



## AI as White-Collar Automation and The Repairman Economy

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“The Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office has launched its first-ever self-driving police vehicle, named PUG (Police Unmanned Ground). Its functions are powered by AI-driven patrol and real-time crime analytics” (dadesocial). It is a familiar and all too often normalized to think of while allowing automation to replace blue-collar labor. It is commonplace to have automation eliminate factory floor labor, mining jobs, and cashiers, but an automation panic when white collar jobs are under threat.

So often ignored is “the unpaid digital labour that makes up an increasingly substantial part of the digital media/information economy” [2]. But we can see clearly how freelance artistic work, in the field of graphic design or artist commissions, has been economically affected. But all of this ignores the quality of what creativity is: “The moment we collectively refuse to pretend that autocomplete is intelligent and instead laugh...we realize they [the designers of AI systems] didn't build anything at all. Thinking isn't pattern matching. Creativity isn't statistical recombination.

Consciousness is not computation.” Society only freaks out on a real scale about automation when that automation comes for jobs of arbitrary prestige. AI reveals the injustices of labor practices, the violence, and exploitation behind labor systems. How AI is meant to devalue human life, thus allowing humanity to be viable slaughter fodder. When there is a discussion of AI replacing people, it assumes a lot: “AI is going to replace humans? Is it going to love your family for you? Is it going to enjoy a sunset on your behalf? No. What you mean is it's going to do work. And describing doing work as replacing humans [is] buying into the lie that the purpose of a human life is to serve as a cog in a machine that views human life as replaceable” [5,6].

The main jobs that AI will replace are those that assist the state's monopoly on violence. AI weapons, which all AI are, have no sense of guilt or regret; they will not second-guess if their target needs to be killed. This is invaluable for all states, and whoever has the keys to the monopoly of violence with AI will now have an absolutely loyal set of literal killing machines. Thus, whoever the state wants dead will be dead, and humans

whose value has been reduced to useless labor can be killed off en masse.

The American economy is changing; some argue that the United States is shifting or has already shifted into an oligarchy, kleptocracy, and or a neo-techno-feudal state. While all of these may be true, these analyses focus on broad macroeconomics and ignore labor relations. Most recently, the majority of American labor shifted from working industrial jobs to service industry work. The new coming labor shift will transition the United States (and possibly other economies) from service economies to repair economies. The time will likely come when the majority of Americans are working repair-based jobs.

What jobs fall under the umbrella of repair-based jobs? Most obviously, maintenance jobs are found in this category: appliance fixers, painters, electricians, plumbers, and so on of the lie. Yet, less obviously, repair jobs included tech repairs, think here of IT workers and computer scientists. Most workers in the economy will be pushed toward repairing the work made by machines. Automated machinery is already key to global manufacturing and will keep coming to replace workers in other industries, such as home construction. The positions left for humans will be those regarding the maintenance and repair of goods created by automated processes. Why not just have another machine to repair and maintain goods? While machines are good at producing goods in mass, they are currently not as skilled in the repair process. A human is not as productively skilled as a robot but can repair a variety of goods. Compared to their robot counterparts, humans are Swiss army knives; you would need a new robot (at the current time) for every type of item you would want repaired. “In the future, there will be an exponential rise in the technology driving maintenance automation. However, it will not completely eliminate the need for human workers in maintenance activities. Maintenance automation brings about improvement in processes, efficiency, and, in turn, the bottom line. But after a critical limit, an incremental increase in efficiency comes at a huge cost” [1]. This all still spells eventual doom for human repair workers when costs and efficiencies are improved.

There will be a time when humanoid robots with repair functions will shift human labor once again. Yet,

further future speculation is not of present concern, even when they are a concern to present inevitabilities. The true present concern is the economic damage that will be caused by a labor shift from a service to a repair-based economy, “The US Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts 14.9% [17.2%] job growth for industrial machinery mechanics workers from 2022 to 2032” (Unmudl). Most of the workforce lacks repair skills, and there may likely not be enough repair demand to grant a job to every service worker. This will only plunge the labor participation rate even deeper. Our economic priorities will have to be shifted with a shift in labor relations, for example, trade schools will become of greater value than colleges and universities.

This is anything but a dig on trade school, “We need to start with changing the negative perception of the technician career at the school level” [7]. This is simply to point out that the reason that college and university are so valued is because they are valuable in a service economy. In a repair-based labor economy, the college or university is either a privilege or a ground to compete for the few service jobs not destroyed by AI. As previously pointed out, it is a combination of AI and automation that is altering current labor conditions. Automation has already driven individuals who would have taken industrial jobs into service and repair jobs, and it will only continue to do so. Now, AI will destroy service jobs, and many of these service laborers will likely not have industry jobs or other service jobs to take up, but instead will have to compete from repair jobs or find themselves no longer as a part of participating labor. For there is plenty of available maintenance work, “Mechanics and technicians rank No. 3 and No. 4 on the list of hardest to fill jobs, according to a 2007 manpower survey” [3]. Yet, this will change in part as there will be fewer service workers able to pay for maintenance work and more maintenance positions filled up out of necessity. All of this is but a possible prediction, but the trend may have already begun, “Students enrolled in vocational-focused community colleges increased 16 percent from 2022 to 2023, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center” [4]. And we are not prepared for this radical labor shift.

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