



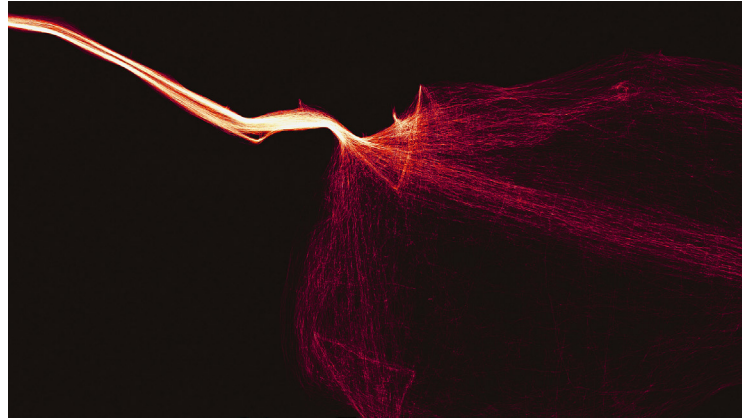
xCoAx 2021 9th Conference on  
Computation, Communication, Aesthetics & X

[2021.xCoAx.org](https://2021.xCoAx.org)

**Fabian Weiss**

[info@fabianweiss.com](mailto:info@fabianweiss.com)

University of Applied Arts  
Vienna, Vienna, Austria



## In the Heat of the Day

**Keywords:** Body, Algorithm, AI, Digital Bodies, Tracking, Wearables

Algorithms are more and more structuring our world and they are at the forefront of shaping our current and future bodies. We are increasingly intertwined with algorithmic calculative devices as we consume information, inhabit space and relate to the world around us. Calculative devices transform the nature of human subjectivity, pushing at the limits of what can be read, analyzed and thought about, and with new forms of data aggregation come also more advanced forms of profiling human behavior. While a lot of the developments around algorithms are meant to be beneficial for our wellbeing, AI may lead to new forms of manipulation and surveillance, not necessarily in the form of authoritarian politics but in a more hidden and highly effective way: by changing the economy in a way that turns us all into smartphone cattle milked for our data.

## Description

The human body is a product of society in the sense that our handling, our knowledge, our feeling, and our notions of the body are defined by societal structures, values, technologies, and systems of ideas. On the other hand, the human body is a producer of society because our social organization is essentially affected by the physicality of acting individuals and the human body contributes to social production as people labor. Bodily (inter-)actions play a crucial role in the construction of social reality and the visual expression of an optimized body has, throughout history, been of interest to human societies. The topic of body politics has become ever-present – especially since the last decades of heightened individualization. Arthur Kroker (2012) asserts that we are “drifting through many different specular performances of the body” (Kroker 2012, 2) and in our current society, we occupy a multiplicity of bodies: imaginary, sexualized, disciplined, gendered, laboring, and technologically augmented.

Today, we are living in a decisive time, where technology, medical science, and interconnected knowledge disrupts our handling of the body and allows us to modify our bodies in dimensions never known before in order to push the ‘human’ to uncharted territories. Bodies are rendered as carefully cultivated images, drawn into conversational practice and discursive interaction. Algorithms are more and more structuring our world and they are on the forefront of shaping and enhancing our current and future bodies. We are increasingly intertwined with algorithmic calculative devices as we consume information, inhabit space and relate to others and to the world around us. Louise Amoore and Volha Piotukh sum up this current state of intertwined connection: “Just as being human may also be closely enmeshed with being algorithmic, these calculative devices also alter perception, filtering what one can see of big data landscapes, how one makes sense of what can be perceived” (Amoore & Piotukh 2015, 24).

Through our use of digital technologies and gadgets we expose massive chunks of data about ourselves and our surroundings, revealing details of our movements, activities, and behaviors. Calculative devices transform the nature of human subjectivity, pushing at the limits of what can be read, analyzed and thought about (Amoore & Piotukh 2015, 37) and with new forms of data aggregation come also more advanced forms of profiling human behavior, fueling the emergence of often poorly regulated business models and new forms of governmental and commercial dataveillance. Tracking regimes that we once have thought bizarre are becoming normal (Wolf 2010), challenging us to re-evaluate what normal means. By various means of seduction, coercion, lies,

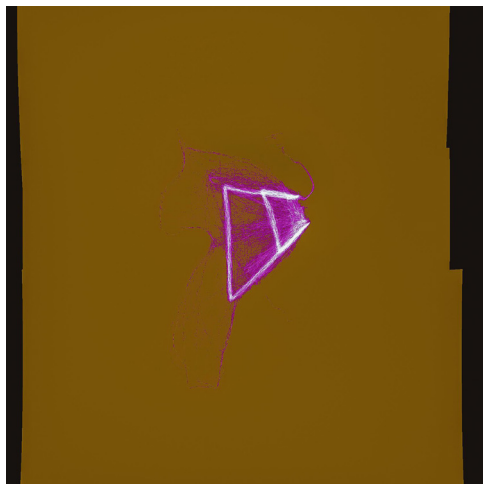
and co-optation, “everyday life has been irresistibly colonized by forces collectively known as Big Data” (Horning 2015). Corporations and state agencies use communications networks and digital surveillance to collect huge quantities of information on the activities of all individuals using their services in hopes of predicting their next moves.

From this data, digital profiles – digital bodies – are being created and they shape the treatment or response that individuals receive from state and non-state actors (Tactical Tech, 2021). Instead of cells and organs, digital bodies have data and metadata – with the connected parameters and data points growing day by day. Unlike a physical body that exists in one place, our digital bodies are scattered throughout the servers that make up the internet. Individuals are isolated or detached from their own digital bodies and cannot intervene: the digital shadows are controlled exclusively by the environment they live in (Lee & Toliver 2017, 6) and are increasingly exploited in order to model, anticipate and preemptively affect possible behaviors as well as track, control and suppress the flesh-and-bone individuals behind the digital bodies. While our physical bodies converge with digital ones, the collected data has more and more real-world implications.

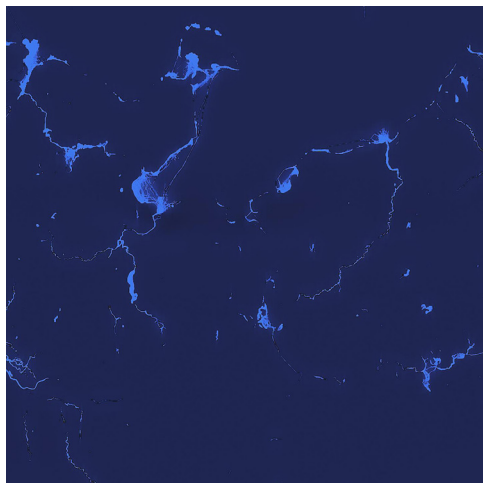
Norbert Wiener was already sounding the alarm over 60 years ago how we are turning into Mechanical Turks when being interweaved too closely with big corporations and their tools: “When human atoms are knit into an organization in which they are used, not in their full right as responsible human beings, but as cogs and levers and rods, it matters little that their raw material is flesh and blood” (Wiener 1989, 185). Following Herbert Marcuse’s argumentation about the different forms of domination of the so called free and non-totalitarian societies, “AI may lead to new forms of manipulation, surveillance, and totalitarianism, not necessarily in the form of authoritarian politics but in a more hidden and highly effective way: by changing the economy in a way that turns us all into smartphone cattle milked for our data” (Coeckelbergh 2020, 103).

The series *In the Heat of the Day* explores algorithmic structuring of the world by exploring and rearranging location data from fitness trackers made available through the service STRAVA and visually exposing the traces we leave somewhere in the cloud, acting as a driver of debate around topics of privacy, safety, and obedience. Through the abstracted images and highly stylized forms and colors, the viewer is confronted with the idea that machines and algorithms are looking at us and the data our bodies are generating constantly as well as the question of how our movements are informing the code and vice versa.

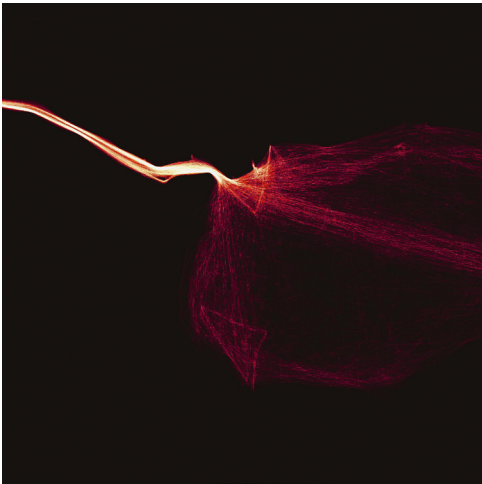
**Fig. 1.** Fabian Weiss,  
*In the Heat of the Day*, #1.



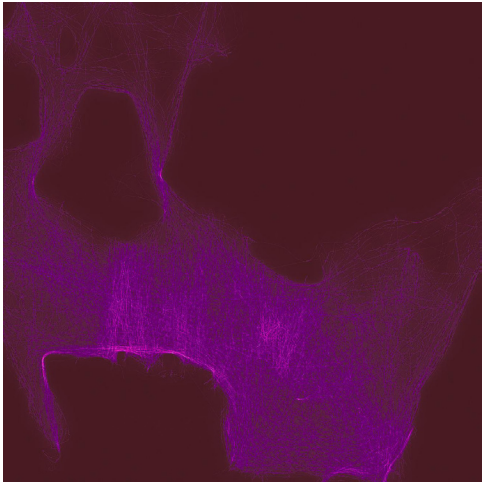
**Fig. 2.** Fabian Weiss,  
*In the Heat of the Day*, #2.



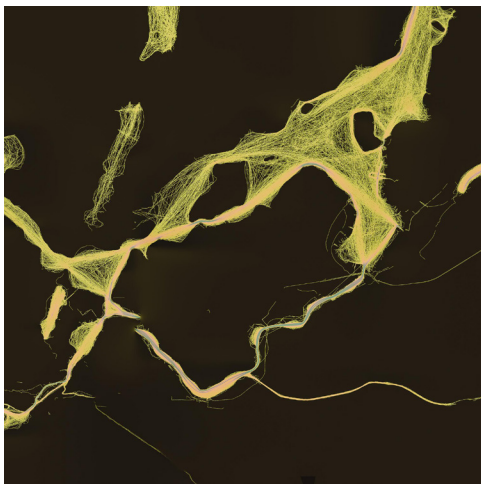
**Fig. 3.** Fabian Weiss,  
*In the Heat of the Day*, #3.



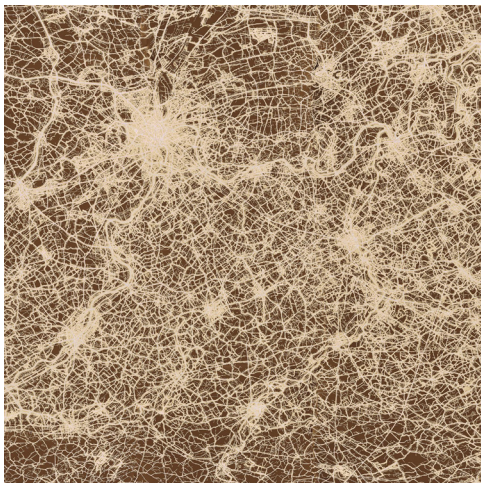
**Fig. 4.** Fabian Weiss,  
*In the Heat of the Day*, #4.



**Fig. 5.** Fabian Weiss,  
*In the Heat of the Day*, #5.



**Fig. 6.** Fabian Weiss,  
*In the Heat of the Day*, #6.D



## References

**Amoore, Louise**

**and Volha Piotukh.**

2015. *Algorithmic Life*.

*Calculative devices in the age of big data*. London: Routledge.

**Coeckelbergh, Mark.**

2020. *AI Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

**Horning, Rob.**

2015. "Hide and Seek: The Problem with Obfuscation".

*Los Angeles Review of Books*, Published November 10, 2015. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/hide-and-seek-the-problem-with-obfuscation/>.

**Kroker, Arthur.**

2012. *Body drift: Butler, Hayles, Haraway*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

**Lee, Una and Dann Toliver.**

2017. "Building Consentful Tech". Accessed January 15, 2021. <http://www.lib.montana.edu/privacy-forum/Building-Consentful-Tech-Zine.pdf>.

**Tactical Tech.**

"Shrinking Civil Space: A Digital Perspective". *Our Data Our Selves*. Accessed January 29, 2021. <https://ourdataourselves.tacticaltech.org/posts/shrinking-civil-space-a-digital-perspective/>.

**Wiener, Norbert.**

1989. *The Human Use of Human Beings*. London: Free Association Books.

**Wolf, Gary.**

2010. "The Data-Driven Life". *The New York Times Magazine*, April 28, 2010. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/02/magazine/02self-measurement-t.html>.