

**Bruno Ministro (Institute for Comparative Literature - University of Porto)*****Post-Literary Ghosts: Discomfort and Disruption on Amazon Mechanical Turk*****BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

**Bruno Ministro** is a Junior Researcher at the Institute for Comparative Literature, University of Porto, Portugal. He has received a PhD in Materialities of Literature from the University of Coimbra. His research sits at the intersections of literary studies, media studies and cultural studies, with an emphasis on intermediality and comparative media. In recent years he has participated in several projects and events related to modern and contemporary poetry, mainly on the subjects of experimental poetry, copy art, electronic literature, and other hybrid genres. Since March 2023, he has been the Principal Investigator for the exploratory research project *To See the Tree and the Forest. Reading the Poetry of António Ramos Rosa from a Distance*. This digital environmental humanities project has received funding from the Portuguese Research Council – FCT Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

**ABSTRACT**

Some technologies work like magic. Artificial Intelligence is one of them. The truth is that there is a vast amount of hidden human labor behind every technology. These people are not only engineers, programmers, designers, and sales teams from Silicon Valley. They come specially from the global south and are what anthropologist Mary L. Gray and computer scientist Siddharth Suri call “ghost workers” (Gray and Suri 2019). These workers create training data for automated systems and perform other human-based computation tasks. Due to innovation pressure, some companies even hire people to impersonate AI systems like chatbots. In short, the “digital factory” (Altenried 2022), with its dematerialized assembly line and the massive crowd of disposable workers, is invested in making technology look like magic.

Asymmetric relations are not exclusive to today’s technology. As thoughtfully shown by recent research, computer history and discourses have always been embedded in racialized and classed social relations (Dyer-Witheford 2015; Franklin 2021; Dhaliwal 2022). In the time of automation—which did not start yesterday with AI—big tech still needs humans to perform repetitive tasks that computers cannot. Thus, the smooth functioning of services provided by companies such as Amazon, Google, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft is only made possible by the hard work of a large and unseen workforce of human employees. One may argue that these are not even employees, as they usually do not hold any employment contract and are often paid per task done in crowdsourcing platforms. With this, these platforms confirm and perpetuate a global divide through invisibility and social inequalities. One known example of such a crowdsourcing platform is Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk).

Several artistic and literary works have critically engaged with MTurk to unveil the disturbing reality behind digital work conditions in global post-capitalism. In my paper, I will look at some of these projects and argue that they are both discomfoting and disruptive as they clearly show that digital labor is about exploitation, alienation, and “digital lethargy” (Hu 2022), meaning the “exhaustion, disappointment, and listlessness experienced under digital capitalism.” My point is that only discomfort can be disruptive under such circumstances.

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