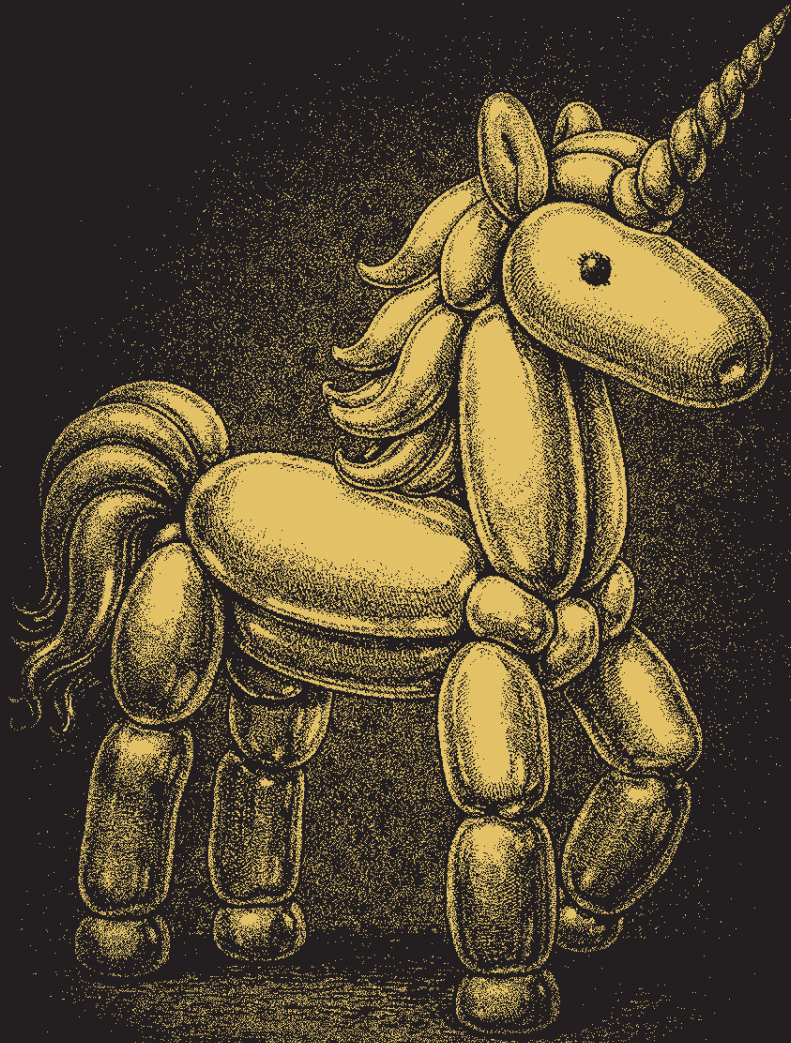




Corvus corax

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Yanis Varoufakis
Cloud capital

Alexa

While writing a book, I indulged in a lot of hardcore research: I bought an Alexa, a Google Assistant, and used Siri. Alexa is a little contraption from Amazon. It sits on your desk and is supposed to be your mechanical, automated slave. You tell it:

“Alexa, switch on the lights.”

“Alexa, order me this book by this idiot.”

“Alexa, play some soothing music because I’m in a bad mood.”

“Alexa, remind me to buy milk or order me some milk.”

Is it your slave? No! It’s not your slave at all. By the way, Alexa doesn’t really exist. It’s just an interface connecting you to a cloud-based agglomeration of machinery. And the thing we call the cloud is not a cloud at all. We call it that because we don’t see it. It’s all on Earth, on huge server farms—with the exception of some satellites. Amazon’s AWS server farm is monstrous. It really shocks the senses.

I visited a Microsoft server farm somewhere between Idaho and Washington State, and it felt a bit like a James Bond movie—like when he stumbles upon Dr. No’s underground silos. It’s in a cave, carved out of a mountain in order to keep it cool and maintain a constant temperature, full of machines making a huge noise. It’s like a massive factory.

Alexa connects you to the cloud, which is essentially machinery—like capital goods. It’s no different in many ways to a factory. And of course, there are thousands of kilometers of optic fiber cables crisscrossing the bottom of our oceans to connect this cloud together. This is how Amazon works. And so when you type in electric bicycles, you get this list. Alexa connects us to this network, but that’s only part of it. The other thing it does is actually essential. Let’s face it—it is sold to us at a very low price – Amazon loses money when it sells you an Alexa. Why? Because it’s very lucrative for Amazon that you have an Alexa on your desk or in your kitchen. Essentially, what you do every time you tell Alexa