

# LOCKOUT IN THE AGE OF CONTROL

**I think what I'm expecting from photographs, or what I am presuming photographs are, are products that came out of an encounter. And this encounter is part of an ongoing conversation that we have about our life. About our life when we speak about our rights, when we are trying to change our life in those revolutionary moments and when we are trying to do other things. So photographs are just those outcomes of our life that are not closed entities that already have their meaning within themselves... photographs are components in our conversation... so the question is how to re-integrate photographs into our conversation. Ariella Azoulay, 2013.<sup>1</sup>**

The effects of capital failure are soft. Its violence takes on subtle forms. Its perpetrators are shrouded in financialised abstractions. So it follows that in everyday life, the means of resistance to capital failure are necessarily subtle too. In most cases, the 'subtle resistances' we are thinking about here are not even proposed as acts of resistance, let alone as self-consciously revolutionary practices. In our approach to the question of legacy and women's labour since 1913, we have attempted to collect some traces of those more subtle practices and present them collectively in the form of an *(In)Visible Labour Factorium*. The substance of the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* is more in the order of practices that are enacted and maintained in spite of the systemic violence of the overall situation. By systemic violence we mean to invoke Slavoj Žižek's notion of the soft effects of capital failure that cannot be properly coded as 'subjective' as compared to war or direct physical violence connected to crime and so on: **At the forefront of our minds, the obvious signals of violence are acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international terror. But we should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible 'subjective' violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent... there is what I call 'systemic' violence or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems. Slavoj Žižek, 2009.<sup>2</sup>**

But this systemic mode of violence nonetheless impacts on us all. It is violence at the experiential level, at the level of the body and the level of the affective. These modes of systemic violence flow out of the financialised

abstractions of capital failure and are connected to a constellation of contemporary experiences, for example, the loss of a job, relations of indebtedness with banking institutions, the dismantling of organisational infrastructure in community development, the constriction of the conditions of possibility for kindness within health and care settings and the anonymous technocratic logic of the state naturalization processes that organise migrant and asylum-seeker experience. This is not an exhaustive summary of those domains of experience, nor is there any suggestion in listing them separately that they operate singularly upon us. Rather, the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* is ploughing a furrow beneath the line of visibilities or, more precisely, a series of visibilities: the visibilities of big history, the visibilities of the news and the visibilities of knowledge – the 'established facts'.

## CONTEMPORARY LOCKOUTS

In our approach to the NWC Legacy Project, *Vagabond Reviews* was interested in engaging with different strands of the membership of the National Women's Council of Ireland with a view to taking readings on contemporary experiences of women that somehow remain beneath the threshold of visibility and description. So for us, the work began with a question: in 2013, what forms of knowledge and experience remain locked out of contemporary representations of women's labour in Ireland? In that sense the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* is a history of the present lodged at the end of an arc of history that spans from the 1913 Dublin Lockout to the present day.

But are the conditions of possibility for lockout the same today? We propose that the Dublin Lockout of 1913 should be characterised and understood as a *spatialised* mode of exclusion. Following the work of the historian of ideas Michel Foucault, the spatial politics of the Lockout in 1913 belong to a *dispositif* that marked the disciplinary society of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> We can say then, that the 1913 Dublin Lockout belongs to a time when the physical (architectural) space of labour corresponded precisely

with the (factory) site of labour.<sup>4</sup> Within the apparatus of the disciplinary society, the regime of truth corresponded to a specific, closed institutional space. So the space of the hospital corresponded with the truth of medicine, the school corresponded with the truth of education, the asylum corresponded with the truth of mental medicine and the factory corresponded with the truth of labour. In 1913, these spatialised conditions of labour created the conditions that made absolute exclusion from the site of labour a real and present possibility, creating a labour force that could be decisively displaced and expelled from the place of work.



**Fact I**  
**practices of organising**  
Three generations of my family were engaged in shirt making and factory work, my grandmother, my mother and my aunts and four of my siblings.

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While in some cases those spatialised conditions still persist, labour in its contemporary form has moved beyond the factory walls and established its operations along multiple sites and along (unlimited flows) with respect to the organisation of time. In 2013, we are living in a post-disciplinary society. Everywhere, at the level of institutional formations, we see the breaking down of that spatialised regime of the disciplinarian society. Medicine is no longer confined to the site of the hospital, education no longer co-extensive with the space of the school, mental medicine is no longer confined to the site of the asylum and, most salient for the contemporary possibilities of *lockout*, labour no longer contained within the site of the factory or even a stable 'workplace'. As work has moved beyond its spatialised form, what are the conditions of possibility for contemporary lockout as an exclusionary device within the circuitous apparatus of the control society.<sup>5</sup>

And here we arrive at the (hypo)thesis of *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* as a particular kind of catalogue of facts. As labour in its post-disciplinary form becomes precarious, scarce and decoupled from the site of the factory (and redistributed across workplace/domestic space-time) what kind of contemporary experiences of women's labour are locked out? This might be a metrics for the unannounced, the under-described, the unallowable. And if it was possible to discern the shape of such contemporary erasures, what kind of tactics are employed within the logic of the control society towards maintaining their exclusion? In a very tentative way this project has only begun to explore the contours of these contemporary mechanisms of exclusion within the circuitry of the control society with its fissures, its exclusions, its refusals, its omissions and expulsions in the name of flexibility, competition, market forces and self-realisation.

## THE (IN)VISIBLE LABOUR FACTORIUM

In developing the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* we have been seeking creative contributions primarily among the membership organisations of the National Women's Council of Ireland towards generating photographic and textual traces of the more hidden narratives of women's labour experience. As an interdisciplinary arts and research platform we are attentive to the conditions of production and distribution of more traditional forms of research which tend to extract knowledge and distribute it elsewhere. In other words the destination of the research often tends to be outside of the situation itself. In this project we are following our interest in creative research processes and in forms of representation, where the research can be present in order to illuminate and inform the situation itself. So in working with some of the membership organisations of the National Women's Council of Ireland, with individuals and associate organisations we have been interested in the notion of reinforcing forms of collective knowledge, while creating some new visibilities around women's contemporary and past experience of labour in Ireland.



### Fact XX

#### practices of kindness

I feel that kindness is actually in someone. This woman that I work with has had a really difficult life but still she's never lost that gift of kindness.

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Within the overall theme of *invisible labour* we have explored three distinct seams of invisibility. The first thematic seam, **invisible practices of kindness** was posited for an era of austerity where the metrics of productivity have been applied to all aspects of labour. Given that general constriction around the metrics of labour we decided to explore a distinct line of inquiry: can there be a counter metrics for practices of kindness? And if so, can we bring some visibility to those practices of kindness that may fall outside the official language of accountability, particularly in our contemporary healthcare settings?



### Fact V

#### practices of organising

As the union's first secretary Marie Mortished occupied a pivotal position in an era where trade union leadership was mainly the preserve of men.

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Following a second thematic seam, **invisible practices of organising** was posited at a time when so much of the state architecture for the support of community development is being eviscerated or dismantled. In such an environment we set out to explore and illuminate hidden practices of organising both past and present. We invited examples from individual women, whose practices of organising and participation occupied a space beneath the threshold of official history and of our contemporary visibilities.



### Fact VII

#### practices of belonging

In MRCI we regularly organise residential events where migrant leaders take time out from their really busy lives to be together, reflect on what's happening in society.

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The third thematic seam **invisible practices of belonging** was mindful of a changing Ireland, where old cultural identities are being challenged and where notions of Irishness are being transformed in many ways. Again, at a quieter level we have sought out hidden practices of belonging between the old and the new. We invited examples from individuals of practices that generate new forms and new possibilities for belonging.

The *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* has been developed through a recursive process, a process involving invitations, conversations, briefings, workshops and production cycles. We have met with NWCi membership and non-member organisations to explain and encourage their creative contributions to the construction of the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium*. We have conducted *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* Briefings and Clinics, where contributors are invited to share memories and the experience of individual women and their hidden labour practices. We have asked for contributions in the form of a text of no more than 200 words and an accompanying photograph. Our primary approach to the processes of collecting these various contributions to the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* has been conversational. Ethnographically, we have worked within the spirit of the conversation.

### Conversational Photography

The photograph is a component of the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* that does not impose any duty to de-code an enclosed meaning, already inscribed. Instead, we propose the photograph here as a visual trace. Each photograph, combined with its explanatory text, offers a point of visibility along a conversational drift that in every case belongs to a wider, more diffuse, less finite and less final conversational flow. In that sense, the combinatory trace of the photo/text does not 'stand for' the whole conversation. To borrow Ariella Azoulay's phrasing, they are *components in our conversation*.

So the photograph here is a sort of visual punctuation in a conversational flow within a network of conversations around invisible practices of labour. The photograph here is situated as a readable element in a conversational drift around invisible practices of labour. It operates and announces itself at the level of the document, at the level of the fact and even, in a certain light, at the level of data. Before exploring this question of the fact we would like to position the idea of invisible labour within the framework of modes of capital exchange generally, and modes of exchange around labour specifically..

### Over-Coding the Means of Exchange

We can generally see the tendency within post-industrial capital to over-code the means of exchange per se. Through the combinatory logic of *service-industry* many informal domains of exchange, such as care, pleasure and of course knowledge, have been increasingly incorporated into the dynamic of market exchange value. The *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* is in part articulated as a symbolic counterpoint, a 'market correction' if you will in relation to the over coding of the means of exchange with respect to labour.

What then is the nature of these collected invisibilities? Do they have common features? Here we can make a first observation. What has been gathered here is a collection of practices that are operative *in spite of* rather than *as well as* the situations where they are practiced. They are not surplus gestures added onto the 'already given'. By the 'already given' here we mean to imply the depersonalised architecture of an abstract state and institutional apparatus that is always already there before any individual encounter with it. For example, the 'already given' of the naturalization experience of the migrant worker is an extended and sometimes Kafkaesque subjection to the technocratic logic of the state. It is in that sense that the humanising encounter (the breaking of ranks) between the support worker and the migrant is a counterpoint, a gesture operating despite and against the logic of the 'already given'. To the extent that we are living in times when the already given threatens to reduce us to some minimum degree of maneuverability, we are concerned here precisely with such small-scale acts of resistance. They are both fragile and vital in the face of those modes of soft systemic violence.

We can also discern a commonality around forms of exchange that are uncoded or unrecorded both as forms of labour and as forms of social exchange. They can be understood as informal generousities. In our conversational encounters, many women brought forth examples of colleagues whose work practices went 'beyond the call of duty'. All of these accounts more or less take the form of women who decline in their voluntary or professional practice to reduce the relations of assistance to their minimal contractual form. One of many examples that come to mind here is a woman bearing witness to a colleague working in a voluntary capacity, where the boundary between professional life and everyday life does not hold.



### Fact XIX

#### practices of organising

My neighbours and friends (almost exclusively women) are a big part of the network of support that enables me to be a working parent. They look after my daughter at times...

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### Fact III

#### practices of kindness

I helped him to become documented through my work with the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland one of the member organisations of the NWCi. He did not forget this kindness.

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### Fact XVIII

#### practices of organising

Her door was always open or if she got a call from me and could hear stress or fear in my voice she'd be straight down. Nothing was ever too big for her.

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And if these modes of engagement break with the metrics of official labour there is no suggestion here that they should be somehow made accountable to them. On the contrary, we have noticed that their very status as uncoded, unrecorded practices – in short, their invisibility – is a precondition of their logic of practice. So paradoxically, their official recognition and acknowledgment as contributions in the form of labour would be a form of self-cancelling. And yet, within the logic of the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* there is an ontological gesture that would extend the status of the fact to these practices of kindness, of organising and of belonging.

### On the Status of Facts

Our issue is not with facts as such, but rather with the status of facts within the overall scheme of things. So, each contribution to the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* has been ascribed the status of *the fact*. Why then this nineteenth century sounding invocation of the Factorium in relation to the resulting catalogue of facts? In the first instance it references the nineteenth century spirit of empiricism when the observable fact was establishing itself as the irreducible unit of truth in the discourse of the philosophy of science. While that mode of empiricism, formulated most forcibly by the logical positivism movement of the early twentieth century, has long since lost its hold on the way we think about science, the fact endures in social discourse as an appeal to the force of evidence. Facts are always invoked at that point in the argument when *reality* is introduced: *is it not the fact... the fact of the matter is... the facts speak for themselves* – and that enclosed little fortress of truth – *facts are facts*. So what is the fact of the matter with regard to labour? In the face of that nineteenth century legacy with respect to an economy of truth we have granted the status of fact to those aspects of labour experience whose truth is known, whose legitimacy is felt, but whose *factuality* cannot be legitimately announced within the available tools of description. When we invoke the fact we therefore have a particular use in mind. We

are interested in de-stabilising the ontological status of the fact in its reductive form, a form that has leaked into general social discourse from its nineteenth century origins. The fact is deployed here as a gesture of epistemological restoration, to grant the status of truth to aspects of women's labour that have occupied an ambiguous, for the most part invisible space within the discursive economy of formal labour metrics.



**Fact XV**

**practices of organising**

She loved her street. Every summer she used to go out and get the whole street together to paint all the stones around the trees, the buildings, sweep it up, clean it.

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Borrowing the robes of nineteenth century empiricism, perhaps ironically, we want to say that these experiences are valid. Ironic because we do not want to transform these conversational traces around labour (in)visibilities simply into mere data as such but to say that they are valid features of labour experience and practice. And furthermore, to say that (sometimes) they create the very conditions of possibility for enduring, for going on, despite the soft, systemic violence of the already given. So the ambiguity surrounding the status of the collected traces in the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* should come as no surprise. Moreover, the centrality of ambiguity can be detected in the manner in which contributions have been introduced by women bringing them to the table: *I'm not sure if this will count but... I don't think this is what you are looking for but...* It is in that sense that the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* is a form of restorative epistemology, a way of thinking about systems of knowledge, a kind of encoding/ re-coding from the unsayable to the describable. Albeit, always only as a partial description.

### Conclusion

The *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* operates in the intangible domain of labour experience and (in)visibilities. It operates in regions that are not necessarily the proper subjects of more formal research processes. It is not, however, proposed as a research practice instead of, but rather as well as, those more formally recognisable domains of inquiry. We have taken a reading in the hope of effecting a transversal move across the usual logics of association by this we mean, issue-based, occupation-based, regional, and so on, across the membership of the National Women's Council of Ireland. Is there a possibility to create new dialogues around practices of kindness, organising and belonging that forge new solidarities across the usual lines of allegiance?

History takes care of certain visibilities. *The (In)Visible Labour Factorium* has situated itself beneath the threshold of those bigger visibilities. This is not to say that the contributions to the *(In)Visible Labour Factorium* are small. It is more that they are operating on a different scale. Just as architecture employs scale to indicate relative size in relation to the real of the built environment, these contributions are of a certain scale relative to the real of history. They are formulated beneath the threshold of big history along with its big figures and big events. These are always only the visible tip of small-scale events, visible moments in the process of becoming history.

### Endnotes

1. Ariella Azoulay. In conversation with Thomas Keenan at 'Can photographs claim rights?', Photographic Universe Seminar, The Vera List Center, Parsons, April 2013.
2. Slavoj Žižek. *Violence*. Profile Books: London, 2009: pp1 – 2.
3. Foucault associated *disciplinary* societies with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; they reach their apogee at the beginning of the twentieth century. They operate by organizing major sites of confinement. Individuals are always going from one closed site to another, each with its own laws: first of all the family, then the school ('you're not at home you

know!'), then the factory, hospital from time to time, maybe prison, the model site of confinement.' Gilles Deleuze. Postscript on Control Societies. In *Negotiations: 1972 – 1990*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1995: pp177.

4. 'What I'm trying to pick out with this term (*apparatus*) is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogenous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements... I understand by the term "apparatus" a sort of... formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. This may have been, for example, the assimilation of a floating population found to be burdensome for an essentially mercantilist economy: there was a strategic imperative acting here as the matrix for an apparatus which gradually undertook the control or subjection of madness, sexual illness and neurosis.' Michel Foucault. The Confession of the Flesh. Interview. In *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (Ed. Colin Gordon), 1980: pp194-228.

5. 'We're in the midst of a general breakdown of all sites of confinement – prisons, hospitals, factories, schools, the family. The family is an 'interior' that's breaking down like all other interiors – educational, professional and so on ... *Control societies* are taking over from disciplinary societies ... Confinements are *molds*, different moldings, while controls are modulations, like a self-transmuting molding continually changing from one moment to the next, like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another. This comes out well in the matter of wages: the factory was a body of men (sic) whose internal forces reached an equilibrium between the highest possible production and the lowest possible wages: but in a control society businesses take over from factories and a business is a soul, a gas. There were of course bonus systems in factories, but businesses strive to introduce a deeper level of modulation into all wages, bring them into a state of constant metastability punctuated by ludicrous challenges, competitions, and seminars.' Gilles Deleuze. Postscript on Control Societies. In *Negotiations: 1972 – 1990*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1995: pp177 – 182.