
Notes Toward a Digital Worker Inquiry

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Abstract

This presentation describes and reflects on experiences of digital worker inquiry, or collaborative research that feeds into labour organizing within and against digital capitalism. Building on traditions of militant inquiry and inspired by the wave of global struggles across platform-based industries, the presentation draws on a set of interviews with organizers from rideshare, e-commerce, AI data labeling, and software sectors to theorize digital worker inquiry as an organizer's orientation to scholarship in the digital economy. We argue that knowledge production must emerge from worker struggle, aiming not just to document exploitation but to catalyze labour recomposition, including the emergence of new solidarities, tactics, and organizational forms. Drawing inspiration from operaismo, action research, feminist scholarship, and community-based research, we maintain the need to challenge both extractive academic research and the tech sector's aspiration to monopolize knowledge, advocating instead for inquiry rooted in reciprocity, solidarity, and political transformation. Condensing some of the key arguments contained in a forthcoming book (co-authored with Julie Chen, Brian Dolber, Lilly Irani, and Tamara Kneese) which gathers the interviews, we reflect on lessons from grassroots initiatives and researcher-organizer alliances across North America, Europe, and Asia, and propose digital worker inquiry as a critical tool for confronting the technological and organizational infrastructures of contemporary labour control.

Keywords: worker inquiry, labour organizing

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