

*Basisarbeit*

Mia Sanchez

The title *Basisarbeit* opens things up. It is not just the loss in translation that makes it a good starting point, despite the fact that we've been discussing at length how to translate this German word into English. Basic work, groundwork, bare labor, simple tasks, unqualified, uneducated, unskilled: the word becomes judgmental. The sense of *Basisarbeit* within Mia Sanchez's exhibition has to do with the reception of this kind of labor, how it's seen by those who don't perform it. This artwork becomes a document of it. However, it is not much the basic worker who becomes the subject as it is what conditions him or her.

Sanchez proposes a view of one of these conditions, a taxi meter, time itself as a boss. Time, and the meter that marks it, dictates value. In English, the fare is both the money that the passenger has to pay and the passenger herself. The two conflate in a materialistic blob where a person becomes potential material gain and vice versa. The same could be said of the person who performs the basic work, the driver. Whether employed, self-employed, or the hybrid in between the two imposed by the Uber economy of today, her benefit and cost are dependent on time, and so are the fare's. It is unclear who gains.

This exhibition deals with what goes on between public and private. Sanchez seems to choose the taxi and its meter for reasons that go beyond a simple exposition of constraints on basic labor. There is a reflection on self-ownership as a philosophical concept too here, whether and how the premise of one person owning oneself advocated by Robert Nozick and other libertarians extends to labor tools, the car in this case. Once we enter a taxi, are we entering someone's private property? A psychological discomfort as we sit in the car, especially if the interior smells and looks as if it belongs to someone, would tell us so. At the same time, the meter reminds us we are buying this space, albeit temporarily. Is it ours for those minutes?

The answer is suspended as the exhibition presents a view of the taxi interior from the outdoors – SIS123 is a series of windows in public after all. We are touched by the intimacy of the car but reminded we're outside of it. It is ours and not, it is the driver's and not. A view of the Migros Metropol shopping mall reminds us where we are – La Chaux-de-Fonds – a town that rests on its watch industry and the workers in it. A meter hovering across the buildings suddenly appears from the small backseat of a taxi.

Piero Bisello



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