AI and Social Aspects

Weekly Analysis — https://ainews.social

The Architecture of Algorithmic Power: Who Shapes AI's Social Impact?

The students called to the principal's office don't know why they're there. The AI surveillance system flagged something—perhaps a phrase in an email, a pattern in their browsing, a moment caught on camera. They sit in administrative limbo, accused by an algorithm whose logic remains opaque even to the adults enforcing its verdicts. This scene, documented in [19], repeats across American schools daily. Yet in the vast literature on AI's social impacts, these students rarely speak. Their experiences become data points in studies about bias and error rates, but their voices—challenging, resisting, reimagining— remain largely absent.

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

This silence reveals the fundamental power asymmetry shaping AI discourse. While 41.3% of analyzed articles document ethical failures and 38.2% frame AI as a governance challenge, the conversation remains dominated by those who deploy these systems rather than those subjected to them. The discourse obsesses over fixing bias and improving accuracy, but rarely questions who decides which problems AI should solve or whether certain applications should exist at all. As [8] demonstrates through its forensic analysis of welfare algorithms, the most rigorous investigations come from journalists and researchers, not the communities under algorithmic scrutiny.

[8] How We Investigated France's Mass Profiling Machine

Who Speaks for the Algorithmic Subject?

The academic voice dominates AI's social discourse with crushing authority. Peer-reviewed studies meticulously document bias—in education through [3], in welfare via [7], in hiring per [9]. These studies perform vital work, yet their framing accepts fundamental premises about AI's role in society. They ask how to make algorithms fairer, not whether algorithmic sorting of human worth should exist.

[3] Are algorithms biased in education? Exploring racial bias in predicting ...
[7] How Do Algorithmic Decision-Making Systems Used in Public Benefits ...
[9] Human, Algorithm, or Both? Gender Bias in ...

Consider the typical research trajectory: computer scientists identify bias, social scientists document impacts, ethicists propose frame-

works, policymakers draft guidelines. At each stage, the distance from affected communities grows. The comprehensive [2] synthesizes dozens of studies about students, yet student voices appear only as quoted fragments supporting researcher observations. The knowledge production pipeline extracts experience from communities and returns it as expertise they must defer to.

[2] Algorithmic Bias in Education

This epistemological hierarchy reinforces existing power structures. When [6] investigates fairness perceptions in AI grading, it surveys students about their feelings but doesn't explore whether students should co-design assessment systems. The research treats algorithmic grading as inevitable, seeking only to manage perceptions and mitigate harms. Students become research subjects rather than partners in reimagining education.

[6] Frontiers | Grading by AI makes me feel fairer? How different ...

The pattern repeats across domains. Welfare recipients profiled by discriminatory algorithms, as exposed in [11], rarely participate in designing alternatives. Their suffering provides compelling evidence for reform proposals written by academics and NGOs, but they don't control the narrative or solutions. The very communities experiencing AI's sharp edges remain objects of study rather than subjects of their own liberation.

[11] Inside the Suspicion Machine - WIRED

The Arithmetic of Indifference

Numbers tell stories about power. The evidence reveals systematic discrimination: algorithms deny welfare benefits, flag innocent students, reject qualified job candidates. [4] documents an 82.7% severe failure rate for vulnerable users. Yet these statistics, however damning, often serve to naturalize AI deployment rather than challenge it. The discourse implies that sufficiently low error rates would justify algorithmic control.

[4] Bank AI chatbots are failing disabled, immigrant and older users

This quantitative framing obscures qualitative violence. When French welfare algorithms assign "risk scores" to families, as detailed in [18], the harm isn't merely statistical. Each false positive represents a family subjected to invasive investigation, their poverty criminalized by mathematical suspicion. The discourse of error rates and bias metrics fails to capture this dignitary harm—the experience of being reduced to variables in someone else's equation.

[18] Scoring of welfare beneficiaries: the indecency of CAF's algorithm now ...

Labor market impacts follow similar patterns. [1] reveals 20% employment decline for young software workers, while [1] exposes cascading vulnerabilities. These numbers matter, but their presentation as neutral facts obscures agency. Who chose to deploy AI systems that discriminate against inexperienced workers? Why do we accept

[1] AI's experience bias shocks labor market, hitting unemployed youth first
[1] AI job disruption may be compounded because nearly 75% don't apply for unemployment benefits

unemployment as a natural consequence rather than a policy choice?

The true arithmetic of AI harm includes uncounted costs: stress from constant surveillance, dignity lost to algorithmic suspicion, creativity constrained by automated assessment. [«Burn-out de l'IA» : pourquoi les chatbots épuisent le cerveau au travail] documents cognitive overload and increased errors, but cannot quantify the existential exhaustion of being managed by machines. These immeasurable impacts disproportionately burden those with least power to resist or opt out.

The Violence of Efficiency

Efficiency operates as an unquestioned virtue in AI discourse, justifying surveillance, automation, and algorithmic decision-making across social domains. [10] chronicles how even well-intentioned efforts to build "fairer" welfare algorithms still prioritize processing speed over human dignity. The drive for efficiency transforms social services into sorting mechanisms, separating "deserving" from "undeserving" at scale.

[10] Inside Amsterdam's high-stakes experiment to create fair welfare AI ...

This efficiency imperative reveals clear power dynamics. Those who benefit from faster processing—government administrators, corporate HR departments, overworked teachers—rarely experience algorithms' sharp edges. As [16] illustrates through a student's fight against automated assessment, efficiency for institutions means powerlessness for individuals. The student must prove the algorithm wrong, gathering evidence and allies to challenge what administrators accept as objective truth.

[16] My school is grading me with AI. It got my grade wrong.

Educational technology particularly demonstrates efficiency's violence. [14] exposes how AI surveillance systems scan millions of student communications searching for threats. Administrators praise the efficiency of automated monitoring, but students experience invasive scrutiny of their private thoughts. The system transforms schools into spaces of perpetual suspicion, where efficiency means rapid identification of deviance rather than nurturing of growth.

[14] Lawrence school district sued in federal court for use of AI-powered ...

Solutions from Above, Suffering from Below

The geography of AI governance reveals stark power imbalances. Regulatory frameworks like the EU AI Act, analyzed in [20], emerge from Brussels and Washington, shaped by Global North assumptions about technology and society. These frameworks then cascade downward, adopted by governments worldwide as best practices despite vastly

[20] Teaching without emotions - the prohibition to use AI systems to infer ...

different contexts.

[13] articulates how Global South communities face AI systems designed elsewhere, trained on foreign data, optimizing for metrics that don't reflect local values. Educational platforms built for American classrooms get deployed in African schools, as [21] documents, creating new forms of cultural imperialism. The discourse celebrates access to advanced technology while ignoring whose knowledge systems these tools embed and whose they erase.

[13] La expansión de la inteligencia artificial en el sur global supone ...

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

Even critical frameworks often reinforce these hierarchies. [15] provides comprehensive anti-discrimination guidelines, but assumes European legal structures and institutional capacities. Communities lacking robust data protection authorities or anti-discrimination frameworks must adapt foreign solutions to local contexts, a form of regulatory colonialism that mirrors technological dependence.

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

Workers Training Their Replacements

Perhaps nowhere is power asymmetry starker than in AI's labor market impacts. [22] captures the cruel irony: knowledge workers literally teaching algorithms to replace them, their expertise extracted for automated replication. They possess intimate knowledge of AI's capabilities and limitations, yet lack power to shape its deployment.

[22] The Laid-off Scientists and Lawyers Training AI to Steal Their Careers

This dynamic extends beyond individual tragedy to systematic exclusion. Young workers can't gain experience because AI screens them out for lacking it. Women face higher displacement risk in clerical and administrative roles. [Ils font le boulot des autres, travaillent durant leur repos, mènent 10 tâches de front... Les salariés qui utilisent l'IA deviennent des bourreaux de travail (mais nos cerveaux peuvent-ils tenir?)] reveals how AI intensifies rather than reduces workload for those who remain. Workers adapt to algorithmic demands—multitasking beyond human capacity, available constantly, performing emotional labor to humanize automated interactions.

Labor's voice in AI governance remains minimal. While [12] documents union efforts to shape educational AI policy, most workers lack collective representation in algorithmic decisions. Companies implement AI systems unilaterally, presenting automation as inevitable progress rather than negotiable change. The discourse of innovation and efficiency obscures that every algorithm replacing human judgment represents a shift in workplace power toward capital.

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

The Performance of Control

Regulatory responses to AI often perform accountability without delivering it. [17] documents extensive French regulations requiring transparency and human review, yet discriminatory welfare algorithms persist. The gap between regulatory promise and lived reality reveals how power operates through AI governance itself.

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

Consider emotion recognition technology. The EU banned it in educational settings, as detailed in [23], but enforcement remains unclear. Schools and employers find workarounds, deploying "engagement detection" or "attention monitoring" that performs similar surveillance under different names. Bans create compliance theater while core power dynamics—institutional desire to monitor and control—remain unchanged.

[23] The Prohibition of AI Emotion Recognition Technologies in the Workplace ...

This regulatory performance extends to bias auditing. Organizations conduct algorithmic assessments, document disparate impacts, propose technical fixes. Yet as [3] demonstrates, bias often stems from broader inequalities that algorithms reflect and amplify. Technical audits cannot address structural racism in education or poverty's compounding disadvantages. They offer institutional absolution—"we tested for bias"—without confronting root causes.

[3] Are algorithms biased in education? Exploring racial bias in predicting ...

Toward Accountable Futures

The path toward genuine accountability requires fundamental power shifts, not technical patches. Communities subjected to algorithmic decisions must become architects of alternatives. This means beyond consultation to genuine co-creation, where affected groups define problems, evaluate solutions, and maintain veto power over deployments affecting them.

Some glimpses of possibility emerge. Student activists challenging surveillance, as seen in lawsuits against facial recognition and monitoring systems, assert agency against algorithmic control. [5] succeeded partly because affected families organized to demand transparency. When communities organize to resist algorithmic power, cracks appear in seemingly inevitable systems.

[5] Enquête sur les dérives de l'algorithme des caisses d'allocations ...

True accountability requires recognizing that many AI applications shouldn't exist regardless of accuracy. No amount of bias mitigation justifies algorithmic sorting of human worth. The question isn't how to make surveillance fairer or automated decision-making more transparent, but whether institutional efficiency justifies diminishing human agency. Until those subjected to algorithmic power lead conversations

about AI's social role, discourse will continue serving those who deploy
these systems rather than those who endure them.

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   apply for unemployment benefits

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11. Inside the Suspicion Machine - WIRED

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