a ‘wonder’, a ‘dignity’, ‘the American secret’, a cure of ‘that tired feeling’ and ‘mental fatigue’, the ‘developer of character’, an ‘adventure’, a ‘form of play but better’, a ‘source of spiritual inspiration’, and the creator of ‘saints of the workshop’.”⁶⁹

Regarding this not much has changed in the last 40 years. We live in a society in which holding a job is the ideal route to self-actualisation and self-development and is commonly perceived as a sign of independence, maturity and good character. While hard working expresses a proper way of living and proof of the dedication to the prosperity of one’s nation, non-labour is still demonised.

“We are building a country for those who work and want to get on. And we are saying to each and every hard-working person in our country: we are on your side ... This is a government for hard-working people, and that’s the way it will stay.”⁷⁰

Prior to his commitment to the “hard-working people”, the former British prime minister Cameron portrayed benefit claimants as wasters, “sitting on their sofas waiting for their benefits to arrive”⁷¹. While facing mass unemployment caused by automation, we have to question the virtue of labour as a foundation for solidarity and social inclusion.

And everybody from left to right proposes agendas addressing the breakdown of the labour market by supporting full employment in assumption that having a job is naturally a good thing and can feed the worker. The current unemployment rate (currently around 6% in the US) does not mean that all the employed people can live from what they earn. 25% of US-American employees live below the poverty line because of low wages. To cross the official poverty line you would have to make \$10 per hour working a 40-hour week but with the current minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour that is impossible.⁷²

People believe that labour is a medicine. The UK government declares that working “leads to better physical and mental health”⁷³ and promotes “a better quality of life [...] allowing people to make the most of their potential.”⁷⁴ The ideal of the positive effects of employment does not take the alienating, health-damaging effects of poor-quality jobs into account. Field studies about the experiences of unemployed people suggest that it is not the absence of a job that creates misery but the feeling of redundancy.⁷⁵ Losing a job may be a personal disaster. But employment itself partly even holds the responsibility for the negativity of joblessness. It leaves people in some cases only with little social and personal resources to default to. In today’s capitalism, paid labour has become equivalent to a notion of public life. Therefore it is hard to imagine other ways than labour to escape the isolation of a private existence.⁷⁶ That is why we have to disconnect income from labour and develop new paths to earning respect as a citizen and to satisfying our human needs outside of employment.

WHAT IF
A ROBOT
COULD DO
YOUR JOB?

Work certainly includes the opportunity for creativity, collaboration and satisfaction. It lets us participate in society in economic and social terms. Work can be a form of escape and the gate to autonomy. That is what drove the feminist movement to fight for the right to work. Work allows us to take responsibility and to fulfil ourselves. But unfortunately, when turned into wage labour, it often lacks these qualities. A transition from labour to work could enhance these ideal qualities and let them flourish.

A fully automated economy, a reduction of the time we spend as employees, a new social and economic system like an unconditional basic income, and most importantly a drastic cultural shift in the understanding of labour and work can achieve a post-labour society.

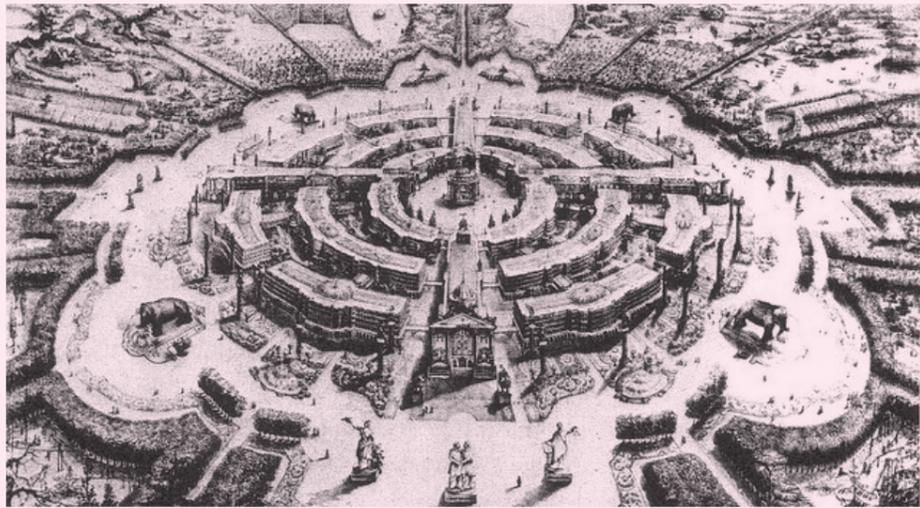
“The goal for the future is full unemployment.”⁷⁷

Machines can progressively produce all essential goods and services and release humans from the effort producing and performing them. The liberation from labour could decrease stress, anxiety and mental health problems induced by neoliberalism. Labour can not be eliminated immediately and entirely but should be increasingly reduced. If therefore the supply of labour were to decrease, the power of workers would increase. It would shift the regular set of values, culture and relations of power.

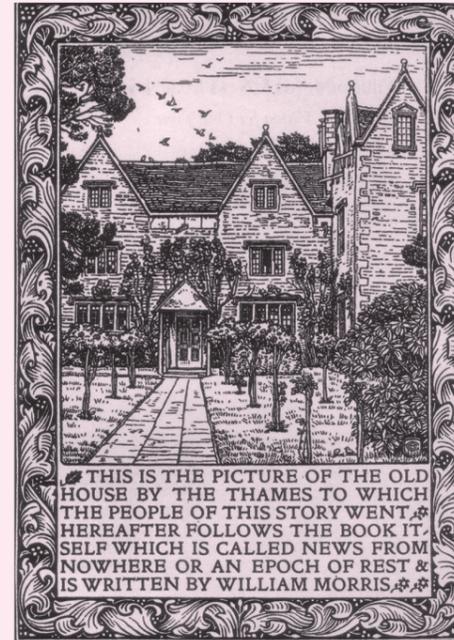
“I think that there is far too much work done in the world”⁷⁸

Paul Lafargue promoted a reduction of labour to just three hours per day already in the 19th century.⁷⁹ Think tanks, such as the Jimmy Reid Foundation and New Foundation, propose a reduction of the working hours. Public opinion polls in the UK present the desire for the reduction and the support of the idea through a majority of the population.⁸⁰ So it should become the goals of trade unions to reduce the working weeks and support job-sharing instead of resisting automation. Our governments should subsidise automation investments and we should start discussing the obsolescence of labour as a societal project. In the following text different ideas to shape the transition are revealed. They are not questioned in detail but are considered as realistic possibilities for a reaction to the automation of labour. This project is developed on the basis of these future ideas.

The question if we could work less – or not at all – in the future and have more time for ourselves has already been asked by various utopian thinkers. Charles Fourier believed in the potential of work to become the primary source of fulfilment and the entire expression of human powers. The divide between his ideal and the real work experiences created through industrial capitalism bothered him. In reaction to his unfortunate reality he developed detailed blueprints of a utopian society called *Harmony*. There, work could be chosen freely and would fill the workers with passion and eagerness. Pleasurable work with a spirit of co-operation and a healthy sense of competition would be the essence of his utopia, as a playful activity, abandoning the need for rest or escape.⁸¹



Utopia. Charles Fourier 19th century (fig. 15)



News from Nowhere.
William Morris 1890
(fig. 16)

Similarly the artist, designer, and socialist pioneer William Morris was interested in the idea of transforming labour into work, a source of pleasure and aesthetic delight. In his novel *News from Nowhere*, he describes a future society based on democratic control and common ownership of the means of production. He imagines a utopian world in which factories are called unified workshops. Work is enjoyable, the products are artistic, and there is no need for earning money. People ally to collectively produce while having fun. “Tremendously improved machines”, today called robots, perform troubling labour and transform labour into something pleasant – in contrast to today’s economization of the workforce seen in mass production. The inexhaustibility of art offers continuous occupation and meaningful work would never fade.⁸²

Also, Karl Marx anticipated the possibility of shorter working hours enabled through machine technologies. Even though to him they represented a tool for degrading labour and control, their enormous productive abilities could generate a reduction of necessary labour, leaving more space for free activities outside of labour.⁸³ But before coming any closer to these imageries we first need to establish a new economic but also cultural and social system.

More than 2000 years ago the Roman Empire had a comparable labour crisis as we are facing it today through the automation of labour and came up with an unusual policy. In 123 BC the Roman landowners had slowly replaced workers with cheap slaves from the colonies, which has led to high unemployment within the Roman population. The population suffered while the production flourished. As a reaction, the politician Gaius Gracchus introduced a policy that was later known as Bread and Circuses, a policy of free grain and entertainment, which resulted in an economic upswing and new stability.⁸⁴ What if we relate this to today's state of labour and replace the Roman landowners with stakeholders and the slaves with robots?

The Bread and Circuses policy of the Roman politicians can be compared with today's idea of a Universal Basic Income. Supporters, like the Swiss-German Initiative Grundeinkommen⁸⁶ or the association Mein Grundeinkommen e.V.⁸⁷, present the Universal Basic Income as a societal possibility to prevent social inequality and mass unemployment due to automation and to stabilise the transition we are facing. The idea is that there would be a steady income provided to every member of society, unconditionally and regardless of age, working status or level of income. This revenue would be enough to cover the costs of basic needs. To earn money on top of this to better one's situation is left to every individual.



Campaign for the Universal Basic Income Referendum in Switzerland. Initiative Grundeinkommen 2016 (fig. 17)

Numerous studies and small-scale try-outs state that it would have no meaningful effect on the incentive to participate in the workforce. But it would spur economic activity, eradicate poverty, encourage a wider audience to take part in the market economy, reduce crime and burdens on health care, lower school dropouts, decrease state bureaucracy, and increase economic productivity and consumption of resources. There are different strategies how a Universal Basic Income could be financed, for example through taxation, redistribution of social welfare payments or revenues from public resources.⁸⁸

As it has been only tested in communities but not on a national level and only for a comprehensible period of time it is not clear what the long-term effects of it would be if implemented as a national policy. But the idea would overrule the current inequality of power between capital and labour, allowing everyone to subsist without a dependency on a job. Separating labour from income enables us to develop an entirely new attitude to work and engages with the increased automation of labour. It requires a re-evaluation of different types of activities, dangerous or tedious tasks would ask for different working conditions or have to be paid better. If therefore the wages for unattractive labour rose, new incentives to automate it would be created. The Universal Basic Income offers an attractive potential economic solution for a post-labour society or the way to get there. The biggest difficulties we are facing might not mainly be economic but political and cultural as working is so profoundly embedded in our identity. Overcoming the huge strain to submit to the work ethic is not an easy task.

fig. 17

In 2016 23% of the Swiss population, 568,905 people voted in the referendum for the implementation of an Universal Basic Income. The results of polls showed that 2% of the asked people would stop to work (while around 33% think that the others would stop to work), 54% would study further, 53% would spend more time with the family, 22% would go into business for oneself, and 35% would consume more sustainably when receiving an unconditional basic income.⁸⁵

fig. 18

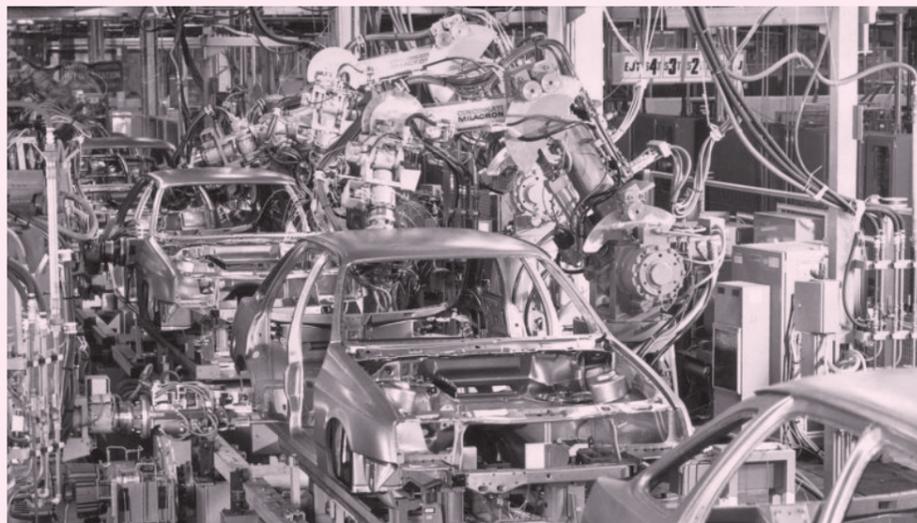
To test and promote a Universal Basic Income Michael Bohmeyer founded the non-profit organisation Mein Grundeinkommen. The organisation crowdfunds campaigns and raffles off basic incomes of 1,000 Euros a month. As soon as 12,000 Euros are gathered, one applicant can receive a basic income for one year. Since 2014 the initiative was able to fund 82 basic incomes and therefore enabled the receivers to focus on their life goals and a meaningful life without existential worries. Mein Grundeinkommen wants to bring the basic income discussion beyond academia into our daily lives.⁸⁹



Mein Grundeinkommen. Michael Bohmeyer 2014 (fig. 18)

Poverty of Desire

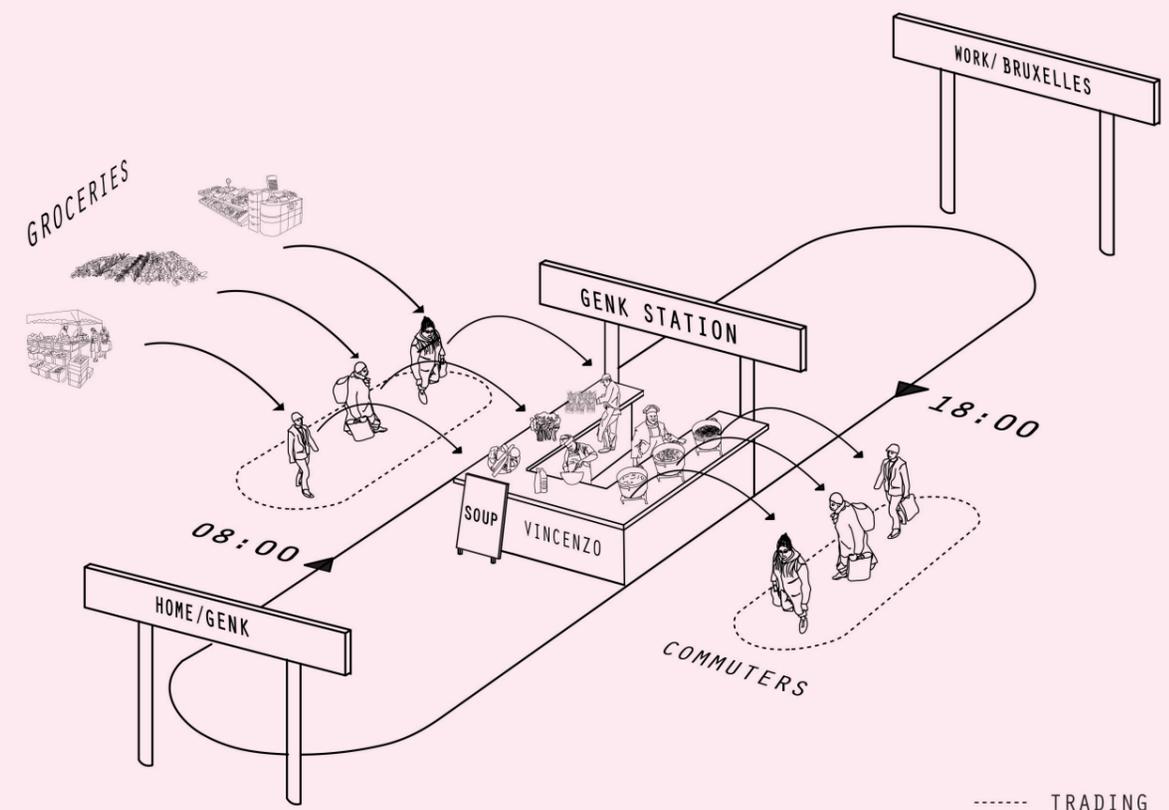
It is interesting to discuss the value and meaning of time outside of a job on an intellectual level. But what does not working mean when it affects us personally and in reality? When in the 1980s due to computerised production in the automotive industry 50% of the jobs of the citizens of the vehicle city Flint in Michigan were endangered the philosophy professor Frithjof Bergmann founded the New Work movement. He introduced the “6 months – 6 months proposal” which suggested to let half of the workers work for half a year and to be busy the other half of the year with more exciting things while the other half of the workers are working in the production. The workers refused the suggested proposal not knowing what to do with their newly gained free time. Bergmann described this as a “poverty of desire”, a “societal ill” that people do not know what to do when asked regarding true calling.⁹⁰ The work we do is such a vital source of status and identity that it is tough for us to face a mental liberation from employment. The idea of Frithjof Bergmann sounds very intriguing, but there has to be a preparation for the time of non-labour and guidance through this transition. We need to learn how to discover our true desires. Such a proposal implies a significant cultural shift in how we understand work and more importantly how we would exist without labour.



Automated Car Factory. Ford 1984 (fig. 19)

fig. 20

The project is looking into the impact of the closure of a Ford production plant and exploring new work scenarios in and around the city of Genk. By searching for models and scenarios that link specific skills of the workers and local institutions, one-man business strategies were developed into Post Ford Probes. The project does not mainly question labour but offers a solution for the current situation, new occupations and sources of income to the former workers. Opposed to the top-down decision-making that led to the closure of the factory it was essential to the project to include the former employees and their personal interests and skills into the discussion and the design proposals.⁹¹

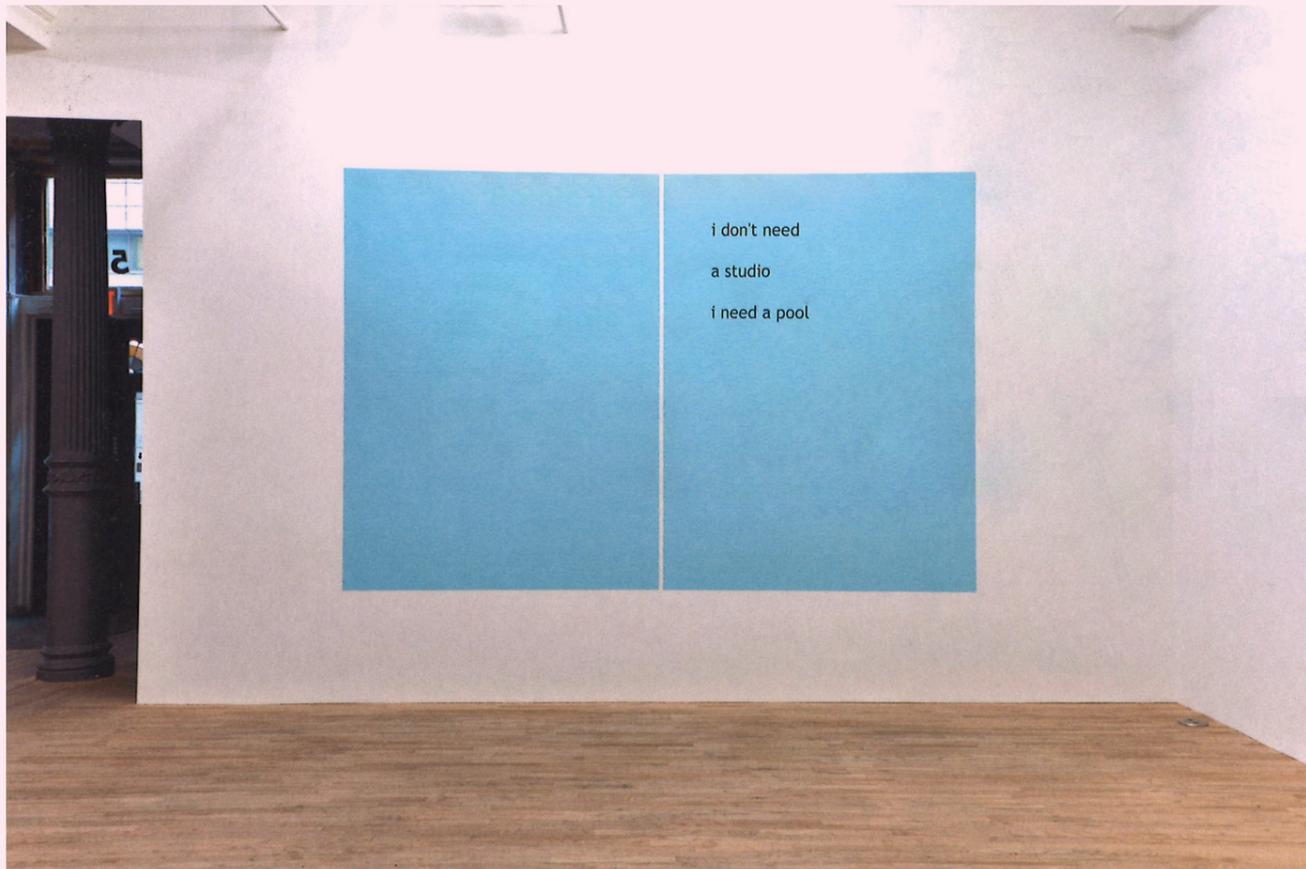


Post Ford Probes. Irma Földényi and Daniela Dossi 2014 (fig. 20)

One of the most pressing questions in this time of transition is what we would do with this newly saved time. Which content and meaning would we individually and as a society give this time gained through productivity? Will we use it to enhance our self-development and social relationships outside of labour or will economic rationality force us to continue working with the same pace and amount of time?

fig.21

RR Haiku 154 by Rafaël Rozendaal questions what we will do with all of our new-found free time when robots take over our jobs: Will something else keep us bonded to our working desks, or will we elope it straight to the pool?⁹²



RR Haiku 154. Rafaël Rozendaal 2015 (fig.21)

The philosopher André Gorz was concerned with these questions and promoted a politics of time – a democratic, critical and broad-minded discussion about the aims of production and the social distribution of working hours. He celebrated the new-found free-time provided by productivity afforded by capitalist development. But in his view, it is essential to lead this discussion among the people as the free-time might be meaningless if it can not be directed towards societal and humane ends. Therefore a politics of time is necessary, as “the development of the productive forces may, of itself, reduce the amount of labour that is necessary [but] it cannot, of itself, create the conditions which will make this liberation of time a liberation for all.”⁹³ Gorz advocated a reduction in working hours to allow free self-development, an increase in voluntary and self-defined activities outside of labour, more space for political and social engagement and cultural creation and appreciation. He also speculated that these factors might also improve the conditions of labour as it would encourage people to be “more exacting about the nature, content, goals and organisation of their work”⁹⁴. Until now we have failed to develop a politics of time, and instead, the striving of private profit regulates who works, how long for and to what ends.⁹⁵ Unemployed people are technically outside of labour, but that does not mean that they are necessarily free from labour in a meaningful sense. In our labour-centred society unemployment can be seen as a no-man’s-land, “a dead time, degraded by financial worries, social isolation and stigma”⁹⁶. One aim of the politics of time is to create an equal distribution of work and free time on a societal level – “everyone should work less so that everyone may work, and so that all may benefit from an increase in free-time”⁹⁷. If we do not start such a discussion, there is the danger of the creation of more labour as a response to unemployment which would lead to a treadmill of relentless economic growth. Capitalism does not benefit from free-time in which citizens neither produce or consume. The central question the politics of time raises is, in which kind of society we want to live in. And as unemployment rates (currently 6,1 – 12% in the UK in 2013/14 according to different estimations⁹⁸) will probably rise due to automation we have to discuss alternative ways of distributing work. We should introduce new modes of experiencing solidarity and pleasure which are conventionally searched through labour. But to accept an alternative vision of human progress and felicity demands a radical departure from our current concepts.

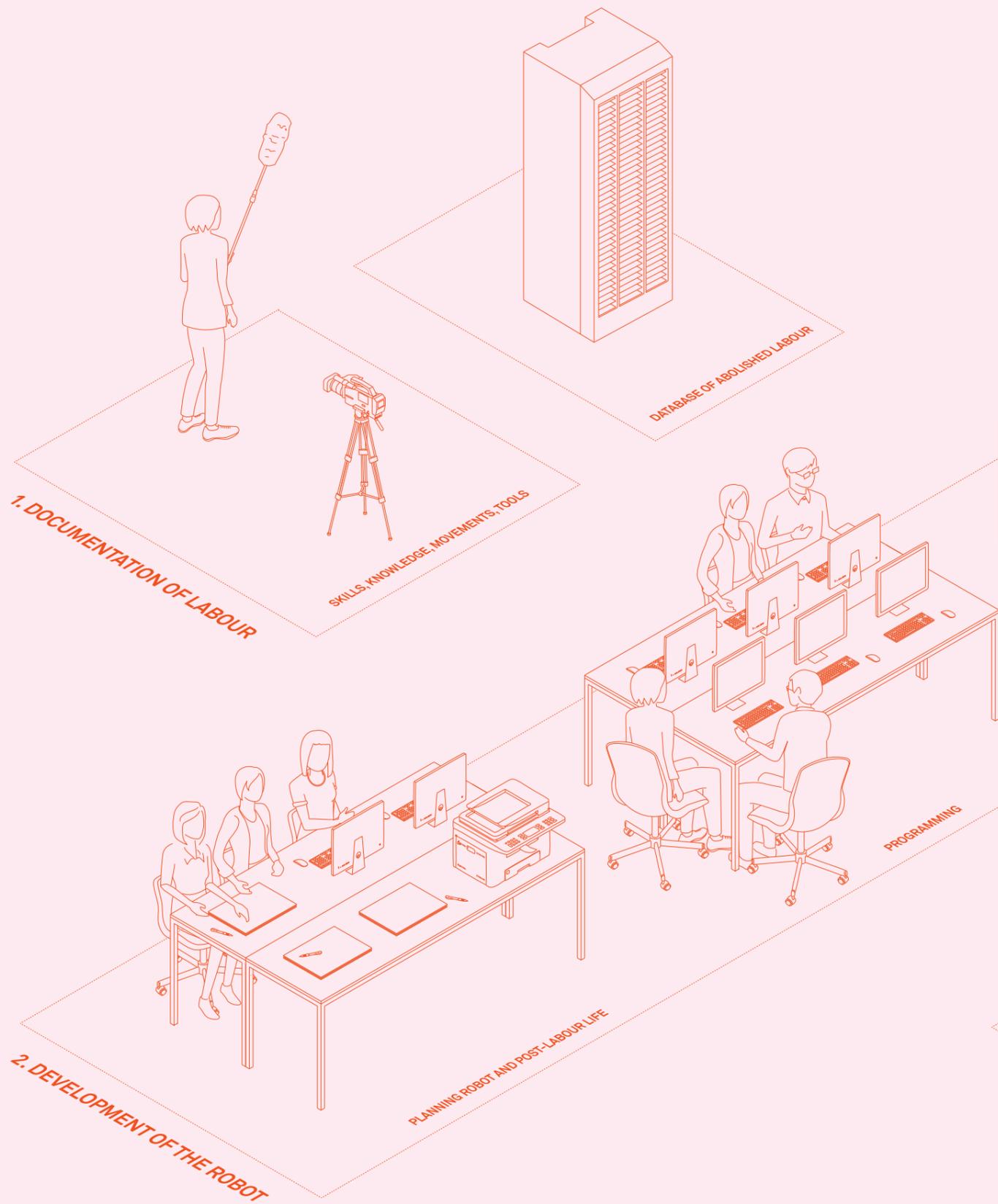
WHAT WOULD
YOU TEACH THE
ROBOT ABOUT
YOUR JOB?

The Post-Labouratory is an answer to the rapid automation of labour and the resulting cultural crisis. It liberates us from the idea of the necessity of labour and supports us in discovering our true desires. It offers participants the possibility to abolish their job by developing a robot that does their labour with the engineering help of post-labour companions.

For the documentation of human skills, knowledge, tools and experiences the working process of each participant is recorded. This documentation feeds the development of the robots but is also stored in the database of the Post-Labouratory.

Through the abolition of their labour, the participants can explore a post-labour future. The post-labour companions assist the participants to reconsider their desires during individual sessions. The creative action of making and discussions about work, leisure and life enables this passage. The Post-Labouratory claims that the quality of automating technology increases if the specialists – people working in the job to be automated – take an active part in the development of the robot.

The Post-Labouratory combines the skills of the participants and the post-labour companions that include design, engineering and social sciences. The Post-Labouratory supports the transition of workers into non-workers and the building of a post-labour future.



Procedure (fig.22)

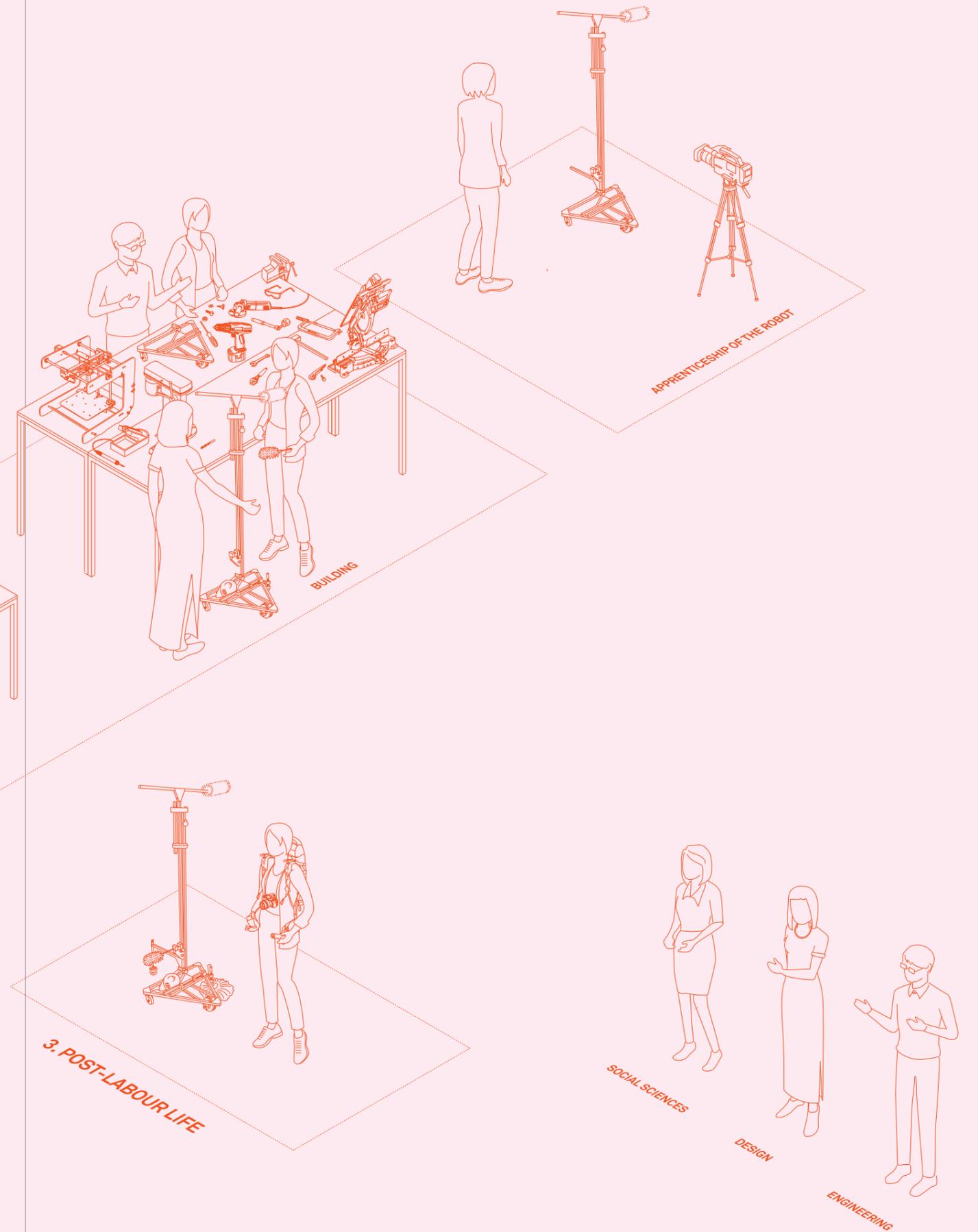




fig.23

“Finally I have all the time to travel around the world. Right now I am in a small Bedouin village in the south of Marocco learning how to weave carpets. It is a very challenging craft and takes a lot of time. Learning this and getting to know the local Bedouin culture gives me so much energy. If you would have asked me few years ago I would have never imagined myself here doing this. Next I will go to the north to work on a biological farm. I am already excited about that. Maybe one day I could have my own farm, here or back in the Netherlands.”

“To think about my true passions and desires was very difficult for me. Without the help of the Post-Labouratory I wouldn't have been able to, I think. I did so many different jobs before but never found something I really enjoyed. Maybe because I always had to do it, it was never really a free choice. I am good in cleaning but I never liked to do it all the time.”

0000001 TAW. Veronique Notten 2017 (fig.23)



fig.25

“Since I am not working for the Post NL anymore, I have plenty of time to do interesting things. I am mainly busy with taking care of the dogs in the neighbourhood. When their owners are out during the day I take them for walks and play with them. I even started training two of the dogs for circus tricks, they are really talented and enjoy this a lot.”

“In the beginning of the project it was very challenging for me to imagine this post-labour future. I couldn't imagine what I would do if I wouldn't have to work anymore. Before I worked my whole life, I was educated to work. My job at the Post NL was nice but I never experienced the same passion and enjoyment as I do now with taking care of the dogs and the other things I do.”

0000002 TCD. Will van Zutphen 2017 (fig.24)



fig.24

“Funnily I still paint, even if I don’t have to. But I enjoy it much more. It became my own choice when to do it and how much. Now I do it for friends, just for fun. I like the meditative mode of painting – even more since I don’t have to do it for an income anymore. I just do it from time to time. In the main time I can concentrate on my real passion – scanning the ground for metals. I found already so many amazing things from the past, you can’t imagine. This year I had the chance to join the metal scanning world cup in Canada, I was part of the Dutch team. We didn’t get to the top ten but just being part of this big event meant everything to me.”

“It seemed impossible to me to be able to automate my job in the beginning of the project. When I look back I am really amazed that we actually managed. I mean, it was a struggle and took a lot of time. Now there is a painting robot working instead of me, how great is that!”

I feel the urge to respond to current issues like the automation of labour, to take action through my design practice and take the discussion out of academia into our everyday lives. The transition towards a future without labour is a project of its own. Therefore I decided to concentrate on this development in my project rather than designing the jobless future itself. But certainly, the design of the transition plays an important role on how our future will look like. That is why the context of the design proposal is situated in the present and the coming years while shaping the transformation of labour to come during the following decades.

To prepare for a world without labour, we have to unlearn working. We are financially but also mentally so dependent on our jobs that thinking about our deep desires for a life without the imperative of working seems for some almost impossible. The primary goal of this project is to prepare us for non-labour by triggering people’s desires for life. The aim is to take people on a discovery of the transition from labour to work. Creative action and confrontation with the abolition of their job empowers participant to discover their true desires. It is essential to the project to include the people affected by automation into the process and to open up the discussion about a labour-free future. I believe that the transition of labour can be best designed in collaboration – regarding the technical/engineering, individual/emotional and social/cultural aspects.

In his book *The Refusal of Work*, David Frayne describes interviews with people that consciously had reduced their working hours or given up labour altogether to prevent labour from colonising their lives. Through the interviews he realised that the people had needed a “taste of autonomy” to reach a breakpoint, to begin to actively struggle with their alienation from work which concluded in a liberation from labour. One interviewee refers to it as “mini utopia” while talking about a pleasuring trip, emphasising the element of variety or multi-activity that is usually missing in our working routine.⁹⁹ One possible way to liberate people from the felt necessity to work might be to create such “mini utopias” that enable a taste of autonomy. Similar to the putative future Karl Marx imagined where it would be possible “to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner...”¹⁰⁰

Through the project, I want to embrace autonomy, empowerment and participation of the participants to facilitate the liberation from the imperative of labour and the experience of mini-utopias. As a designer, I want to take an active part in the discussion about the future of labour. I believe that design tools can facilitate a society-wide discourse and enable a cultural shift. It is essential to question something so natural to us like labour critically and reflect upon its origins, its effects and its future.

For the development and testing of the idea of the Post-Labouratory, I did a field research in which I discussed my thoughts about labour and an automated future with several people from various areas of professions, including cleaning, painting, mail delivery, nursing, haircutting, journalism, psychology, medicine and design. The central questions “What do you do?” and “What would you do if you would not have to work anymore?” put a frame around the conversations and symbolise the transition. The reactions to the question what people would do if they would not have to work were diverse. For all it was firstly an unexpected question and a scenario which is hard to imagine. Some of the respondents had after a bit of time thoughts and ideas, partially because the concept of an Universal Basic Income or automation was not new to them, and others were overwhelmed by the question and needed time to think about this essential issue. Most of the people would like to continue to perform specific tasks of their profession in a labour-free future. Most people questioned would reduce their working hours and would change the exogenous conditions of their work.

Through the field research, I realised that discussing the idea of a robot facilitates a discourse about much deeper questions regarding labour and life. It was easier for the participants to reflect on their feelings, interests, fears and desires in relation to an object that they were co-creating. The creativity and enjoyment involved made it much easier to have this challenging conversation especially with a topic which was new for a lot of people and in dialogue with someone they hardly knew. Through involving them in the process of creation, the participants felt empowered and gained new energy, also to reflect on their current situation and imagine possible futures. But also the speculative framework of a Universal Basic Income and the possibility to automate their labour was in each discussion essential to stimulate imagination.

The process of questioning your genuine desires can be very challenging and requires guidance and support and especially time and space. That is why one

project of the Post-Labouratory can take up to two to five years, depending on parameters like the complexity of tasks to be automated and the state of technological development but also the individual and psychological aspects of each participant. The research I did is just a starting point and included only a limited amount of tasks of the Post-Labouratory. I had the chance to discuss the current working situation and their ideas for a future without labour with the participants. This included the personal expertise, skills and experiences associated with their work that a robot doing the job would have to acquire, as well as the functionality of the robot. In the following, I will show a selection of this research - with images of the workplace of the participants and their statements during our conversations - to illustrate the concept of the Post-Labouratory. In this research, I mainly concentrated on professions that demand craft skills and manual labour as it was most interesting to imagine and co-create a robot that is performing visible tasks at this stage for me as a designer. Nevertheless, the idea of the Post-Labouratory does not exclude any profession but is indeed bound to the current state of technological development.



fig. 26

“I like to be outside and I like the flexibility I have, I can start whenever I want, I just need to be finished by five o'clock.”

“This dog here, he is always alone at home. Sometimes he tries to bite my hand, I have to be a bit careful. In this neighbourhood there are so many dogs that are alone at home during the day when their owners are working.”

“In my free-time I enjoy to walk with the dog, cooking and baking, mountain biking, reading and almost everything that has something to do with spirituality. I am going to attend soon a meditation course. Hiking is my passion. And the time with my family and good friends is important to me.”

“If I really wouldn't have to work anymore... No, I wouldn't work for the Post NL. I would rather do something social, volunteering, or something with animals.”

Will van Zutphen.
January-May 2017 (fig. 26)



Veronique Notten. March-May 2017 (fig.27)

fig.27

“So you have to teach the robot everything. That could be a large problem to teach all these things. Because you have to teach how he wrings the doekjes, you have to teach him how to clean.”

“A robot can do it efficiently, never gets tired, it doesn't need a break and can go on.”

“Then I could sit down, read a book or sit in the garden – no, no. I don't know. That is a psychological problem. That is the other side of the story, do I have to think about that, too?”

“I don't think it is possible for a robot to learn ironing. Of course I can teach him to do this one but this one is only 30 by 30 centimeters but a big sheet with 2 meters by 120 or something or a shirt, how can you teach the robot to make this chic?”

“The robot is cold. I am creative, the robot isn't. I can think of a different way to clean and he can't. The robot has to be able to put the curtains after washing the curtains. He has to take them down and bring them up again. Especially with this you need the feeling because it can't go automatically. I really think I could use a robot for certain things but I can't use it for everything. Because of the feeling, you have to react on certain tasks.”

“We need breaks and time to think about these questions.”

“I would like to travel and be active at the spot. Maybe I could teach women or children or play with children. But I would also like to learn from them, how they make a living in other parts of the world.”

“I am good at cleaning but I don't need to do it every day.”

“I could do volunteering, for the red cross for example.”

“It would be also nice to work on a biological farm, with chicken or cows. I like animals. I would like to be a farmer. But I wouldn't earn any money, the cattle would be small and they would get too old before I could slaughter them. I would like to clean the stable.”

“If you have a passion for something meaningful and you can tell or write about it, with this basic income you could freely do so.”

“Do you know “Floortje naar het einde van de wereld” at NPO? She travels into very distant areas of the world and experiences so many interesting things. The way she lives is just a dream!”

“It doesn't feel real, we hardly can imagine this, that you can do what you like. It is so difficult.”

“It is difficult to form your own opinion of who you are and what you want to do. We are so shaped by our surrounding and the role models we have.”



Sjors van Bree. February-May 2017 (fig.28)

fig.28

“If you sand the door frames you have to feel it with your hands, a robot couldn't do that, I think.”

“Painters are philosophers. I like the meditative modus of painting, I have all the time to reflect and think. I have the best thoughts and ideas while working.”

“It is a quite complex thing because in our job we don't have much standard tasks. Everything we paint is different from shape, measurements, materials... Every job we do is different. The surfaces are always different but the handling is nearly the same every time.”

“First I was a little bit hesitating. In the beginning I thought robotics would not be possible in our job. But as more I think about it and for example the car fabrication where almost everything is automated, I think it is possible to automate my tasks. But it is a long way.”

“Maybe we would need a kind of petrol stations where the robots will be cleaned or filled up with paint.”
“If the robot would paint the walls I could paint something else.”

“I could have more time to live my life and enjoy.”

“I think, even if there is an advanced robot, there would still be things that I could do better than the robot.”

“What would we do with our spare time? If you look at gardening – there are grass cutting robots, so the humans don't need to do anything anymore. On the other hand it is very therapeutic to do something with your hands. It is the same with painting. People will still paint because they might enjoy to do it, even if there are painting robots. Both is possible, you could choose, you could let the robot do things and you could do it yourself.”

“I would still work as a painter but maybe less hours. In the rest of the time I would do sport and things with my kids. And I would go to scan the ground. It is my thing to search for things, for metal. I found bullets from the Second World War. I found ground bullets, 400 years old, coins 200 years old. If the sun is shining, I would go to the woods for scanning, beep beep beep. When I have a robot doing my job then I had a lot of time for this.”

“The social aspect is also important for our job. It is important that we drink coffee and chat with the customers. There would have to be a solution to replace that if I wouldn't come to customers anymore.”

“Surely it would be possible but it is very hard to fantasize about it.”



Noortje Vlemmings. December 2016 (fig.29)

fig. 29

"I love my job but actually I want to go to school again but I don't know exactly what or when. So maybe in the future I want to learn something else but I don't know what."

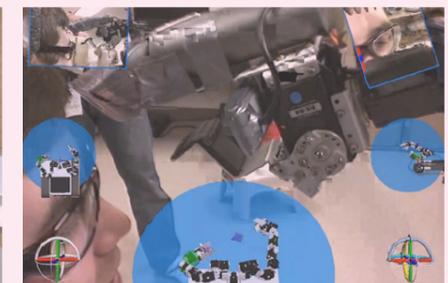
"If I would get now 1000 in a month without doing anything... Then, I think, I would work less hours. Yeah, of course. But not nothing because I love my job. I like to work with my hands and with people. So I think I have to do it. I cannot live without I guess. If it is not for the money then just for two days a week or so. Just to do something."

"I love to draw so maybe I could do something with drawing, painting or something. And I would buy a dog. I really want a dog but I am just never home. So that is probably the first thing I would do. And, I don't know. What would you do with the time when you never had it? But I think you have the time there would probably a lot of things that came up in your head. But first a dog, I guess."

"Being creative and working with people. Just talking to people, getting to know the people and making beautiful hair. Making nice hair. Making people happy. Yeah, that is what I like about my job."

"For being a hairdresser you have to have it in your hand, you have to feel it and see it and I don't think that a robot can have that feeling, no just people can have that. And a robot, no. Maybe a robot can make like a straight bob line, you know, just a straight line and everything. But a robot can not see what kind of hair somebody has or how hair falls and that is more important, that you have the techniques."

"There will be a time when the robots will be hairdressers. I believe that the time is coming, sometimes..."



Noortje 2.0. Idea for a Hairdressing Automat (fig.30)

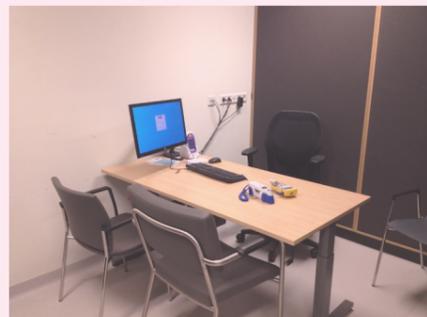
fig. 31

"The anamnesis is a way is a way to make contact, if you optimize it you have to come up with another way to make contact."

"I always try to make people feel welcome, I am trying to make conversation. These small talks make my job fun."

"What I like most about my job is to explain things to the patients and their families. I try to calm them down in the short time they are at the hospital. I like the diversity at our department and to work together with my colleagues."

"If you want to use a robot in the conversations with patients it is easy for giving information as so much is standardized already. But if they ask questions you have to find a way to answer them."



"The difference between me and a robot is empathy. The robot can not have empathy."

"To do an infusion is not so easy, you need a lot of practice. I don't know if you could automate that."

"I don't think you can automate care and empathy. I also don't see how a robot should look after a wound or take away a drain. What would happen to calming patients and reacting on emotions?"

"You can't delete the human approach with a robot."

"Everything has to be efficient, yes, time is money. Sometimes it is like a factory."

"As a start I would maybe design a washing street for the patients to go in and get washed. Then I think I would love my work more."

"A lot of things can be automated in the hospital, like the transport or the handover. The beds could be automated and self-driving. And the handover could work via a computer. Why does there has to be a nurse present if there is everything in the computer?"

"I go running and try to do sport four times a week. I really like reading, that is always relaxing. I also like to watch series on Netflix or to go out with friends."

"If I would not have to worry about an income, I would work one day less per week or would work as a volunteer. I like to work with people. I wouldn't like to be all the time at home. Then your world gets small, I think. I really enjoy the contact with patients and colleagues. I also think I am a better person when I am working. I also didn't study for nothing, I also want to use this somehow."

"If I go into my imagination, I would open a small shop with old stuff, old cabinets, nice things from the time of my grandmother. I like to be busy with interiors, I read lifestyle magazines and watch lifestyle TV programs."

"It would be nice if the weekend would then be 3 or 4 days instead of 2. Time always flies and we are always too busy to spend quality time with our family and friends."

"In my ideal world money shouldn't play such an important role but rather the enjoyment of small things."

We are approaching the end of this guided expedition into the future. We reflected on the status quo of labour, opened our minds about new interpretations of the notion of work and equipped ourselves with the tools necessary to imagine a post-labour scenario. This thesis is meant to be an initiator to rethink labour but offers only a narrow perspective on this complex issue. There is much more to work on and discuss until the implementation of the transition of labour can be tackled. Instead of being threatened by and opposed to it, we must embrace the automation of labour as an opportunity. After understanding our current labour-centred culture and its tradition, we should question our perception of progress, the logic and social organisation of labour, the connection of wage and labour, the time and energy invested in labour and the propaganda around labour. We must extend our collective imagination beyond what capitalism allows. While working towards a non-labour society, we have to face the cultural challenges associated with the abolition of labour and create solutions that include and empower humans to take part in designing the transition. We must combat the "poverty of desire". We have to form a base for a postcapitalist culture, facilitating a transition from labour, exploitation and scarcity towards the flourishing of humanity.

This project builds a platform for a post-labour society but offers just a first step for this transformative process. It is difficult to predict all effects of a liberation from labour and there is no guarantee that things will work out as expected. But visionary proposals are too often ironed out by sceptical criticism outlining every detail that might fail because of the uncertainty of the unknown. The challenge is to create new futures while being uncertain about the possible problems created. But even if neoliberalism feels secure today, it does not guarantee any future survival. Like every other social system we have experienced over time, it will not exist forever. Our duty now is to design what happens next.

The research and thoughts summarised in this thesis are limited. I mainly concentrated on cultural and social aspects in the context of affluent societies. I would not take the liberty to apply the before mentioned statements to other parts of the world. With my proposal I also do not want to prevent everyone from working, even if machines can perform labour; there will always be space for human engagement. Today's labour would simply transform into meaningful work. Furthermore, I did not include ecological aspects into the discussion; it is certain that ecology and sustainability have to be taken into account when developing automating technology. Gained time for leisure will not help if we had destroyed our environment in the meantime.

Liberate from labour, free to work. This project is a contribution to a larger debate and an opportunity for reflection. It should be our goal to accelerate and tackle the challenge of automation and the replacement of human labour as a common project of our entire society – to go on this exploration collectively. This journey is an open-ended one, as are all journeys into the future, and this thesis is intended to be a first calibration of the compass that will direct us on this adventure.

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fig.21 Vitra Design Museum. Hello, Robot. Design between Human and Machine. Exhibition catalogue, 2017. p. 127.

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WHAT WOULD
YOU DO IF YOU
DID NOT HAVE
TO WORK
ANYMORE?