

who loses?

2. lives on discount.

2.1 human lab rats.

2.2 ai = manipulation.

Mug shots form part of the archive that is used to test facial-recognition algorithms. (...).

Neither the people depicted in the photographs nor their families have any say about how these images are used and likely have no idea that they are part of the test beds of AI. The subjects of the mug shots are rarely considered, and few engineers will ever look at them closely. (...) they exist purely to “refine tools, techniques, and procedures for face recognition (...) many people show signs of enduring violence, such as scars, bruises, and bandages. But the document concludes that these signs are “difficult to interpret due to the lack of ground truth for comparison with a ‘clean’ sample.” These people are not seen so much as individuals but as part of a shared technical resource—just another data component of the Facial Recognition Verification Testing program, the gold standard for the field.

(...) mug shot databases are particularly disturbing because they represent the model of what was to come. It’s not just the overwhelming pathos of the images themselves. Nor is it solely the invasion of privacy they represent, since suspects

and prisoners have no right to refuse being photographed. It’s that the NIST databases foreshadow the emergence of a logic that has now thoroughly pervaded the tech sector: the unswerving belief that everything is data and is there for the taking. It doesn’t matter where a photograph was taken or whether it reflects a moment of vulnerability or pain or if it represents a form of shaming the subject. It has become so normalized across the industry to take and use whatever is available that few stop to question the underlying politics. (...)

The context—and exertion of power—that these images represent is considered irrelevant because they no longer exist as distinct things unto themselves. They are not seen to carry meanings or ethical weight as images of individual people or as representations of structural power in the carceral system. The personal, the social, and the political meanings are all imagined to be neutralized. I argue this represents a shift from image to infrastructure, where the meaning or care that might be given to the image of an individual person, or the context behind a scene, is presumed to be erased at the moment it

becomes part of an aggregate mass that will drive a broader system. It is all treated as data to be run through functions, material to be ingested to improve technical performance. This is a core premise in the ideology of data extraction.

Machine learning systems are trained on images like these every day—images that were taken from the internet or from state institutions without context and without consent. They are anything but neutral. They represent personal histories, structural inequities, and all the injustices that have accompanied the legacies of policing and prison systems.

ai systems are built to see and intervene in the world in ways that primarily benefit the states, institutions, and corporations that they serve.

human lab rats.

A cylinder sits in a room. It is impassive, smooth, simple and small. It stands 14.8cm high, with a single blue-green circular light that traces around its upper rim. It is silently attending. A woman walks into the room, carrying a sleeping child in her arms, and she addresses the cylinder. 'Alexa, turn on the hall lights?' The cylinder springs into life. 'OK.' The room lights up. The woman makes a faint nodding gesture, and carries the child upstairs.

This is an interaction with Amazon's Echo device. A brief interrogative conversation – a short question and a response – is the most common form of engagement with this consumer voice-enabled AI device. But in this fleeting moment of interaction, a vast matrix of capacities is invoked: interlaced chains of resource extraction, human labour and algorithmic processing across networks of mining, logistics, distribution, processing, prediction and optimization. The scale of this system is almost beyond human imagining. (...)

The device contains seven directional microphones, so the user can be heard at all times even when music is playing. The device comes in several styles, such as gunmetal grey or a basic beige, designed to either "blend in or stand out." But even the shiny design options maintain a kind of blankness: nothing will alert the owner to the vast network that subtends and drives its interactive capacities. The promotional video simply states that the range of things you can ask Alexa to do is always expanding. "Because Alexa is in the cloud, she is always getting smarter and adding new features."

How does this happen? Alexa is a disembodied voice that represents the human-AI interaction interface for an extraordinarily complex set of information processing layers. These layers are fed by constant tides: the flows of human voices being translated into text questions, which are used to query databases of potential answers, and the corresponding ebb of Alexa's replies.

For each response that Alexa gives, its effectiveness is inferred by what happens next: Is the same question uttered again? (Did the user feel heard?) Was the question reworded? (Did the user feel the question was understood?) Was there an action following the question? (Did the interaction result in a tracked response: a light turned on, a product purchased, a track played?). With each interaction, Alexa is training to hear better, to interpret more precisely, to trigger actions that map to the user's desires more accurately. That is the ideal of the form. What is required to make such an interaction work? Put simply: each small moment of convenience – be it answering a question, turning on a light, or playing a song – requires a vast planetary network, fueled by the extraction of non-renewable materials, labor, and data. The scale of resources required is many magnitudes greater than the energy and labor it would take a human to operate a household appliance or flick a switch.

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Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler (2018). "Anatomy of an AI System".