Discourse Machine: Automatisation[1]

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We want to build a giant Discourse Machine on Industry 4.0 where visitors become part of the machine, instructed by pen and (recycled) paper. The Discourse Machine is an interactive installation for showing fundamental principles and concepts of industrial automatisation, such as labour division, Taylorism, or co-operation. Furthermore, we will highlight the fundamental differences between the way humans work in contrast to the machine. That is done by giving simple tasks, e.g. »go to the wall« in a mechanised way, stripped of all meaning: »go to the obstacle you cannot overcome«.

This tasks and calls for action are written on a Character Sheet, on a leaflet that also contains the rules of the game and information about the fictitious working situation, e.g. being a click-worker in a city of the »Global South« or a manufacturer in a rural port of the »Global North«. At the end of the first part the visitors will have constructed a gigantic installation, say, a pyramid out of card boxes. Each one of the visitors is needed in one way or the other for the completion of the overall goal, but does not know it in advance.

There will be 4 tasks for the playing visitor:
1.) Delivery
2.) Image processing
3.) Crowdworking / Co-operation
4.) Content moderation

The whole conference area will be used, the four corners of the building represent different part of the global industry and reflect social inequalities by different distribution of wealth, resources, and other conditions. Incentive for the user is a price at the end, say, Joseph Weizenbaum's Computing Power and Human Reason. Each visitor has different chances of winning this price, which is again a reflection of the unfair situations in the real word (North–South, Cosmopolitan–Rural, Young–Old).

Furthermore, we address current problems of automatised working situations, like the stress of click-workers working on content moderation. This is done by asking the participants of our Discourse Machine to look into a bunch of quotations of actual click-workers and to make editorial changes to the texts. The participants will get insights on monotony, boredom, and/or psychic stress by reading and reflecting the texts.

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1 Discourse Machine II: Resilience – coming soon to theaters.. er.. research institutions near you.
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Tasks

1. Delivery

In the start of the event, there will be a huge amount of boxes in the »Rural Part of the Global South«, representing resources or labor force etc. These boxes will be assembled by fixed rules to a complex structure (e.g. a pyramid). The important thing here is that we will describe the task in a way we would do it for a machine. Principles like routing (e.g. based on the internet protocol) become rules of the game. The visitors do not know that or how they construct this structure, they focus on a simple task (»if you see a blue box on top of a red one, carry both boxes to the nearest green box«).

2. Image Processing

People do image processing very good, Machines don't. We will simulate the machine version of image processing by stripping the participants of one or more senses. We could blindfold someone, a second participant can operate a colour sensor, a third one can read the colour codes the second produced to instruct the first participant.

3. Crowdworking

The power and efficiency of the system »factory« strems from labour division and specialisation. On the Character Sheet, participants will find »feats« or »competences« that can lead a group to success, but only if they work together. For example, there could be a feat that empowers someone to make Mate out of Water, a requirement for <coding> could be the permanent infusion of caffeine in form of Mate, and maybe the <coding> is done to program water filtering machines. Each of the participants need two or three other people, but we won't tell them – we are sure they'll find out.

4. Content Moderation

In this task participants have to highlight search terms in short quotations. These texts are actual transcripts of an interview with click-workers, where they talk about their situations and experiences with their work. The participants have to re-transcribe it, but alter some of the words in a way to subtle change the meaning.