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Marc-Antoine Pencolé

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“ ‘AI’, socialization and the experience of injustice”

The question of the relationship between work, injustice and "AI"¹ can be approached in two ways. The first would be to assess the reorganization of activities and status at work induced by such automata in relation to their adequacy to given norms of justice - either transcendent norms founded in reason, as does the theory of justice inspired by Rawls, or norms immanent to the professional community, which would have emerged through hermeneutic work, or a combination of the two, in the manner of the Frankfurt School. The other way would be not to assess the adequacy of a new situation to the norms of justice, but to study how the introduction of these techniques mediates the phenomenon of work in all its depth, and in particular how it transforms its normative dimension. Thus, we are not asking "is it adequate to the norm?", but "how does it affect the way norms exist, how they are drawn up, how they are implemented, how value judgments are made, and how the subjects who bear them are constructed?". Our claim is that the spread of "AI" in the workplace, when not a mere tool, has the effect of altering the normative capacities of subjects, and in particular their capacity to qualify the experience of suffering as an experience of injustice. Thus, we need to understand two things: first, that our capacity to experience a feeling of injustice, to express it and to act on it, is not a given but presupposes a whole infrastructure of social relationships; secondly, that certain forms of "AI" can significantly alter the socialization of work activity.

Our normative capacities depend on material conditions and are in no way innate or definitively acquired - at least this is what appears when we start not from injustice, but from the *experience* of injustice: experience can happen under different modes, it presupposes a material, sensible basis, it can be educated and sedimented in dispositions that constitute experienced subjects, and it may be judicious to explore these conditions to evaluate the effects of a technical mediation of the activity, upstream of the application of already given criteria of justice. Before asking whether the introduction of "AI" into the work process is fair or unfair, let us see how it alters our experience of this very activity, and hence our experience of what is fair or unfair.

The autonomous moral subject, able by himself, and with competence, to qualify and judge morally the situations he experiences, able to determine the responsibilities of everyone, and capable of practical self-determination according to his evaluative judgments, etc., can only be a fiction - the weight of the cognitive, motivational and organizational burden would make such autonomous moral activity perfectly heroic. This is what the theories of social reproduction and care have clearly exposed: the autonomous moral subject is in fact dependent on reproduction and care relations, from which he draws the self-confidence and strength he needs to assert himself. However, current research which uses the care perspective to discuss the ethical dimension of "AI" at work only focuses on the justice of inter-subjective relationships (more or less reassuring, distressing, rewarding, etc.) without exploring the question of how the constitution of subjects and their capacities depends on this relational infrastructure. Similarly, the field of study of Human

1 For our concern here, so-called "AI" are more related to the old problem of machinery than to the metaphysics of artificial consciousness. Talking about "automatic learning algorithms" or "programs" would often avoid the confusion of quite different problematizations.

Machine Interactions (HMI) is beginning to mobilize frameworks for analyzing the *systems* of relations affected by algorithmic devices that go beyond the simple tool-subject relationship, but without integrating the question of the very fabrication of the subject through the mediation.

To theorize the production of the subject of production, we can mobilize resources that lie at the crossroads of psychology and critical sociology - an old Frankfurt program, updated in a conceptually more rigorous and empirically grounded way by the psychodynamics of work. This approach seeks to document on a clinical basis phenomena of naturalization of suffering. Situations of suffering at work can be represented by the subjects who experience them either as intra-subjective, i.e. as arising from the psychic tension inherent in the projection of individual activity onto the inertia of the material which offers resistance and which makes it necessary to constantly redefine its plans (knots in the wood which thwart the cutting plans), or as inter-subjective, i.e. as arising from constraints extrinsic to the activity (imposed pace, contradictory injunctions, etc.). However, through various processes of "shrinking of inter-subjective awareness" (Christophe Dejours), certain situations of suffering whose cause is extrinsic, social, happen to be represented by the subjects as intra-subjective, as if caused by their professional inaptitude.

The feeling of injustice therefore does not always arise, even in situations that could clearly cases of injustice: the experience of suffering can then give rise to guilt, or blind adherence to authority, where we would expect protest and resistance. It is this very absence that needs to be explained. Psychodynamics suggests that the transition from the experienced suffering to the feeling of injustice is situated in the "deontic activity", i.e. the collective deliberation that interprets the instructions of the prescribed work and translate them into mutual duties and concrete processes that enable real work to be done. This moment of inter-subjective mediation of the work activity is essential to understand our problem, because it is a moment which consists of 1) *the expression of the sensible mediated by concepts*, insofar as it is necessary to objectify and communicate each one's experience of labor in order to realize its collective dimension, 2) an effort which is made *necessary* by the imperatives of labor cooperation, and 3) which is supported by a *normatively thick inter-subjectivity* (the listening is interested, the subjects recognized in their contribution). It is precisely this inter-subjective moment that provides the conditions to distance ourselves from the immediate experience of our activity, to compare it to others', and to discuss what we are entitled to expect from each other: where the isolated and vulnerable individual may fail to recognize her suffering as an injustice, the mediation of the collective provides the cognitive and affective resources to do so.

The moment of deliberation that brings individual labors together to produce a collective work is therefore a powerful tool for the elaboration of the individual experience and its possible construction as problematic and unjust. The feeling of injustice therefore depends on normative capacities and judgment, which in turn depend in part on the socialization of individual labors by the collective, by horizontal solidarity. It remains to be seen how this socialization can be affected by technology.

Marx's description of the labor process in the chapters of *Capital* dealing with large-scale machinery clearly shows how this socialization of individual labor is the object of a struggle: the coordination, supervision and surveillance of activity are concentrated in the hands of capital, in the figure of the hierarchy, of course, but also in the factuality of the machines. The weight of machines

organizes work time and space, defining places and roles, and relieving individuals of the burden of constantly and totally managing the organization of collective work. Foucault emphasized the effect of this kind of labor architecture on the production of subjects, whose impulses are domesticated by the material order instituted by technology. However, while the form and content of the socialization of work may be partly imposed by the machinery, it must necessarily still be partly taken over by the collective itself, by a "deontic activity" that fills the gaps left by this purely technical socialization and enables the work to be carried out effectively.

The novelty of these forms of digitally-mediated work is that the physical co-presence of the subjects imposed by large-scale machinery is no longer essential when the material body of the capital's technology is "dematerialized", computerized. What's more, the development of increasingly flexible, "intelligent" and "learning" algorithmic tools, capable of coordinating work in a way similar to that of human collectives, suggests the possibility of drastically reducing the share of work socialization undertaken by the subjects themselves, that share which enables them to bridge the gap between work prescribed by the hierarchical and technical order and real work. Of course, this would not apply to all "AI" devices: some are but mere tools for individual action, and have no bearing on the collective organization of work; conversely, the introduction of "AI" at the level of the collective allocation of tasks and means appears critical.

Given that this deliberative part of socialization, that of deontic activity, provides the cognitive and affective resources individuals need to interpret their experience, to reduce it would mean to reduce the resources for available to elaborate suffering into injustice. So it's not so much, or not only, that this kind of use of "AI" would make labor relations more unjust, it's more fundamentally that workers' capacity to elaborate norms of justice, and to qualify situations as just or unjust, could be prevented by the dispossession of the resources needed to develop such capacities.

Marc-Antoine Pencolé, philosophy PhD and *professeur agrégé*, is associated with the Sophiapol research center (Paris Nanterre University) and actually works as a research engineer for the AP-HP in Necker Hospital. Author of a doctoral dissertation on the concept of surveillance in social theory, his research deals more generally with power and digital technologies, at the interface of social philosophy, philosophy of technology and applied ethics.