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The Human Infrastructure of Artificial Intelligence

The contemporary data-driven paradigm of Artificial Intelligence (AI) envisions an automated future, where little or no human work is needed. The great enthusiasm for the rise of self-driving cars, intelligent assistants and automated delivery drones seems to suggest that in the next future, human functions will be less and less relevant for society. Dystopian and utopian perspectives on AI encounter in a vision where technology, for better or worse, replaces and liberates humans from the burden of unpleasant jobs. By drawing on critical infrastructures studies (STS) [1] I aim at overturning these expectations, pointing out that underneath such AI applications, a large infrastructure of invisible human labour is involved. Amazon Mechanical Turk and other crowdsourcing platforms require human tasks to categorize, collect, label and curate data. [2] [3] Specialized outsourcing data companies rely on remoted workforces of thousands of workers to meticulously delineate the contours of pedestrians and cars' images, to teach machines how to distinguish between the two. The creation of an infographic poster will facilitate the explanation of the mechanisms in which humans are involved, and the processes by which they are kept invisible, within the global development of AI. With texts and images, the poster will take self-driving cars as empirical case study to trace and expose the system of relations linking AI and invisible human labour. By doing so, I will provide a way of conceptualizing AI as human-centered and labour-intensive, while problematizing accounts of AI which present it as disruptive and highly automated technology.