
'AI Workers of the World, Respite!'

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the fragmented productive subjectivities of the global collective AI worker. It takes case-studies from three positions in the AI development value chain: AI research scientists in California, USA; junior software engineers in Warsaw, Poland; and data annotators in Nairobi, Kenya. It brings together the cultural forms these workers are watching in their free time, including podcasts, tv shows and reels, and asks how these forms provide a unique insight into how these workers are processing their particular situations and differentially reproducing themselves. Importantly, while it firmly situates these cultural forms in relation to each fragment's global position, it does so by comprehending each fragment as an aspect of a fundamentally global process (Bonefeld and Holloway 1996). In so doing, the paper seeks to step 'out' of the methodological statism that can afflict comparative work. Here, we are not dealing with organic national 'paths of development' that have been held back or accelerated – either by inter-national (core-periphery / unequal) relations, or national policy successes / mistakes (Inigo Carrera 2016). Rather, what may appear as 'underdevelopment' is simply a result of how that territory has participated in the uneven development of global capital. This is not to deny that inter-national relations have effects – but to stress that the determining relation is between territories and a global capital whose dictates are produced 'behind the backs' of all state actors. From this basis, it's hoped we can probe these forms for the differences and commonalities in how these fragments of the global collective worker are processing their struggles to survive in – and against – a crisis-ridden social process whose only developmental concern is that 'money beget more money'. The claim is that these podcasts, tv shows and reels will be a more accurate window into the hopes and aspirations of the 'AI revolution' or 'Industry 4.0' than the pronouncements of tech-barons or government campaigns. The hope is that this might not only be a step towards understanding the commonalities and differences between these workers, but also a step towards solidarity.

Keywords: Cultural consumption, productive subjectivities

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