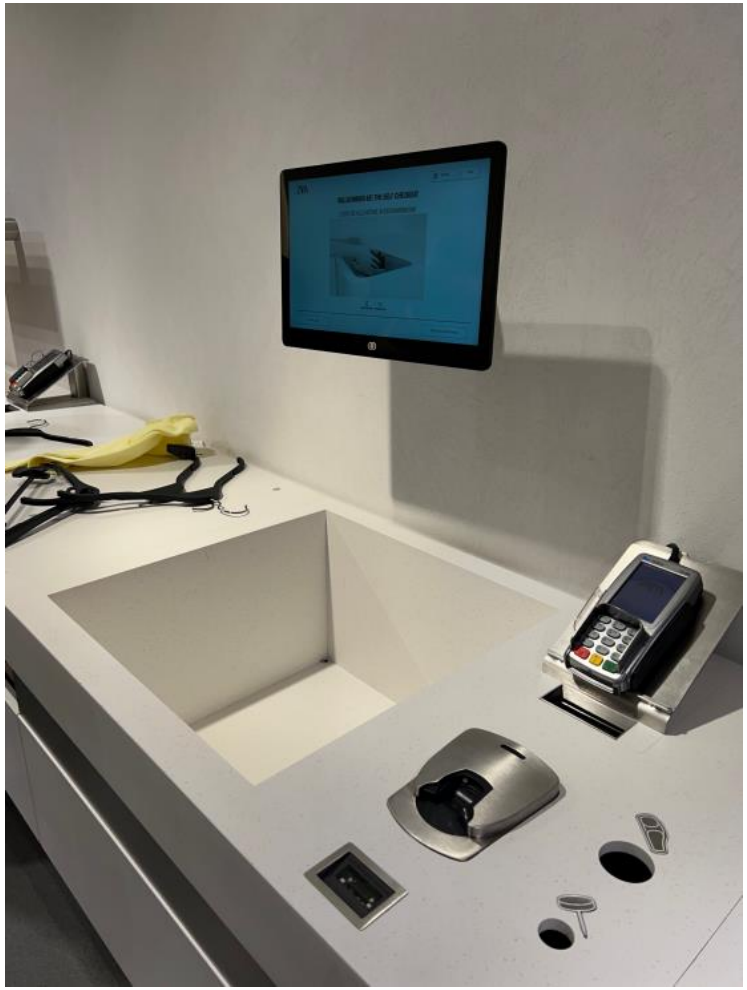
Everyday Archive of Digital Capitalism (SoSe 2023)



This picture shows a self-checkout machine at Zara. It allows customersto pay for their shopped items without having to interact with staff. One simply places all items in the provided pit and selects “checkout items” on the monitor. The customer can choose to buy a shopping bag, too, and complete the transaction cashless via credit or debit card. Hence, customers have no interaction with any employees whatsoever, and can scan, bag, and pay for shopped items completely on their own.

On the one hand, these self-checkout machines are incredibly convenient and facilitate the shopping process for customers. Particularly customers who avoid social contact with strangers benefit from self-checkout machines because they do not need to interact with anyone. Furthermore, it takes away the burden from employees during busy work hours, as well as from the customers who no longer have to wait in long lines at the checkout.

However, one particular question came to my mind when I first saw self checkout machines in the United States a couple of years ago: How do stores control the transactions made at selfcheckout machines? Do these machines promote shoplifting and, to some extent, crime?

Although I detected security cameras in the self-checkout area, I wondered whether people are actually monitored at all times. In addition to that, I doubt that someone sitting at the other end of the surveillance camera can observe every single person and every movement during crowded shopping hours. In fact, I once “shoplifted” a second bag at the self-checkout machine on accident. Even though I had only paid for one bag, I accidently grabbed two bags that were sticking together. Indeed, no one noticed what I had done, and no one asked me to pay for the second bag – and the store was not even crowded… After all, are self-checkout machines actually a great addition to our modern capitalist shopping experience

This picture shows the chip card of an employee at a hospital. This chip is used to control time and attendance of employees to make sure they work their required hours and clock in on time of their shift. Employees simply scan their chip on the monitors on entryways and the system automatically counts the working hours. At the end of the shift, the same scanning on the monitor checks employees out and stops counting their working hours. The time and attendance system, thus, documents when employees come in late in the morning or leave earlier. Above that, mandatory breaks are tracked by scanning the chip. This way, the rights and privileges of employees are protected, and employers ensure that their staff takes breaks during work hours that are neither too long nor too short.

At first glance, this time and attendance system seems reasonable, fair, and practical. The rights of employees are protected by the time clock system, extra hours are always documented, and exploitation of labor is stopped. Furthermore, conflicts within the staff are prevented. For instance, smokers who take frequent breaks still work the same amount of time as workers who only take one long lunch break. Without such a time and attendance system, smokers could take breaks more often but still leave at the same time as someone who did not take as many breaks.

However, it is important to note that the clocking in and out happens manually. Employees could forget to clock in when they start to work, or clock out late on purpose. The digital attendance system can be easily manipulated and lead to inaccurate time tracking and, thus, unfair payment. Above that, the system merely documents when someone clocksin or out. The quality of work, on the other hand, cannot be measured. This poses the question: Is this system even fair after all? – Not to mention the threats of such data collection and violation of privacy of employees …

This is a picture of a European airline's onboard magazine. Upon seeing these pages, I immediately thought back to our discussions about influencers.

Firstly, it is interesting that part of Kylie Cosmetics' success is due to the previous success and fame of Kylie Jenner as a social media influencer. It highlights the fact that nowadays, the line between traditional entertainment or business roles, and "influencers" or "content creators" becomes increasingly thinner.

Secondly, the way that Kylie Jenner's picture is occupying half of the page points directly to the self-branding used by influencers in keeping up their followers, as well as in further promoting their business activities outside of social media. Accordingly, the next page illustrates a more traditional approach with regards to old and established cosmetics companies that are, however, "faceless".

Finally, it shows how influencers are now almost everywhere – and how the digital, social media life is flowing into our real daily lives even in places and moments when there is not even internet access.

This is the front window of a Sinsay clothing store in a Romanian mall, advertising their own app and offering a description of the benefits received by the users.

Along with other similar advertisements I keep encountering, it made me think about how the number of apps significantly increased in recent years, expanding to almost all possible domains: from shopping and grocery apps, to ones for buying bus and train tickets, paying bills, or even managing yourself while attending a festival.

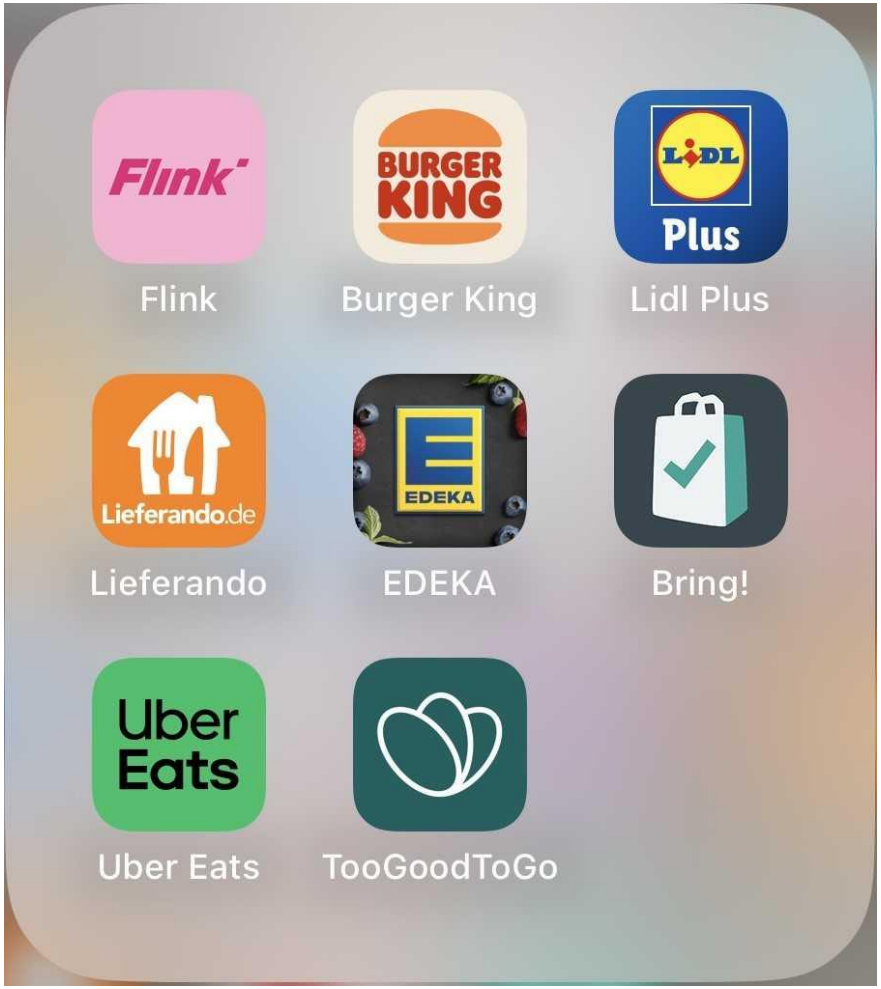
On one hand, all these apps make several tasks easier and, in cases such as the one presented in the picture, even offer concrete benefits to users. On the other hand, at some point it becomes exhausting to need to constantly download apps for any basic services.

Translation:

Download the Sinsay App:

- *Discount on the first purchase and offers;*
- *Return of products without receipt for purchases registered in the app;*
- *Widget of Sinsay ID that can be placed wherever on the desktop;*
- *History of online and in-store purchases that you saved in the app;*
- *Plastic bag for 1 ban* in stores;*
- *Access to a "favorite articles" page.*

*1 ban is the smallest coin in Romania, equivalent to ~0.002 euro



I did a screenshot from my mobile phone, especially from the file where all my "food-apps" belong. I think some of them are kinda useful, for example when I go to some fast food restaurants or grocery shopping they got special offers in the app or the food sharing app "Too good to go" where leftovers from different bakeries or restaurants get offered before they throw them away. But I think I also have less useful apps like the app "Bring!", which is just an online shopping list I can share with my partner. I see the purpose of the app but a pen and paper would also do the same thing as this app does. So I think on the one hand we have really useful apps but on the other hand there are some app which are less useful.

I wanted to share a photo/screenshot with you. It doesn't belong to this weeks topic but I hope this won't be a problem. I stumbled over a "Karikatur" by Klaus Stuttmann and I think it fits perfectly to *Week 12: will ChatGPT change the world?*

I think the Karikatur refers to many political toppings:

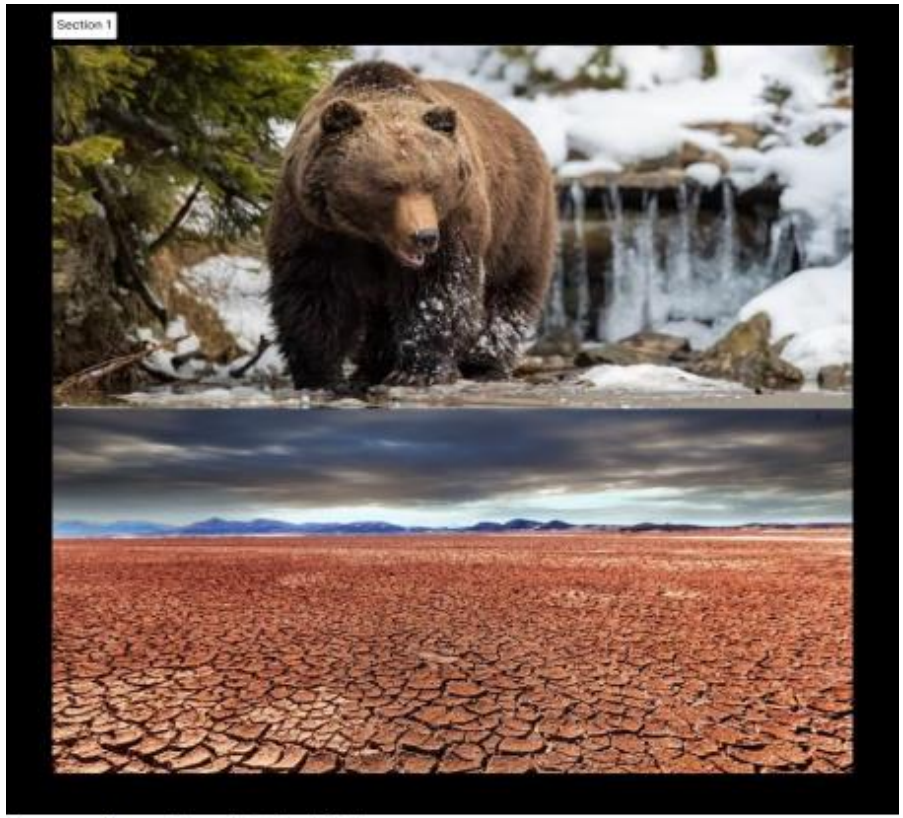
1. The Karikatur refers to the topic, if there needs to be regulations for artificial intelligence, for which politics must find a solution.
2. The Karikatur also refers to the topic, when and how ChatGPT should be used - it's very controversial in school and university contexts. When pupils, students and workers can use ChatGPT, why can't politicians use ChatGPT as well? Will AI have an impact on the politic process?
3. I think the Karikatur also refers to the topic, that artificial intelligence also poses a certain danger. AI was made by humans to be better and smarter than humans but where are the boundaries? Will AI one day will be even smarter than humans and become independent?

This is the MI6 building in london. Intelligence agencies are increasingly using the digital landscape to research potential threats, investigate people and track governments. The world is heavily connected in vast ways with more data available then ever before, so the digital is a significant resource which raises moral questions on surveillance and privacy

In class we discussed the topic around the use of AI and the effects on the environment. We saw the dangers it contains and the potentials it brings along not only for the use of the economy but also for the environment. The main problem we all could agree on, was the immense damages on the environment that are caused by the companies that produce or use AI as well as other digital tools and endeavor gaining the needed resources. An important aspect that goes along with the mentioned procedure is the exploitation of people who live under circumstances of dismal human records for gaining those resources like coltan, cobalt and further rare earth elements (Dauvergne 2022: 698).

The video for this session by Kate Crawford "Atlas of AI (…)" visualizes the damage of the environment in this context very precisely by showing for example a picture of a desert field caused by the target of gaining the chemical element Lithium for rechargeable batteries that is won by evaporating salt water in places like Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile. Furthermore, lakes of toxic waste are caused by processing rare earth ores that are needed for AI, in places like Bayan-Obo. The results are polluted ground water with carcino gens that are promoting cancer and the contamination of local surroundings with radiation (Dauvergne 2022: 710).

On the other hand, there are some glimmers of hope thinking of the possibility to advance the use of renewable energy by using machine learning systems that make wind and solar energy more efficient and reliable. It is to note that the worlds cloud-computing infrastructure was transitioning in recent years to renewable energy (Dauvergne 2022: 703). There is also the use of finding new natural resources by using smart drones which inspect pipelines and submersibles to explore ocean beds and eventually find new oil and gas deposits. These resources can be stored, retrieved, and analyzed of geological, financial, and logistical data by using intelligent platforms (Dauvergne 2022: 706).



Source: Freepik, edited with Figma

We also talked about the bright sides that Joppa is trying to point out by for example mentioning the help of algorithms for the protection of endangered species by providing new ways of estimating global population and locate those (Joppa 2017: 326). Also, something that Joppa addresses is the fact that governments must involve in the affairs of using of AI in a manner that environmental-data collection is being made publicly available so that the support of protecting the global climate can be done appropriately (Joppa 2017: 327).

In conclusion AI is both harming and protecting the environment and the human beings. It depends on which way it is used and if the politics is restraining the use by setting strict rules that are protecting climate (and human rights) and can find ways to cope with the economies aspirations without promoting the capitalist competition. I see the responsibility in the hands of the governments in coping with the digital development so that societal living can work, and we can live on an earth that is not damaged by it. We can't exclude AI from the moder

Wilcox talks about this in her paper and discusses that the issues within drone warfare is not only the extent to which algorithms can manage to replace the abilities of humans but also the territorial expansion concerning the reach of the drone (Wilcox 2017: 13). Wilcox names Donna Haraway and her description of the “god-trick” that refers to the illusion that the digital weapons like drones can see everywhere from basically “nowhere” (Wilcox 2017: 13). The key problem within this so called “god-trick” is that artificial intelligence often mistakes bodies only as dead or dying victims if they appear at all (Wilcox 2017: 13). Furthermore, Wilcox declares this problematic with the form of posthuman embodiment and the recognizing of either a killable or manageable object by analyzing on a racialized and gendered basis (Wilcox 2017: 14). Wilcox criticizes the neglect of rethinking the sensor video feeds by imagery analysts and emphasizes that the incorporation with artificial intelligence cannot be disassociated from embodied practices (Wilcox 2017: 17). The “Turing test” by Alan Turing ascertains the ability of machines to think by an “imitation game” in which a human poses questions at a compute terminal and if the human cannot differentiate if the answer is given by a human or a computer, this ability of the machines is approved (Wilcox 2017: 18).

Wilcox explains that the massacre in Uruzgan province in 2010 shows that the reliance on the category of the visual to the rise of algorithms and artificial intelligence concerning the decisions about life and death is problematic because of the difficulties in establishing “positive identification” of an enemy fighter who is an imminent threat (Wilcox 2017: 18). In addition, the drones are not able to provide the peripheral vision and the final interpretation of the images needs to be done by the operator´s eye or analyst´s eye. She emphasizes the importance of rotation so that multiple embodied gazes can be analyzed rather just one ´persistent stare´. Besides there is the need of filtering the images through satellite relays and security encryption before they are viewable (Wilcox 2017: 19). One crucial factor considering the work with operating drones is the people operating drones suffer from stress and post-traumatic stress disorder. One of those people, Brandon Bryant, speaks of not being able to stop an improvised explosive device (IED) attack that caused the death of five American soldiers (Wilcox 2017: 22). In conclusion, after considering the facts, I can claim that the use of artificial intelligence can only be a minimal supporting factor during the mission of warfare and never be used without being reviewed precisely by the humans operating. It still contains a lot of dangers being used incautiously and for the lives that are at stake it should always be reconsidered if the use is necessary. There is still a lot to be developed in this field to be more reliable.

The rise of amazon’s package dilevery service, now competing in the delivery sector with the Deutsche Post who transported and delievered amazon’s products before the emergence of it’s new delievery service marks a shift in this sector. Amazon has build it’s own delievery network in Germany even though Deutsche Post still holds a market share of at least 80 percent in mail delievery to private providers. But with amazon being a more powerful, faster and employee-unfriendly delieverer und with people more and more buying on the digital platform therefore increasing its market share, Deutsche Post is getting in trouble.

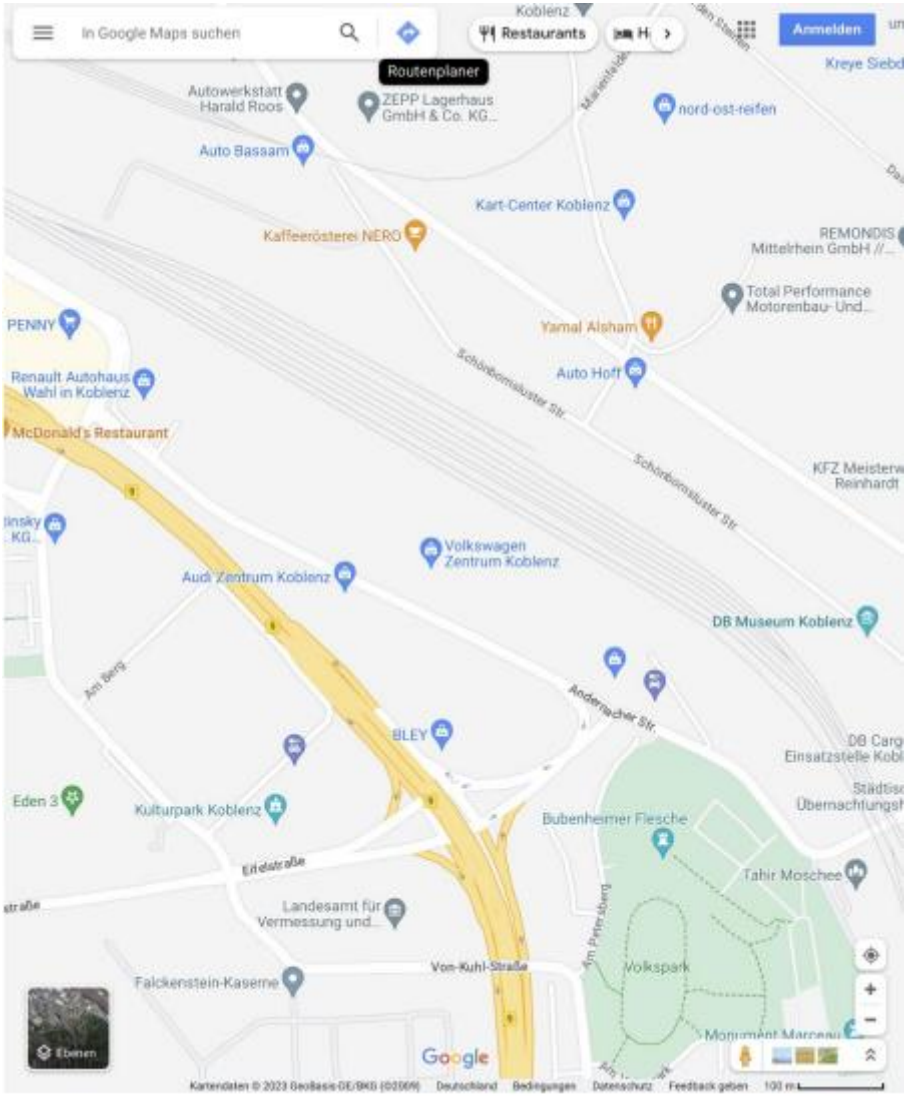
The old-fashioned wristwatch is outdated. Fitness watches or trackers are the new standard. It collects data about your health, pulse, heartbeat, sport activities and more. And the collected data are the digital capital for big corporations like Samsung, Apple, Garmin. The more they know about your personal health, the more they know about their customers. And they willingly share this information with advertising companies to make money out of your health.

Once a private secret, now everybody can share information about how sportive and healthy somebody is on social media like TikTok. Influencers promote fitness trackers to their viewers. And of course (like a usual smartphone) it can be addictive if your watch tells you did not take enough steeps or did not reach your weekly goal in running. In a way, a fitness watch is like a second smartphone that bonds you with a brand, keeps telling you to be sportive (which is a good thing) but easily forwards personal data to big tech companies and sell it to make their profit (which is a bad thing).

The advertising campaign pictured above promotes the Dyson hair dryer and styler. The device was developed in 2016 and it is supposed to revolutionize the styling of long hair. Long hair is worn by a majority of women. However, the device was developed by Sir James Dyson, a man.

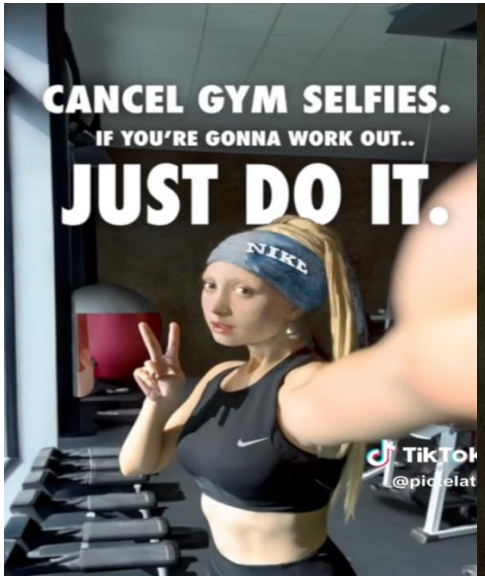
Overall, it is the case that most technical devices are developed by men, because women are still underrepresented in the technology branch. If you think about the hair dryer, the question arises whether a device that is predominantly used by women would not satisfy their needs better if it had been developed by women.

Overall, technology would probably be better adapted to the needs of women if more of them were working in this field.



The randomly selected screenshot of the Google Maps app shows a section of the city of Koblenz. On closer inspection, it is noticeable that the marked locations predominantly appeal to "traditionally" male fields of interest. Car dealers, the Office of Surveying, and a military barracks are drawn in. Places that would appeal to female interests from a traditional perspective, such as malls, daycare centers, or diaper changing facilities, are not found. Other sections of the app also only show these when zoomed in very heavily, or not at all. This raises the question of whether the app is sexist, or whether the male developers of the app have placed a greater focus on "their" interests. One argument against the sexism accusation, but not against the discrimination accusation, is that the preset voice that shows users the way is female

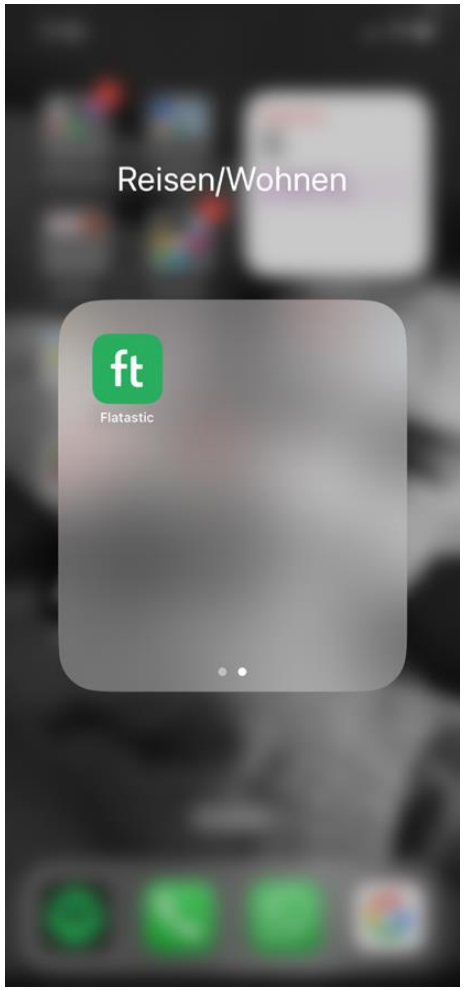
1. Nike ad: Girl with a pearl earring



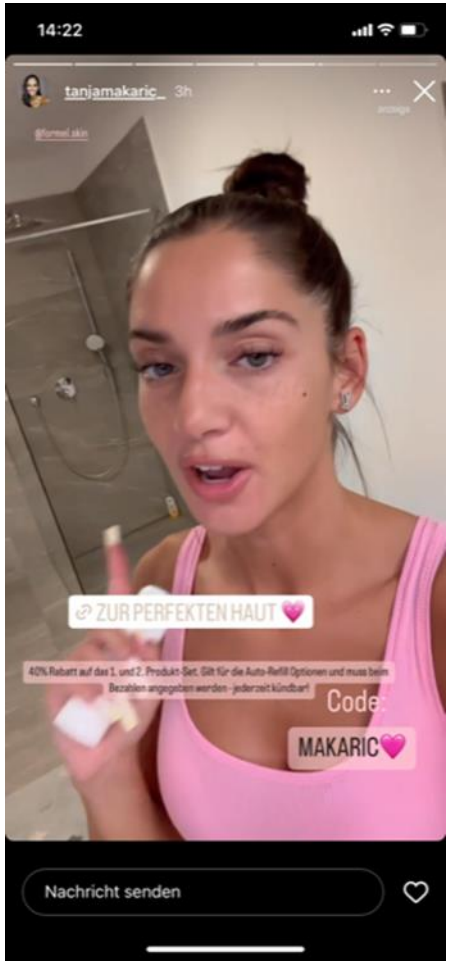
I found the left picture on TikTok. It shows a Nike Ad made by the new photoshop generative fill AI tool. The ad is based on the 17th century painting "Girl with a pearl earring" by Johannes Vermeer (right picture). The software used to generate the ad could transform, fill, extend or change every part of photographic footage and can potentially change the way we edit and work with photos. The labor field of photo editing could become, in the long term, obsolete.
Here a link to a video on how the editing took place which clarifies how fast/easy such complex editing is done:
https://digitalsynopsis.com/design/photoshop-generative-ai-nike-ad/

2. Meme on the mechanics of Deep learning/Machine learning

This Meme contributes, in my opinion, very well to the session regarding criti-hype or hype of new technologies in general. The "new" technology of AI or Machine Learning is marketed in an aggressive way as a fundamentally new thing – while ignoring the technology standing behind AI being pure statistics. Actually, most text-based AI doesn't even know the contents of its outputs but rather just aligns words based on probabilities of them appearing in just that exact position. Despite that software corporations try to cover the mechanism behind their products because of the fact of them being invested in keeping the illusion of their product being "magical" and creating a basis to market on.
I found the Meme on reddit.



This picture is my contribution to this week's theme. The topic is: Why is there an app for everything?
You can see a screenshot of my home screen showing the app "Flatastic". The purpose of this is that the price of common goods is divided up fairly afterwards. This applies to flat-sharing communities as well as couples.
The advantage of this is that everyone can see the current status of things and knows exactly which expenses were incurred by whom. It also ensures that no one is left with their costs.
The disadvantage of this app is that it remains unclear what happens to the data and who manages it. One should always be aware of this.



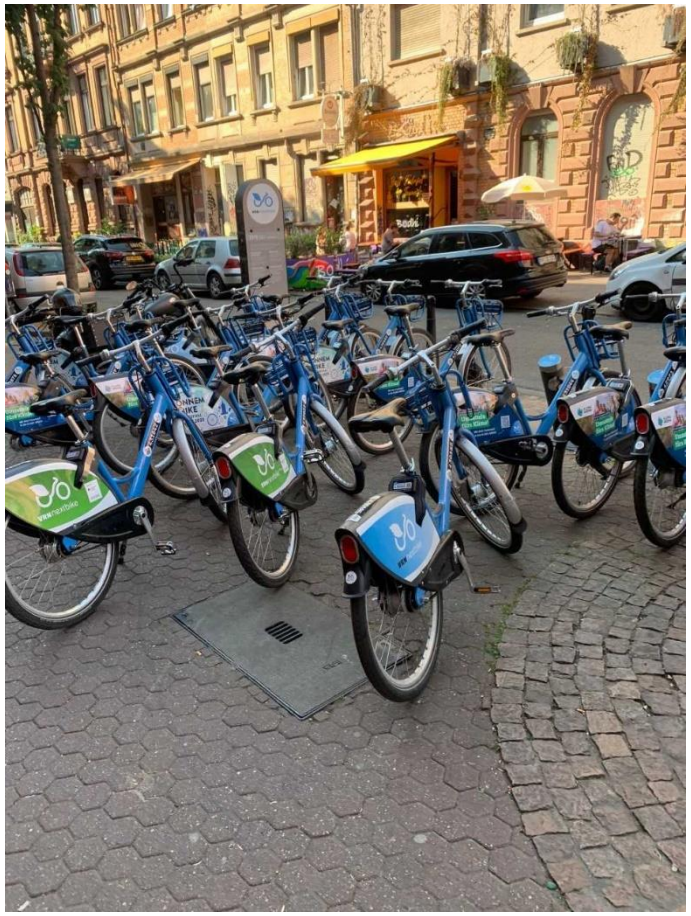
This picture is my contribution to the topic: Do social media influencers commodify social relations? Social media influencers can indeed commodify social relations to some extent. that's the way they make a lot of money within seconds.

Here you can see a screenshot of somebody's instagram story showing an advertisment of a skin care product. It also says that you will get a perfect skin after using this product which is just unrealistic. In many cases, influencers collaborate with brands to create sponsored content, where they endorse products or services in exchange for financial compensation or other benefits.

While some influencers may prioritize financial gain and treat relationships as transactional, others may strive to build meaningful connections and prioritize authenticity in their interactions.

The DHL Packing Station: Revolutionising Logistics

This picture shows me standing in front of my local DHL packing station and posting returns after “retail therapy” has escalated once again. It is standing tall as a testament to the transformative power of digital capitalism in the middle of the LIDL car park. The DHL packing station represents the intersection of technology and logistics, exemplifying how digital capitalism has reshaped traditional industries. At its heart, this DHL packing station embodies the concept of digitisation and automation. With its array of barcode scanners, touchscreens, and secure lockers, the station offers a self-service model that streamlines the package collection process. I could effortlessly interact with the station and complete my transactions, all without the need for human intervention. This epitomizes the efficiency and cost reduction strategies pursued by companies in the era of digital capitalism. Furthermore, this packing station seamlessly integrates with DHL's digital platforms, providing customers with a cohesive and personalized experience. In my case, it was receiving a digital receipt with the track and trace numbers. Through online tracking, real-time notifications, and mobile app integration, users gain unprecedented control and transparency over their shipments. This integration facilitates data collection, enabling DHL to analyse customer preferences, optimise its operations, and deliver targeted services – an embodiment of the data-driven approach central to digital capitalism. It offers 24/7 accessibility and a frictionless pickup process. Its presence underscores the profound impact digital capitalism has had on reshaping customer experiences, prioritizing efficiency, and redefining traditional business models. Finally, there is a small surveillance camera leaving me to wonder who’s sitting on the other side and what they are doing with the footage- what are they trying to gather from this data?



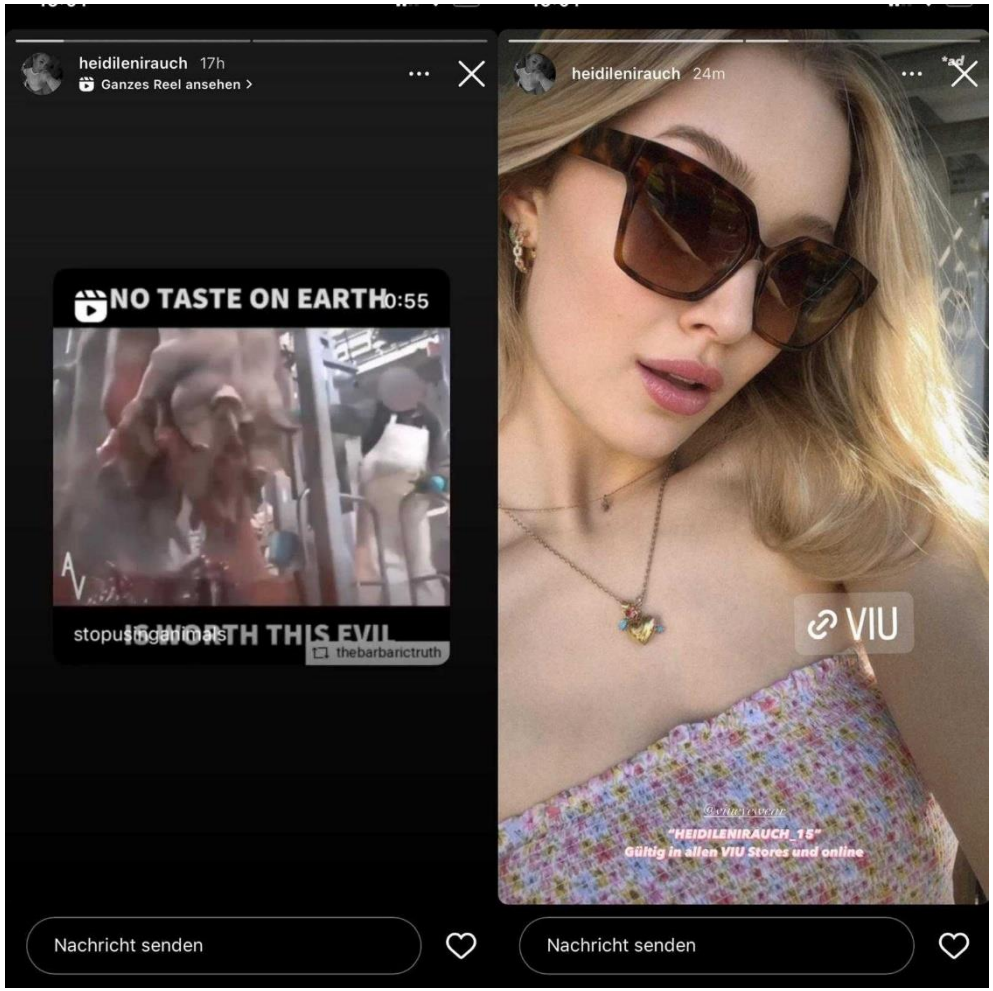
VRN Next Bikes: Revolutionising Urban Mobility in the Age of Digital Capitalism

About a week ago, a friend wanted to visit me late at night. Since the distance from the main station to my flat is quite long and there were no trains running at night, he told me he would come with the Next Bike. When he arrived at my place, he told me he urgently needed a charging cable for his phone, otherwise he would not be able to come back later, since the Next Bikes can only be used via an app. As you can see in the picture, there are several of these bikes in front of my flat and they are generally spread all over the city.

VRN Next Bikes, depicted in the picture, exemplify the concept of digital capitalism due to their integration of technology, connectivity, and market-driven dynamics. These bikes represent the fusion of traditional transportation with digital innovation, offering users a convenient and efficient means of urban mobility.

Digital capitalism refers to the economic system in which digital technologies and platforms play a central role in shaping and driving economic activities. VRN Next Bikes embody this concept as they leverage digital technologies, such as GPS tracking, smartphone apps, and online payment systems, to create a networked and interconnected bike-sharing service.

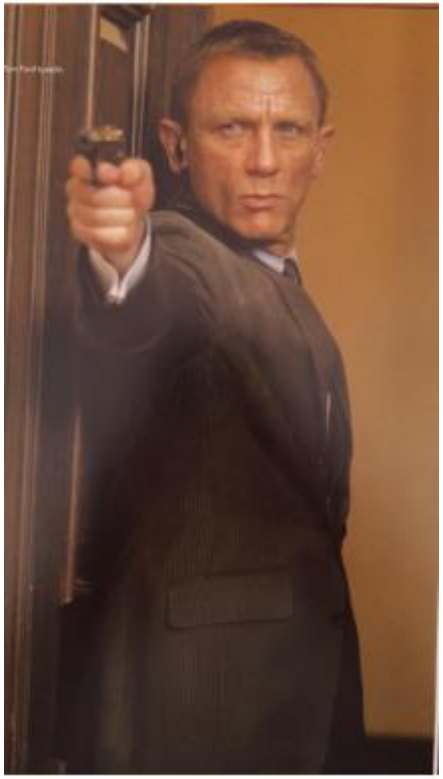
Furthermore, VRN Next Bikes exemplify digital capitalism by capitalising on data collection and analysis. Through user interactions with the bikes and associated apps, valuable data is generated, allowing companies to refine their services, tailor marketing strategies, and make data-driven business decisions. In summary, the picture showcasing VRN Next Bikes represents the convergence of technology, convenience, and market-driven dynamics, making them a compelling example of digital capitalism in the context of urban mobility.



This contribution is a collage of two screenshots taken from an Instagram story, there are two slides that were posted back to back by a small influencer. The first slide is a shared video about animal cruelty, meat production and consumption under capitalism, reading “No Taste on earth is worth this evil”. The second one is advertising the sunglasses she’s wearing. So now one could say that it is amazing, how even small creators try to use their platform to spread critical information about consumption and production and that is one, very valid way of looking at things. But you could also say that the critic of consumption under capitalism is always just a way of individualizing the systemic problem, often followed by some incentive to buy stuff.

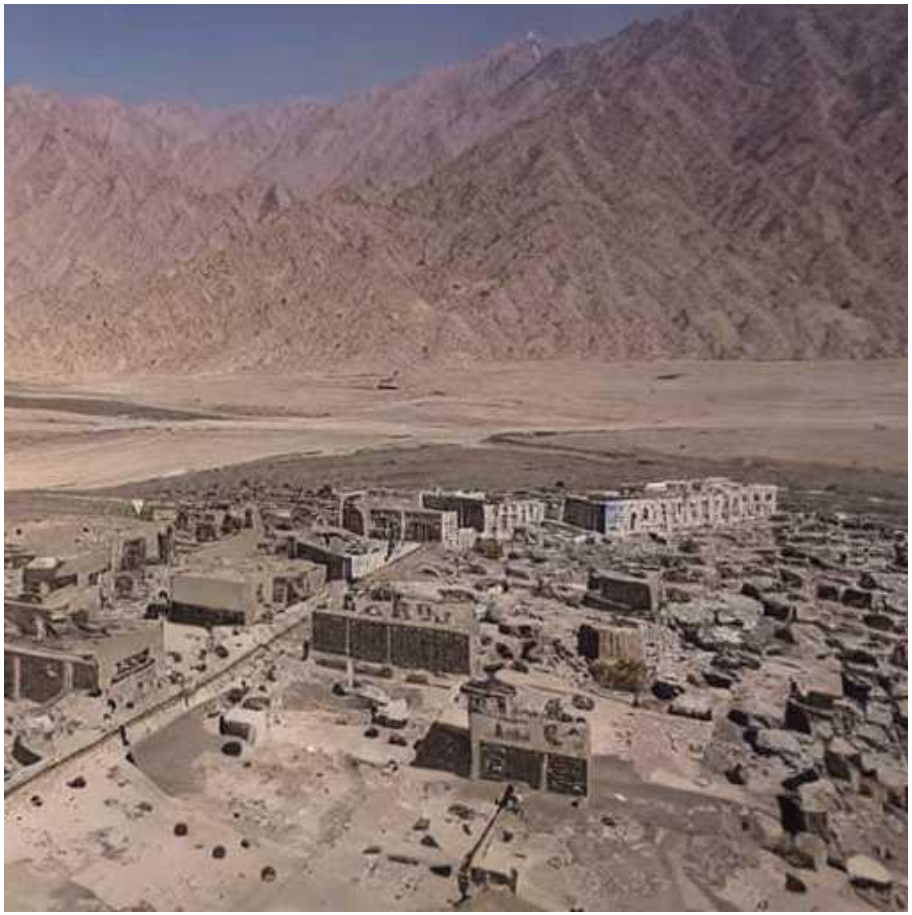
Stop eating meat and consume ethically is one example of an individualized ideology that is very harmful to every form of collective understanding and organizing. Mark Fischer gave a name to the broader concept of critic under capitalism which he called "capitalist realism", the idea that every form of critizism against capitalism is being incorporated into the system itself, which often leads to criticizsm becoming nothing more than a farce, free from every form of radicality. Another example of a similar phaenomenon is the "CO2-Footprint", created by a marketing team to shift responsibility for climate change, away from cooperations and the system itself.(https://mashable.com/feature/carbon-footprint-pr-campaign-sham)

"Jeder Einkaufszettel ist ein Stimmzettel" (every shopping slip is a voting slip) is another example of that individualizing ideology. I of course don´t blame the woman in this example or anyone who posts similar things for the continuation of capitalism in its harmful form. But i do think it´s interesting how social media is used to spread awareness about symptoms of capitalist production, without articulating (atleast not the same people) any form of systemic critic.



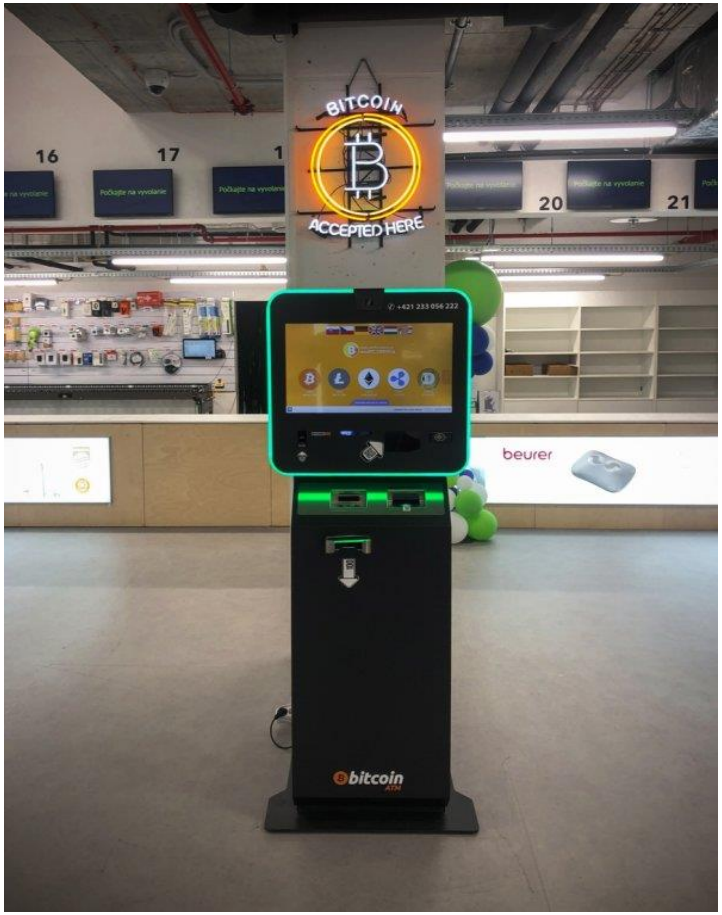
The photo shows a scene from “James Bond” with Daniel Craig. I found this picture in a book about some background information on how the Bond-films were shooted, that I am currently reading. The picture shows Daniel Craig playing MI6 agent 007 and holding a gun. Where is the link between James Bond, a fictional character, and AI’s influence on wars? James Bond operates “in the shadows”, he is a special weapon of his country to collect information and eliminate enemies – an efficient assassin. In the future, this task will mainly be carried out by AI-controlled weapons, like drones and other digital means. Thus, the question is whether there will exist an agent being responsible for his operations or not. In “Spectre”, the fourth film with Daniel Craig as Bond, the character and Bond’s boss M. says, “A licence to kill is also a licence not to kill.” Will an AI-controlled weapon have a licence at all? This discussion is already taking place in terms of drones, but it will probably escalate coming to deeper usages of Artificial Intelligence

This picture demonstrates the growing importance of the economy in our society. A tower of KPMG, bigger than the church or in a metaphorical meaning the state. Of course, the church is far away from representing the modern state. Nonetheless, in a capitalist society the economic part of our lives is growing, in a digital economy even faster. With new technologies such as AI in use, the economy owners gain more power vis-à-vis the consumers. Therefore, it becomes necessary to regulate the scope of AI, as was the analogous economy regulated, too. For example, there could be a register of legitimate uses of AI, assessed by ethical scholars, economists, politicians, and members of the civil society.



anbei finden Sie zwei Archivbilder. Eines ist eine Karikatur, die ich sehr treffend finde, das andere ist KI generiert und bezieht sich auf den modernen Drohnenkrieg.

I recently travelled around Europe and found a lot of different places which had a focus on cryptocurrencies such as this bar I saw when I was in Budapest. I didn't take a photo of it at the time or go in, but it has stuck in my mind since. I have since found that it doesn't accept Bitcoin as a payment. However, it is still a hub for people to discuss cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, Ethereum and Cardano.



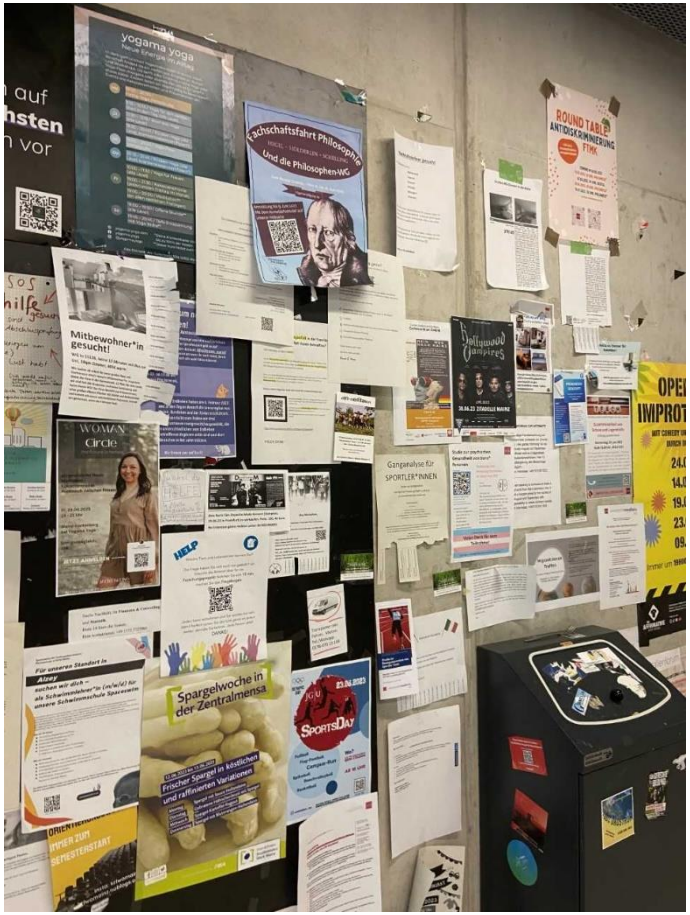
While in Bratislava I also found a Bitcoin ATM when exploring the town, unfortunately I was unable to have a good look at it as it was out of order when I went. This is the only cryptocurrency ATM I have ever seen and after further research seems that its common in Bratislava.

This is a Google Nest it is installed at the house of my girlfriend's sister. The Camera has a motion sensor, that starts filming once, it´s ac8vated. They can see, what the camera is filming with an App on their phone and the camera can also recognize faces. Since we visit them regularly, the camera now knows my face and they get a no8fica8on (which they can personalize with names, so the no8fica8on is even more precise), that I stand in their driveway.

On the web site, it says that Google is protec8ng "your" data, as in, the data of the costumers. I know that they needed to point the camera in angel, that only films their property (so no pedestrians are filmed). But couldn't google now use my, or the mailman's, facial recogni8on data for their own purposes (like training their algorithm)? I think it's different than being willingly filmed or uploading my own images on Instagram or Facebook.

There, I constant to them being used but here, I feel like I did not consent or at least it's a loophole, since it's a home security system.

The first image shows the computer Mensa machine which is used to top up cards and phones to allow for students and professors to purchase food. This machine later tracks how much money you have ever topped in on it, which it displays on the app as well as your purchases. My assumption is that this also helps the Mensa regulate what sells and what doesn't allowing them to manage their stock.



In the second image there are posters and leaflets with QR codes, which is purposely done to make those interested scan the code for more information allowing them to advertise their courses or programs easier and in more detail. If the link takes you to a website, this might lead to you receiving similar advertisements and contents appearing on your device due to 'cookies' and tracking.