
Beyond Efficiency: rethinking automation through collective and individual responsibility in the age of A.I.

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Abstract

This contribution critically analyzes the impact of automation and Artificial Intelligence technologies on power dynamics in digital workplaces. I question how these technologies can be reimagined from a socio-semiotical perspective to redistribute autonomy, skills, and responsibilities between workers and employers. Technological progress does not merely accompany production processes, but actively intervenes in power dynamics - transforming, overturning, and sometimes rebalancing them. A.I., like automation, is transforming work and worker rights.

In this context this presentation - based on my PhD research - questions how such technologies might be rethought in a transformative key to redistribute autonomy, skills, and responsibility between workers and employers. At the core of my doctoral work is a critical study of the concept of responsibility, within which autonomy and relationality emerge as foundational dimensions. The research aims to move beyond negative and retrospective interpretations of responsibility and, instead, reframe responsibility as a forward-looking, constructive capacity.

This contribution, in particular, explores the hypothesis that the operational dependence of Artificial Intelligence on human labor could serve as a leverage point to reverse the alienating use of intelligent technologies and foster new forms of agency and worker resistance. Large Language Models (LLMs), for instance, are already used to monitor employee productivity, communication, and emotional states (Calacci, 2023), highlighting how technology can operate in opaque and inequitable ways (O'Neill, 2017).

To address this issue from a socio-semiotic perspective, this presentation adopts an interpretive and theoretical-critical approach, grounded in the analysis of academic literature and philosophical perspectives that emphasize the non-neutrality of technological development and the obscure use of algorithms in productive and communicative processes (Noble, 1984; O'Neill, 2017; Calacci, 2023).

My research draws on a tensive perspective (Zilberberg, 2012), which proves useful in exploring the tensions between collective and individual responsibilities (Fuchs, 2011) in the adoption of digital technologies. The goal is to propose a theoretical framework that resemanticizes the role of Artificial Intelligence within an ethical and inclusive labor economy. This contribution aims to offer a theoretically grounded reflection oriented toward transformation. It discusses the possibility of rethinking the use of technological tools not merely

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to enhance productivity, but also to support new forms of worker agency and organizational resistance. This study seeks to move beyond the dominant logic of control and replaceability by imagining technologies that actively contribute to the empowerment of human labor and the reconfiguration of workplace power relations.

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