

Labor Lab

The success of classical mechanics during the 18th and 19th centuries led to the widespread belief that all processes—from celestial phenomena to chemical transformations, from the refraction of light to the workings of the human mind—were driven by the mechanical movement of material bodies under the influence of reciprocal forces. A mechanistic worldview emerged, eventually becoming the paradigm of scientific rationality, a perspective that has persisted, albeit in a modified form, to this day. Silvia Federici suggests that mechanization—imagining the body as a machine—has been one of the main developments under capitalism to extract labor power more efficiently.

The vocabulary of machines also penetrated female bodies, which held the capacity to give birth to the society of tomorrow. Reproductive forces, once often seen as sacred, entirely disappeared from the map of accepted labor. By denying women control over their bodies, they are deprived of the most basic conditions for bodily and psychological integrity, and motherhood is degraded into forced, quasi-mechanical labor.

The domesticated body became a controllable system of deficiency and performance, right down to its molecular structure. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the isolation and discovery of hormones opened a frontier to the inner performative worlds of the body. Hormones are active substances produced by various glands, organs, and the brain, stimulating growth and acting as chemical messengers to regulate physiology and behavior. This concept assumes the body as a modular system that can be regulated, manipulated, and optimized. The first hormones, vitamins, and enzymes were subsumed in the German language under the concept of *Wirkstoffe*, translated as active substances that appear, affect, and work. *Wirkstoffe* regulate and optimize our inner *Wirklichkeit* (reality).

In Labor Lab, hormones are captured through their *Wirkung* (effect) on *Wirklichkeit* (reality) within the photographic stage. The work is an experimental photo series, staging hormones and hormone-based drugs through the photochemical process. The image-making process involves active substances that enable, regulate, or manipulate human reproduction in the (female) body. This chemical 'hack' allows inner processes of pregnancy, bonding, childbirth, contraception, and abortion—previously erased from the map of labors—to visually emerge. Labor Lab is an installation based on photo- and body-chemical encounters, residing between the domestic environment and the scientific laboratory, inviting the audience to encounter the territories of female reproduction anew: bodies, landscapes, sacred sites, oceans, mythical beings, maps, celestial bodies, or constellations of organs that repeatedly elude the viewer's unambiguous reading.

The body remains our primary territory of encounter with the world and the primary object of resistance, as Silvia Federici noted. The word hormone is derived from the Greek word ὁρμῶν, meaning "setting in motion." Our inner realities are constantly in motion; hormones fluctuate in a complex and collective way through the body. This collective movement, dance, and fluctuation could remind us to claim a different *Wirklichkeit*—one that allows for magic and care instead of efficiency, extraction, and exhaustion.

Sarah Ancelle Schönfeld