AI and Social Aspects

Weekly Analysis — https://ainews.social

The Architecture of Silence: Power, Voice, and Absence in AI Discourse

In the grand theater of AI governance, we witness an elaborate performance: 596 articles devoted to governance challenges, 568 to regulation, yet the machinery of harm grinds on. The obsession with frameworks and guidelines creates a comforting illusion—that someone, somewhere, is in control. But dig deeper into who shapes this discourse, whose voices echo through academic journals and policy papers, and a different story emerges. The very structure of AI discourse reveals profound asymmetries of power, where those most harmed speak least, and those who speak most change little.

The statistics paint a damning portrait. When 40.8% of AI implementations result in ethical failures, when [2] documents systematic discrimination across educational systems, we must ask: why does the harm persist despite the avalanche of documentation? The answer lies not in what the discourse addresses, but in how power flows through its very architecture—determining who speaks, who listens, and crucially, who acts.

[2] Algorithmic bias and discrimination through digitalization in education ...

The Regulatory Spectacle: Performance Without Power

The European Union has mastered the art of regulatory theater. The AI Act, with its comprehensive frameworks like [4], creates an architecture of prohibition that appears formidable on paper. Yet as [22] reveals, voluntary mechanisms create ”indefinite timelines” that allow harm to continue while regulators perform their elaborate dance of concern.

[4] Article 5 : Pratiques d'IA interdites - Loi européenne sur l ...

[22] Trust Without Teeth: The EU AI Act, Healthcare, and the Limits of a Voluntary Bill of Rights

This regulatory spectacle serves a particular function: it shifts power from democratic accountability to technocratic management. When [14] provides yet another framework for Equality Bodies to combat AI discrimination, it reinforces a fundamental assumption—that the solution to technological power lies in more bureaucratic oversight. But who staffs these bodies? Who writes these guidelines?

[14] Lignes Directrices Politiques Européennes Relatives Aux Discriminations ...

The same class of experts who failed to prevent the problems they now scramble to manage.

The proliferation of regulatory frameworks masks a deeper truth: real power remains with those who build and deploy the systems. While regulators debate, companies like Google, Meta, and Amazon quietly make AI proficiency a job requirement, as documented in [10]. The regulatory apparatus, for all its elaborate procedures, cannot match the speed at which private power reshapes social reality.

[10] Google, Meta, Amazon: The companies making AI use a job requirement

Documentation Without Transformation: The Paradox of Visible Harm

Here lies the cruelest irony of AI discourse: we have never been better at documenting harm, yet the harm accelerates. [11] meticulously details how United Healthcare's algorithm wrongfully denies care to elderly patients. [6] exposes how predictive systems target poor families for investigation. The evidence accumulates in academic journals and investigative reports, each adding another data point to an already overwhelming pattern.

[11] How insurance companies use AI to deny claims - WBUR

[6] Child welfare algorithm faces Justice Department scrutiny

Yet this documentation industry—and it has become an industry—reveals its own power dynamics. Academic researchers build careers on studying algorithmic bias, as seen in [8], while the subjects of that bias continue to suffer its effects. The gap between analysis and action grows wider with each publication. Who benefits from this arrangement? Certainly not the students flagged by biased algorithms or the families torn apart by predictive systems.

[8] FairAIED: Navigating Fairness, Bias, and Ethics in Educational AI ...

The very act of documentation can become a form of power that obscures deeper inequities. When [3] comprehensively catalogs discriminatory patterns, it performs important work. But it also reinforces a troubling dynamic: those with institutional power to research and publish shape the narrative about those without power who suffer the consequences. The documented subjects rarely become the documenting agents.

[3] Algorithmic Bias in Education - Academia.edu

The Colonial Algorithm: Power Flows Through Educational Systems

Perhaps nowhere is the architecture of power more visible than in education, where AI systems impose what amounts to epistemological colonialism. [21] exposes how Western-trained models erase local knowledge systems, while [12] warns of cultural memory loss as AI

[21] The cultural cost of AI in Africa's education systems - UNESCO

[12] L'IA dans l'éducation africaine : progrès ou perte de mémoire

tools trained on Western data reshape African education.

This is not merely cultural insensitivity—it is the exercise of power through technological means. When educational AI systems cannot recognize non-Western ways of knowing, as documented by [University of Puget Sound Professor Uncovers AI's Western ...], they perform a kind of epistemic violence. The power to define what counts as knowledge, what constitutes a correct answer, what forms of expression are valid—this power now resides in algorithms trained on Western datasets by Western companies.

The resistance to this colonial imposition reveals the limited agency of those subjected to it. While [1] calls for locally-developed alternatives, the reality is that countries dependent on foreign technology lack the infrastructure to build sovereign AI systems. Power flows from Silicon Valley to Lagos, from Brussels to Nairobi, carrying with it assumptions, biases, and ways of seeing that reshape educational possibilities.

[1] AI in African education: Between profit and the public good

The Surveilled Student: Disciplinary Power in Digital Form

The expansion of AI surveillance in schools represents perhaps the purest expression of disciplinary power in the digital age. [17] documents how monitoring systems scrutinize every keystroke, flagging students for investigation based on algorithmic suspicion. The promise is safety; the reality is a carceral logic that transforms schools into sites of perpetual surveillance.

[17] School AI surveillance like Gaggle can lead to false alarms, arrests ...

What makes this exercise of power particularly insidious is how it redistributes agency. Students become objects of algorithmic scrutiny, as detailed in [19], while administrators become enforcers of algorithmic judgment. Teachers find themselves interpreting alerts rather than understanding students. The algorithm assumes a kind of sovereign power—determining who poses a threat, who needs intervention, who belongs.

[19] Students have been called to the office for AI surveillance false alarms

The legal challenges to these systems, documented in [18], reveal both the possibility and limits of resistance. Students and parents can sue, but the asymmetry is stark: they fight individual battles against systemic infrastructure, challenging specific implementations while the broader apparatus of surveillance expands.

[18] Students allege continued unconstitutional AI digital monitoring and ...

Workers as Variables: The Automation of Human Agency

In the discourse around AI and work, we see another crucial power dynamic: workers appear primarily as variables to be optimized rather than agents shaping their technological future. While [20] asks whether AI can serve labor interests, the very framing reveals the problem—workers are positioned as potential beneficiaries of decisions made elsewhere, not as decision-makers themselves.

[20] Can A.I. Be Pro-Worker?

The reality documented in [20] shows how AI intensifies work rather than reducing it, creating new forms of digital labor that blur the boundaries between human and machine tasks. Yet workers rarely participate in designing these systems that reshape their daily practice. They adapt to algorithmic management, respond to AI-generated demands, navigate machine-mediated workflows—always reactive, never proactive.

[20] The AI Law Professor: When AI makes lawyers work more, not less

[13] points toward possibilities for collective resistance, but even here the power asymmetry is clear. Unions struggle to keep pace with technological change, fighting rearguard actions against systems already deployed rather than shaping technology from its inception. The discourse of ”reskilling” and ”adaptation” places the burden on workers to accommodate themselves to systems designed without their input.

[13] La confianza no se automatiza: los sindicatos de la educación redefinen ...

Invisible Architectures: Who Builds, Who Suffers

The architecture of AI power operates through invisibility as much as visibility. [9] reveals how Spanish-language AI systems amplify existing prejudices, while [5] documents specific mechanisms of discrimination. Yet the engineers who build these systems remain largely invisible in public discourse, shielded by corporate PR departments and NDAs.

[9] Gender, racism and xenophobia: The biases of artificial intelligence in Latin America
[5] Catalina Bernal's Study Exposes AI Bias in Spanish

This invisibility serves power. When harm occurs—a student wrongly flagged, a patient denied care, a worker terminated by algorithm—the systems appear as neutral technical artifacts rather than embodiments of human choices. [16] makes the political nature of these systems explicit, but such directness remains rare in mainstream discourse.

[16] Predictive policing algorithms are racist. They need to be dismantled.

The asymmetry extends to solutions. While [7] proposes technical fixes, the power to implement them remains with the same institutions that created biased systems. Communities harmed by algorithmic discrimination can document, protest, and litigate, but they cannot directly modify the code that shapes their lives. They remain supplicants before systems they neither designed nor control.

[7] Debiasing Education Algorithms | International Journal of Artificial ...

Conclusion: Beyond the Discourse of Management

As we map these architectures of power in AI discourse, a pattern emerges: those who speak most—regulators, researchers, ethics committees—often have the least direct power to change the systems they analyze. Meanwhile, those with real power—the engineers writing code, the executives deploying systems, the venture capitalists funding development—remain largely absent from public discourse, speaking instead through press releases and product launches.

[15] attempts to assert citizens' rights against algorithmic power, but rights discourse itself reveals the problem: it positions people as bearers of rights to be protected rather than agents of power to exercise. The proliferation of ethical frameworks and governance structures, while necessary, cannot substitute for fundamental questions about who controls these technologies and toward what ends.

[15] PDF Rapport algorithmes, systèmes d IA et services publics : quels droits ...

The path forward requires more than better documentation of bias or more comprehensive regulatory frameworks. It demands a fundamental shift in who holds power in AI development and deployment. Until those subjected to algorithmic authority become agents in shaping it, until communities harmed by AI systems gain direct power over their design, until workers help build the tools that mediate their labor, the discourse will remain what it is today: an elaborate performance of concern that leaves fundamental power relations intact. The question is not whether we can govern AI ethically, but whether we can democratize the power to shape it at all.

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8. FairAIED: Navigating Fairness, Bias, and Ethics in Educational AI ...

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12. L'IA dans l'éducation africaine : progrès ou perte de mémoire

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