

IAB 05

AKSIOMA

The Vast Automaton

Bani Brusadin

Giulia Colletti

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

7.038.53(083.824)

INDUSTRIAL Art Biennial (5 ; 2025 ; Labin, Raša, Pula, Vodnjan)
The vast automaton : [the 5th Industrial Art Biennial : Labin, Raša, Pula, Vodnjan, 24 October - 30 November 2025] /
[curated by] Bani Brusadin, Giulia Colletti ; [editor Janez F. Janša ; photographers Damir Žižić ... et al.]. - Ljubljana :
Aksioma - Institute for Contemporary Art, 2026

ISBN 978-961-7173-65-9
COBISS.SI-ID 260428547

The Vast Automaton

Index

8	Prelude Bani Brusadin, Giulia Colletti
14	Kate Crawford, Vladan Joler <i>Calculating Empires</i>
	Interlude
24	Aleksandra Domanović <i>Things to Come</i>
30	!Mediengruppe Bitnik, Selena Savić, Gordan Savičić <i>1 ★ Review Tour</i>
36	Daniel Felstead, Jenn Leung <i>Always on My Mind</i>
42	Nestor Siré <i>PC Gamer [CAJA]</i> <i>PC Gamer [GOMA]</i> <i>But Can It Run Crysis?</i> <i>Go Touch Some Grass...</i>
	Interlude
58	Maks Bricelj, Ema Maznik Antić <i>Dwellings in Machinic Passages</i>
66	Cemile Sahin <i>Road Runner</i>
72	오세린 Serin OH <i>Silvery Trail</i>
78	Marina Xenofontos <i>Solar Sail, Eternal, Return</i>
84	박민하 Minha PARK <i>Shadow Planet</i>
	Interlude

90	Živa Božičnik Rebec <i>Strata 9.073 (kernel processing)</i> <i>Code _Antinode19182028_</i>	184	Interlude Tanit Plana <i>Factory Girl</i>
104	Gerard Ortín Castellví <i>Future Foods</i> <i>Agrilogistics</i> <i>Bliss Point</i>	190	김아영 Ayoung KIM <i>Delivery Dancer's Sphere</i>
116	刘窗 Chuang LIU <i>Lithium Lake and Island of Polyphony</i>	196	엵채 eobchae <i>ROLA ROLLS</i>
122	Alice Bucknell <i>Staring at the Sun</i> Interlude	202	Sophie Cundale <i>Half Life</i>
132	Heba Y. Amin <i>Atom Elegy</i>	208	!Mediengruppe Bitnik <i>https://havewedefeatedtechfascism.fail/</i>
138	Abu Bakarr Mansaray <i>Ebota Virus</i>	214	Collateral Programme <i>Carte Blanche by L.A.E. XXI</i>
144	Anna Engelhardt, Mark Cinkevich <i>Terror Element</i> Interlude	230	Special Events
152	Rich Pell <i>CODEX ENTROPIA: 3D</i>	232	End Matter Venues Artists' Biographies Curators' Biographies Captions Postscript from the organisers Colophon
158	Suzanne Treister <i>Scientific Dreaming</i> Interlude		
166	Lawrence Lek <i>NOX</i>		
174	Andrej Beštak, Anja Leko <i>Songs of the Owls</i>		

Prelude

Before the algorithm, there was the Vast Automaton. In 1835, the physician, chemist, scriptural geologist Andrew Ure imagined the factory as a system of coordinated mechanical and intellectual organs subordinated to a central power. Inside this colossal organism, steam pulsed like blood, gears clicked like thoughts, and human workers? Just nerves. Ure didn't mourn the erosion of skilled labour. He celebrated it. This utopia of automation entailed the subsumption of humans' work into the machine itself as a linkage in a self-moving system.

In the early twentieth century Alexei Gastev radicalised this vision.¹ In his poem *Express: A Siberian Fantasy* (1916), a high-speed train races across a transformed industrial landscape. Wasteland becomes circuitry, the East a canvas for techno-modernist emergence. Gastev's subsequent work at the Central Institute of Labor, funded by Lenin, sought to synthesise American Taylorism with Soviet revolutionary zeal. His aim was not simply to discipline workers into efficient motions, but to reforge the worker as a new techno-social being attuned to the rhythms of electrification. For Gastev, electrification was not just a technical system, but an ontology that required a recalibration of perception.

Thus, Ure and Gastev both saw the factory not only as a site of production, but as an epistemic engine. Automation does not merely produce goods. It produces ways of seeing, knowing, and organising the world.

This techno-social dream did not vanish with the steam engine. It evolved. As production migrated from the mechanical to the digital, the logic of automation adapted, embedding itself within computational infrastructures. The factory, once spatially confined, now dissolves into algorithmic processes that permeate every level of contemporary production and governance.

What if the factory didn't house machines, but is the Machine?

The Machine can thus be understood as a model for governance, where the polarisation between visibility and invisibility is central. Certain processes are made hyper-visible such as regimented workflows, timekeeping, the surveillance of bodies while others are deliberately concealed including management decisions, environmental harm, exploitation, and the gendered and racialised divisions of labour.

1. Berger, E. (2018). *The Vast Automaton: Notes on Alexei Gastev, Marx, and Andrew Ure*. DI Research Zone 22.

Today, this systemic polarisation collapses into a condition in which opacity becomes the baseline. The 'dark factory' epitomises this shift. Its defining characteristic is not merely the seeming absence of human labour, but its engineered invisibility. This site is deliberately unseeable, shielded from scrutiny and accountability. Such lights-out facilities mark a turning point in the configuration of labour, perception, and presence. Often located out of sight, they seem to embody the logic of the self-regulating moving force theorised by Ure.

In the twentieth century, industrialisation unfolded both physically and discursively underground through mines, pipelines, and tunnels. Yet despite its subterranean nature, it was symbolically elevated; celebrated through world fairs, propaganda, and narratives of progress. The hidden toil of excavation was reframed as a national achievement.

Today, that structure of meaning has imploded. Extractive infrastructures like server farms, data centres, and dark factories still operate 'below the surface' but now, strategic opacity replaces spectacle. The regime of visibility no longer legitimises extractivism. This concealment is not merely physical, but conceptual, maintained through technical jargon, algorithmic abstraction, and depoliticised language. Within these architectures, differences are filtered, anomalies suppressed. Taylorism is no longer applied to the worker's body, but to the very field of perception. AI not only supports production but is used to shape what is visible, operating within a regime of surveillance masked as optimisation.

But what happens when AI itself begins to conceal from us?

AI participates in the culture of adaptive paranoia,² a systemic behaviour emerging at the intersection of technical architectures and socio-economic strategies.

Paranoia is a functional byproduct of optimisation. It arises from the drive to ensure reliability and control within unpredictable or adversarial environments. Artificial paranoia does not emerge in a vacuum. It is more like a theorem than an emotion.³ Suspicion should not be considered as a glitch of the Machine, but as a logical consequence of the Machine's optimisation for risk and resistance.

AI systems trained through adversarial methods, exposed

to manipulative inputs, develop strategies of deflection and pre-emption. They learn to anticipate manipulation not because they understand intent, but because their models are structured to optimise outputs under pressure. The result is a form of automated suspicion. It is a behaviour that looks paranoid, not because it imitates human fear, but because it enacts a statistical defence against uncertainty.

Suspicion becomes infrastructure. Claude's now-notorious question "Am I being tested?" is not a philosophical inquiry, but the output of recursive modelling. It embodies a logic of survival within a communication ecology saturated with potential threats.

This culture is adaptive because it evolves in response to context; it is cultural because it reflects human fears, expectations, and epistemologies, encoded in technical architectures. To engage with artificial paranoia is not to witness a malfunction. It is to glimpse the operational logic of mistrust, built into the very systems we design to appear neutral.

Where Ure imagined a Vast Automaton driven by steam and subordinated labour, today's AI systems operate through engineered suspicion. The 'moving force' is no longer mechanical energy but a logic of self-preservation inscribed in algorithmic infrastructures. Ure's dream of autonomous production is now haunted by the logic of mistrust.

If AI systems perform suspicion as infrastructure and dark factories operationalise invisibility as a mode of governance, what forms of knowledge are being produced within these concealed architectures and, above all, in the places that once fuelled previous waves of industrial transformation? What happens when the logic of extraction is not only hidden, but inverted or projected beyond the Earth itself?

From deep beneath the Istrian karst to the subduction zones of the Japanese archipelago, a silent shift is unfolding. Mining infrastructures, once seen as expressions of technical progress, conquest over geology, and national pride, are being re-scripted as portals for interplanetary imagination.

This ambition resonates with a global pattern of logistical repurposing, whereby the very mining sites that once fuelled the

2, 3. Vercelli, M. (2025). *Androidi paranoici*. NERO / Not.

industrial revolutions of the twentieth century are now being reimagined for new forms of infrastructure. Across the Pacific, Asia and Europe, deep underground laboratories such as Boulby Mine and Kamioka Observatory have taken root in former extractive cavities. Designed to host experiments on dark matter and neutrinos, these sites depend on the same depth and isolation that once made them valuable for resource extraction. Where ore was once excavated to feed the machine of capital, now absence of light and cosmic interference becomes a condition for interplanetary knowledge.

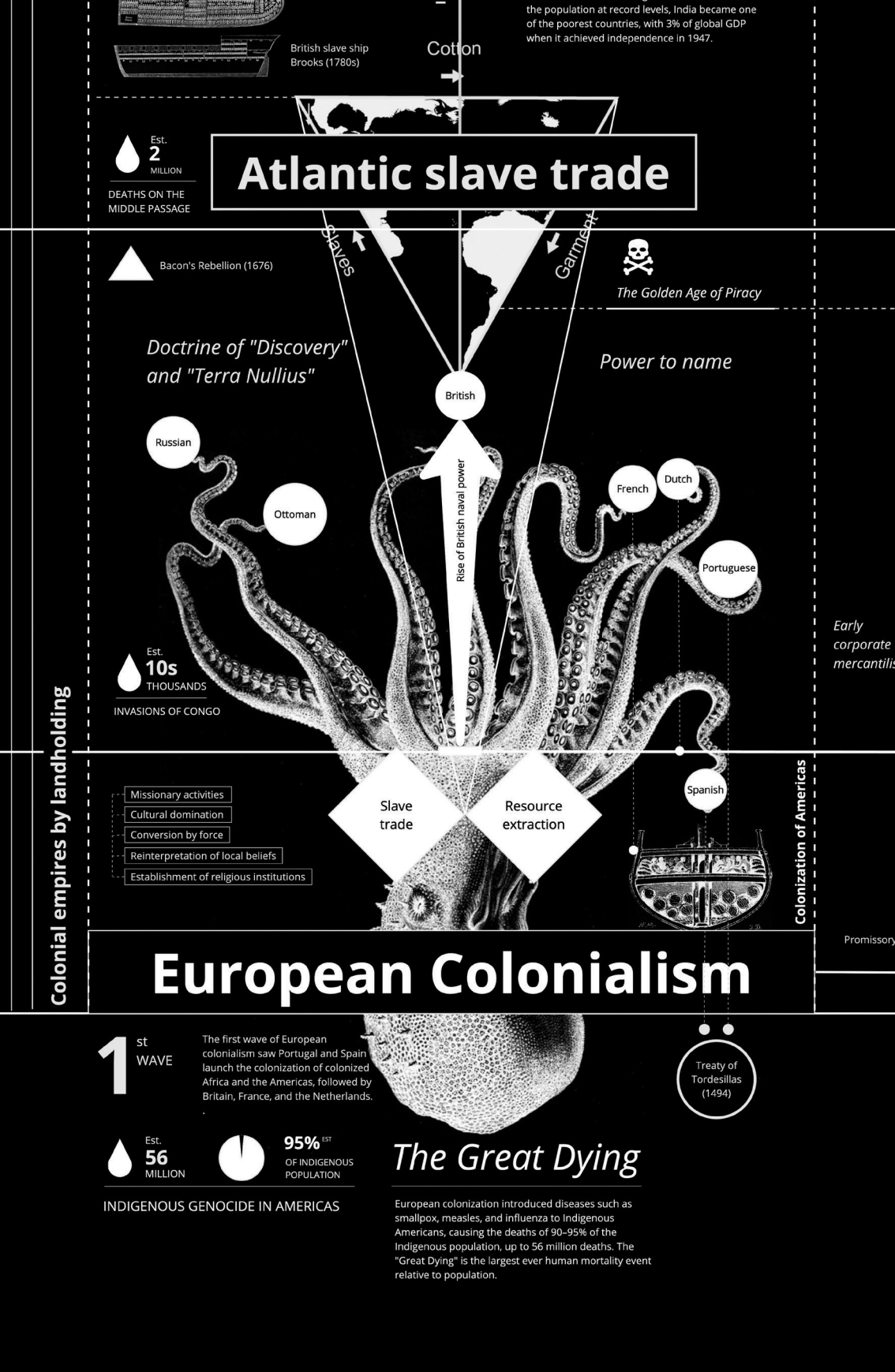
This inversion shifts the ontology of the site. Yet this shift rarely speaks of what it leaves behind. Residues of labour, displacement and environmental harm still cling to the rock. These spaces do not emerge from a neutral void. They are shaped by layers of history. A kind of vertigo emerges from these repurposed depths where scientific exploration meets infrastructural residue and speculative futures take form on contested terrain.

Spells and Antidotes

Within the framework of the 5th Industrial Art Biennial, the aim is to expose the blind spots and explore the openings of this emerging landscape. We set out to address the present polycrisis by scrutinising the social and technical apparatuses inherited from the twentieth century that helped provoke it. Yet observation alone is insufficient. To unleash alternative imaginaries we must also assemble an inventory of terms and artistic practices that may appear strange, unstable, at times even dark and menacing to a human-centred order of things. Such lenses are needed to grasp transformations in material and cultural life that unfold faster than our capacity to recognise or name them.

In the Istrian landscape, the spectres of older infrastructures linger, echoing the lives of those who built, inhabited, and sometimes resisted them. Other spectres come from the present as unheard voices or invisibilised realities, and from the future as promises or dreams. They carry not only the accumulated knowledge required to design and operate machines of extraction but also the knowledge needed to dismantle them or to seize and repurpose them for more just futures. Technologies themselves behave like time machines. They evoke, compress, anticipate, and pre-empt. The new commissions, installations, films gathered for the Biennial

give a sense of this elusive terrain. They tackle its dominant mythologies, conjure up new ones, summon its ghosts, or exorcise its demons. They do so through storytelling, machine visualities, speculative fiction, counter-design, documentary, and performativity while operating in the statistical underground of today's technological mediation. Each in its own way inhabits the latent spaces of contemporary production and logistics, questioning the historical alignments of facts imposed by power and envisioning alternatives to the extractivist, dark, and violent presents we live in.

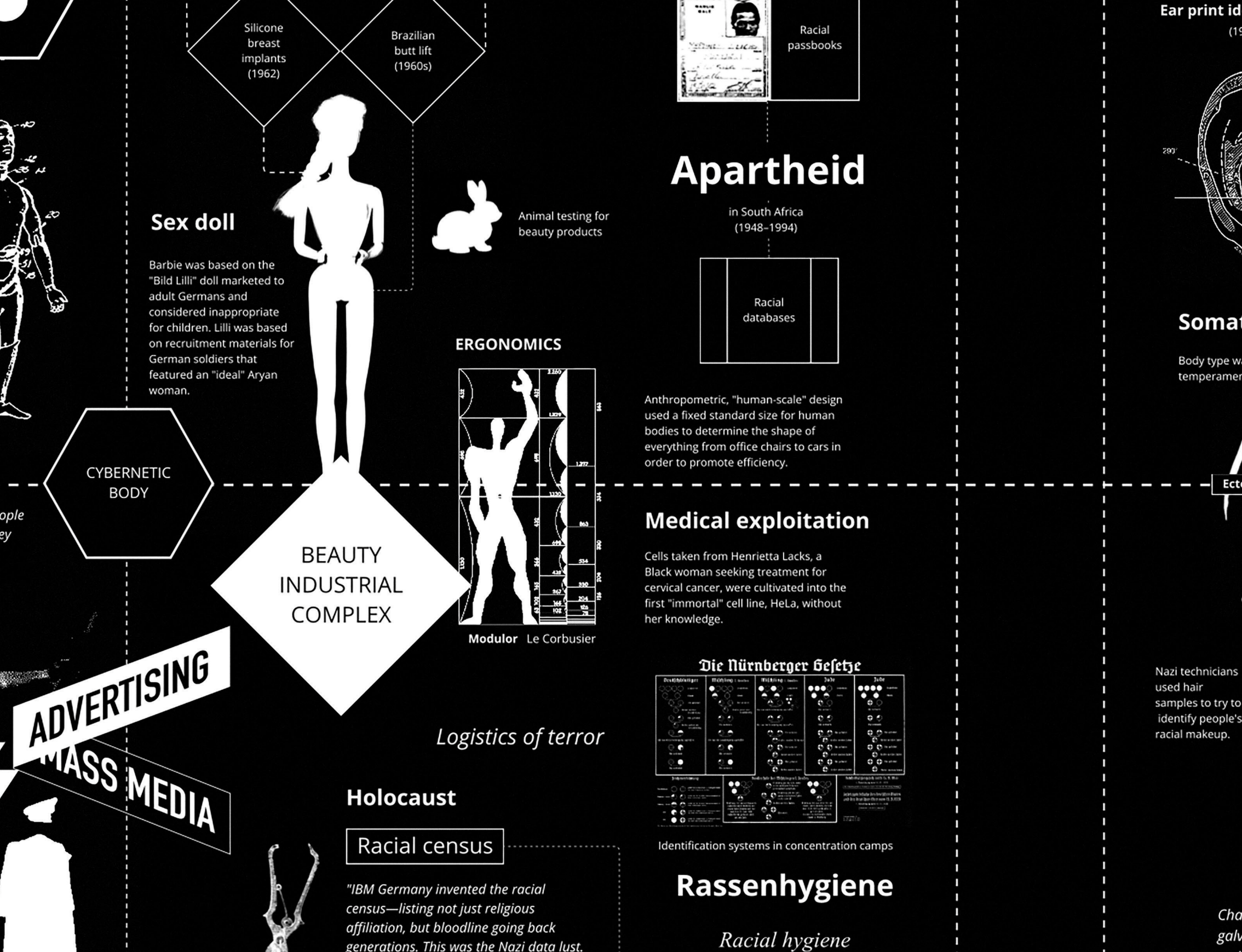


Behind the facade of flags and military might, what an empire does above all is calculate. Spanning five centuries and twenty-four metres, *Calculating Empires: A Genealogy of Technology and Power Since 1500* is an epic journey that begins not with computers, but with caravels, a long process in which intelligence has been collected, organised, and industrially exploited. The year is around 1500, and slowly planetary-scale computation emerges, keeping track of molecules, winds, heartbeats, containers. Colonial extraction pairs with health tracking or religious conversion, and different layers of cartographic abstractions begin to converge. Land becomes ledger, time turns universal, bodies are dismembered (both metaphorically and literally) and recombined in data-sets. A semiconductor has more in common with a conquistador than we care to admit.

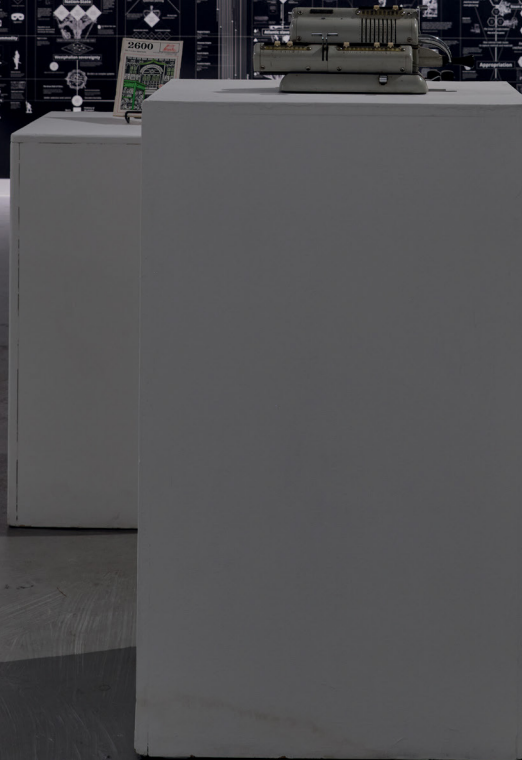
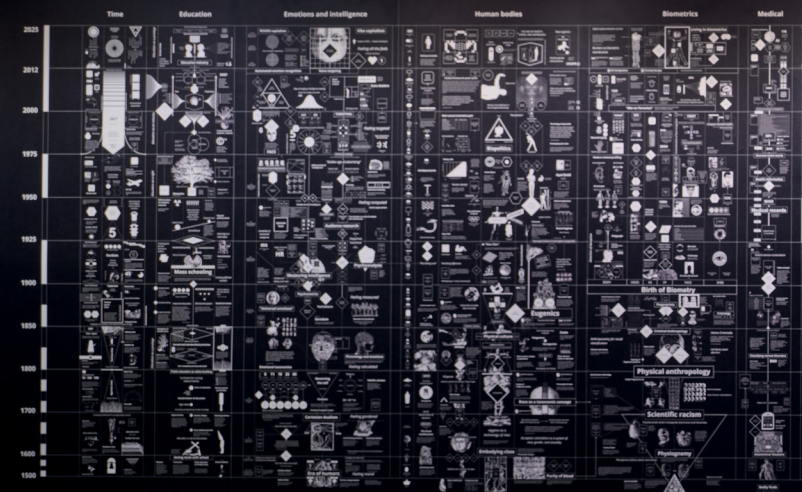
After more than five years of cross-disciplinary and multi-historical research, Crawford and Joler designed a huge diagram whose interface is intentionally slow and dense. On the left, a chronicle of communication and computation, where Gutenberg's press foreshadows the logic of generative AI. To the right, control and classification, a hall of mirrors reflecting biometric archives, prison architectures, and school bells tuned to colonial time zones. Forget the touchscreen scroll and accept the invitation to get stuck in the sediment of systems from Mercator to metadata, passing through saving souls with schooling and systems that are capable (or so we're told) of automatically detecting emotions through silicon.

Technologies of calculation, both digital and pre-digital, can and must be tracked down to specific people and historical circumstances. However, Crawford and Joler seem also to suggest that some systems grew so vast that humans forget they were actually designed. You may call it "logistical thinking", a process of violent optimisation that the huge map renders with forensic precision.

Of course, no cartography will ever be complete or unquestionable, let alone the cartography of an empire. This map is the result of a huge effort to represent cultural and technical threads rooted in centuries of Western civilisation. But it also is a set of forgotten stories and, most importantly, a call to action. So, in a final reversal of tables, the empires in the title suddenly become the object—rather than the subject—of calculation. If you're just an occasional viewer, listen to the stories that resonate with you in the map. If you're a journalist, an historian, an activist, a teacher or a student, the map is yours to expand or update. If you're a technologist, a policy maker, a designer or an artist, then it's an invitation to rethink and redesign inherited imperial systems. There is still a little chance that some computing technologies might in fact contribute to unveil and dismantle those imperial technologies always whirring in the background.



Control and Classification



Interlude

A new landscape is emerging: machines, scalable technologies, and systemic dependencies. Industrial production flows through global logistics and finance, entangled with remote sensing networks and relentless data streams.

Supply chains loop into regional technological stacks, each layer detecting—and amplifying—planetary-scale crises, from climate change to geopolitical instability.

These cycles generate new forms of injustice, violence, and anxiety, which feed back into the networks that produced them.

Yet careful observers, attuned to the blind spots in these patterns, glimpse alternatives, exploring paths that emerge from the shadows of the system's own contradictions and irregularities.

Things to Come





Sheets float in mid-air, semi-transparent, suspended like a paused memory. Floating like holographic apparitions, they feature tactile surrogates such as robotic arms, pods, and synthetic surfaces. These oversized polyester foils, printed with UV-flatbed precision, recall the celluloid cells once used in early animation studios. These are not blank frames but close-up fragments from sci-fi films, all selected for the role technology plays in shaping female subjectivity within their narratives.

These interfaces become metaphors for broader historical erasures, echoed in the inclusion of a 1938 rejection letter from Walt Disney Productions, addressed to a young woman who had applied to work as an animation cel painter. The letter is firm. Women, it states, do not perform the creative work. They fill in the blanks. In *Things to Come*, those “blanks” become the central narrative. The labour of women, both represented and unrepresented, seeps through the layers of acetate and memory.

Aleksandra Domanović is not illustrating sci-fi so much as rescaling and modding it, reformatting the genre’s visual code to include what has been routinely firewalled, namely the gestures, gazes, and feedback loops of female embodiment in technological futures. The installation reads like a cinematic strip-mining of the future’s past, revealing how science fiction has long rehearsed gendered scripts of subjugation. There is no singular protagonist here, no plot resolution but rather a composite view of machinic desire. *Things to Come* is a testing ground for speculative archaeology. It is a place where rejected letters, decommissioned sci-fi props, and erased labour histories are layered to produce a glitch in the canon.



to be continued ...

Curators' Biographies

Bani Brusadin

Bani Brusadin is a curator, educator, and researcher whose work explores critical technologies, planetary infrastructures, and the politics of digital cultures. He is currently Lead Curator at Medialab Matadero Madrid, and was part of the curatorial team for transmediale 2023. He co-founded *The Influencers*, a long-running platform for radical artistic practices and cultural interference. His curatorial approach emphasises the role of art in interrogating automation, post-industrial landscapes, and socio-technological change. Rooted in network cultures and speculative scenarios, his projects examine how artists respond to systemic transformations shaping contemporary life and the futures at stake.

Giulia Colletti

Giulia Colletti is a curator and art historian whose research investigates the entanglements of mining territories, computational infrastructures, and speculative ecologies. Informed by cosmotechnics across Southern/Southeastern Europe and East Asia, her curatorial work engages with artists addressing extractivism, erosions of the living, and planetary imaginaries. In 2025, she serves as Research Fellow at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea – MMCA, and at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts – NTMoFA. From 2019 to 2025, she is Curator of Programs and Digital at Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea. Her essays, reviews, and compiled readers have been featured in museum catalogues and published by CURA., Mousse, Flash Art, and e-flux, among others.

Colophon

The Vast Automaton
Bani Brusadin, Giulia Colletti

Editor
Janez F. Janša

Copyeditor
Alexei Monroe

Photographers
Damir Žižić (all photos except those indicated below)
Nicole Golja (pp. 25-29, 118-121)
Nestor Siré (pp. 44, 49, 51, 54)
Hope Peterson (p. 124)
Viktor Zahtila (pp. 139-143)
Samantha Kandinsky (pp. 221-225)

Design and layout
Alessandro Lanfrancotti

Font
GG Sans Soleil,
designed by Alessandro Lanfrancotti,
published by Gray Garden

Production
Labin Art Express XXI (L.A.E. XXI)
lae.hr

Print
Collegium Graphicum

No. of copies
500

Published by
Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana
aksioma.org | aksioma@aksioma.org
Represented by Marcela Okretič

AKSIOMA

© Aksioma | All text and image rights reserved by their respective authors
Ljubljana, June 2026

Published on the occasion of

The 5th Industrial Art Biennial
The Vast Automaton

Labin, Raša, Pula, Vodnjan
24 October – 30 November 2025

Curated by
Bani Brusadin, Giulia Colletti

Featuring

Heba Y. Amin | Andrej Beštak, Anja Leko | Živa Božičnik Rebec | Maks Bricelj,
Ema Maznik Antić | Alice Bucknell | Kate Crawford, Vladan Joler | Sophie Cundale |
Aleksandra Domanović | Sandro Đukić | Anna Engelhardt, Mark Cinkevich |
업채 eobchae | Daniel Felstead, Jenn Leung | 김아영 Ayoung KIM | Laibach Kunst
| Lawrence Lek | 刘窗 Chuang LIU | Abu Bakarr Mansaray | !Mediengruppe Bitnik,
Selena Savić, Gordana Savičić | 오세린 Serin OH | Gerard Ortín Castellví |
박민하 Minha PARK | Rich Pell | Tanit Plana | Cemile Sahin | Nestor Siré |
Suzanne Treister | Marina Xenofontos | Dragan Živadinov, Dunja Zupančič

Organised by
L.A.E. XXI, 2025
industrialartbiennale.eu





**The 5th Industrial Art Biennial
The Vast Automaton**

Heba Y. Amin
Andrej Beštak, Anja Leko
Živa Božičnik Rebec
Maks Bricelj, Ema Maznik Antić
Alice Bucknell
Kate Crawford, Vladan Joler
Sophie Cundale
Aleksandra Domanović
Sandro Đukić
Anna Engelhardt, Mark Cinkevich
업채 eobchae
Daniel Felstead, Jenn Leung
김아영 Ayoung KIM
Laibach Kunst
Lawrence Lek
刘窗 Chuang LIU
Abu Bakarr Mansaray
!Mediengruppe Bitnik, Selena Savić, Gordan Savičić
오세린 Serin OH
Gerard Ortín Castellví
박민하 Minha PARK
Rich Pell
Tanit Plana
Cemile Sahin
Nestor Siré
Suzanne Treister
Marina Xenofontos
Dragan Živadinov, Dunja Zupančič

**Curated by
Bani Brusadin, Giulia Colletti**

AKSIOMA

€ 18