The Invisible Faces of AI: Ghost Workers, Click Labor and Digital Exploitation

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Zentralkino Dresden

Scientific Program

The event The Invisible Faces of AI: Ghost Workers, Click Labor and Digital Exploitation offers the opportunity to jointly explore various aspects of this complex field of tension. To enable diverse perspectives on the topic, we have invited people who engage with it from different professional, political, and artistic angles. The ceremonial opening of our event on the topic of click working will be introduced by Birte Platow with a welcome address.

To begin, we will watch the approximately 20-minute film Ghost Workers by Lisette Olsthoorn. Ghost Workers is a cinematic research project created in collaboration with Prof. Claartje ter Hoeven. The film sheds light on the often hidden human labor that is essential for artificial intelligence to function at all. Afterwards, the filmmaker herself will provide us with insights behind the scenes of her work.

We are very pleased that Tanja Carstensen and Adio Dinika will first share their perspectives and contributions on the topic. Following this, we will open the floor for a joint discussion with the audience.

The evening will be moderated by Vanessa Kuhfs, who contributes both artistic and academic perspectives in her work at ScaDS.AI Dresden/Leipzig. She has long been engaged with the topic of click working and has helped shape this event through numerous conversations, discussions, and reflections.

Speakers

Prof. Birte Platow holds the Chair of Religious Education (Protestant) at Dresden University of Technology, is a member of the Board of the Center for Scalable Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence, and serves as Area Lead of its research division of Responsible AI. With her research on theology and artificial intelligence as well as on the ethics of technology, she brings an interdisciplinary perspective to the discussion on digital forms of labor and the associated ethical challenges. Her focus on the future of education and ethical education highlights the necessity of developing new competencies and values in dealing with AI and digital work. In addition, her research contributes to fostering respectful dialogue across diverse working contexts.

Lisette Olsthoorn practices what is known as cinematic research, a hybrid form combining film and innovative scholarship. As the director and creator of Ghost Workers, she powerfully brings this subject to the screen. Her current project, UBER: THE CONVERSATION, is an experimental documentary that explores the working conditions of Uber drivers through reenactments and collaborative working methods.

Prof. Tanja Carstensen holds the Chair of the Professorship of Sociology with Focus on Work, Economy, and Organization at Chemnitz University of Technology. Her research areas include gender, diversity and intersectionality in the context of digitalization, the transformation of work, and technology discourses. As a sociologist, she investigates the interrelations between digitalization and labor, particularly the effects of digital technologies on working conditions and the often-invisible people behind AI systems. A key area of her work is click work and platform labor.

Dr. Adio-Adet Dinika is a political scientist, author, and co-founder of the community-based research project Data Workers' Inquiry, in which data workers organize as community researchers to initiate their own investigations into their workplaces (DAIR, 2022). The project builds on traditions of participatory research (Stoeker, 2013; Jason & Glenwick, 2016), enabling data workers to shape research questions and directions according to their needs and with the goal of building power in the workplace. Dinika specializes in the political economy of AI labor, with a focus on the Global South. His research explores invisible AI work – such as data annotation, content moderation, and algorithmic management – as well as the power dynamics behind digital transformation. Based on interviews with 55 platform workers in transport, domestic work, IT, and creative industries in Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, he has developed an empirical typology of the diverse experiences of these workers.