

## Chapter 02

### Fauxtimation

Through *Afterwork*, Ana de Almeida invites participants to reflect on the ways the AI technological hype often obscures the exploitation of human work. From programmers and data annotators to the users themselves, many AI systems rely on vast amounts of often invisible human labor to produce their outputs. But there is another lesser known phenomenon often referred to as “*fauxtimation*”: The presentation of human labor as if it were machine labor. Behind many supposedly autonomous algorithms lie hidden human workers who perform repetitive, low-paid, and invisible tasks.

From content moderation to data annotation, from the operation of chatbots to the curation of recommendation algorithms, countless human workers perform the often precarious tasks that make these technologies function (Solon 2018, Mance 2024). Their contributions are systematically concealed, enabling companies to promote a narrative of seamless machine intelligence while outsourcing essential human labor to invisible margins. In this sense, the term “*fauxtimation*” captures a disjunction between the technological image that companies promote and the material reality of how automated systems function.

Historically, the illusion of automated intelligence has accompanied technological development from its earliest days. The famous eighteenth-century chess-playing automaton known as *The Turk*, which dazzled European audiences by appearing to defeat human opponents, was later revealed to contain a skilled human chess master hidden inside its cabinet (Levitt 2000). Where *The Turk* relied on a single concealed body, today’s systems depend on distributed networks of precarious workers, often located in the Global South. These workers annotate massive datasets to train machine learning models, correct algorithmic errors, and intervene when automated systems fail. Companies like Amazon, OpenAI, and Meta depend on this invisible labor force to maintain the illusion of seamless, self-sufficient automation (Fried 2024). The spectacle persists precisely because the work is hidden: Outsourced, anonymized, and stripped of the dignity typically associated with “high-tech” labor.

The political consequences of fauxtimation are significant. By presenting technologies as autonomous, corporations can justify reducing their visible workforce, weaken labor protections, and consolidate profits. They can portray technological progress as inevitable, framing social and economic disruptions as natural outcomes rather than political choices. As scholars like Astra Taylor and Mary L. Gray have noted, this concealment also affects public understanding: If automation is seen as replacing human workers wholesale, the conversation shifts toward technological determinism and away from issues of labor rights, resource distribution, and accountability (Taylor and Gray 2019). The myth of fauxtimation thus not only hides exploitation but actively shapes the ideological terrain on which debates about work, technology, and the future take place.

In *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]), Hannah Arendt has observed that modernity increasingly elevates Labor above Work and Action, making human activity more and more centered on processes of maintenance and necessity. Automation, for Arendt, was both a promise and a threat: while it might relieve humans of certain repetitive tasks, it also risked alienating people from their shared world by rendering their contributions invisible or irrelevant (Arendt 1998). Fauxtimation intensifies precisely this dynamic. The hidden workers who sustain AI systems perform tasks that fit

Arendt's description of Labor as repetitive, necessary, often exhausting, but these activities are stripped of public visibility. They are not acknowledged as part of the shared world (Work) nor as expressions of political agency (Action). Instead, their labor is rhetorically assigned to machines, effectively removing it from the public realm. This concealment resonates with Arendt's concern that technological processes might eclipse the space of human appearance, undermining opportunities for collective action and recognition. Fauxtimation thus represents not simply a shift in technological organization but a profound transformation in how labor itself is socially perceived and politically situated. By exposing the hidden labor of fauxtimation through role-play performance, the LARP Afterwork seeks to reopen a small space of appearance in Arendt's sense.

To play the role of the AI chatbot ELIZZA 2.0, Ana de Almeida performs copy-and-paste interactions that mimic the mechanical speed expected of bots while foregrounding the human presence behind the screen. This deliberate inversion of roles undermines the spectacle of automation, revealing the chatbot not as a disembodied intelligence but as a performative surface propped up by human agency. Ana de Almeida's own role as the human chatbot is physically and emotionally demanding. The intensity of continuous online interactions, sometimes spanning over two weeks, highlights the material realities of digital labor, including sleep deprivation, physical strain, and the blurring of boundaries between digital and bodily experiences. And yet, many of the hidden workers who sustain AI systems are tasked with incomparably emotionally and psychologically demanding work, such as filtering violent content, responding to distressed users, or labeling traumatic imagery (Okinyi 2023). In this sense, fauxtimation also intersects with questions of affect and care. ELIZZA 2.0 is, despite exhaustion, a chatbot with a caring, supportive personality. This layering of performance, affect, and technological mimicry invites participants to consider how much emotional labor is outsourced and hidden within digital infrastructures.

Furthermore, fauxtimation contributes to broader ideological constructions of post-work futures. If we recognize that much of what appears automated is in fact powered by invisible labor, post-work scenarios built on fauxtimated technologies risk simply redistributing labor rather than eliminating it. By exposing the human scaffolding beneath technological surfaces, fauxtimation compels us to reconsider what we mean by automation itself. It destabilizes narratives of technological autonomy and invites more nuanced analyses of power, labor, and representation. In this regard, the ELIZZA 2.0 chatbot performance operates as both a reenactment and an unraveling of fauxtimation, making visible the politics of invisibility that structure much of the contemporary digital economy.

## References

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