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Review Article

Anthropology of Artificial Intelligence (AI): *Making Sense of Machines*

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Abstract – Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly become a central force shaping contemporary social, economic, and cultural life. This paper explains the field of the anthropology of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in a simple way. It reviews the main ideas, research methods, significant social issues, and ethical and political debates related to AI. Anthropology does not see AI as only a technical tool. Instead, it studies AI as something shaped by society, culture, everyday practices, and power relations. AI works through physical systems, human labour, and social institutions, and it is influenced by cultural beliefs and values. The paper highlights four important areas of research: i. Studying the material systems behind AI and the human labour involved; ii. Understanding how algorithms shape culture and influence how people see and organize the world; iii. Examining how humans interact with machines in daily life; iv. Questioning issues of power, control, responsibility, and decision-making in AI governance. The paper also discusses research methods used by anthropologists and suggests future directions, especially the need to study AI from diverse cultural perspectives and to connect small, local studies with larger economic and political structures.

Keywords: Anthropology of AI; Algorithmic Culture; Socio-technical Systems; Power and Governance; Human–Machine Relations

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Introduction

Anthropologists study Artificial Intelligence (AI) by asking a simple but important question: *How does social life change when computer systems are treated like actors, tools, and decision-makers?* Instead of seeing ideas such as "algorithms" and "models" as neutral or purely technical, anthropology looks at how they are shaped by human labour, use of natural resources, institutional rules, and everyday social life. (Fig.1)

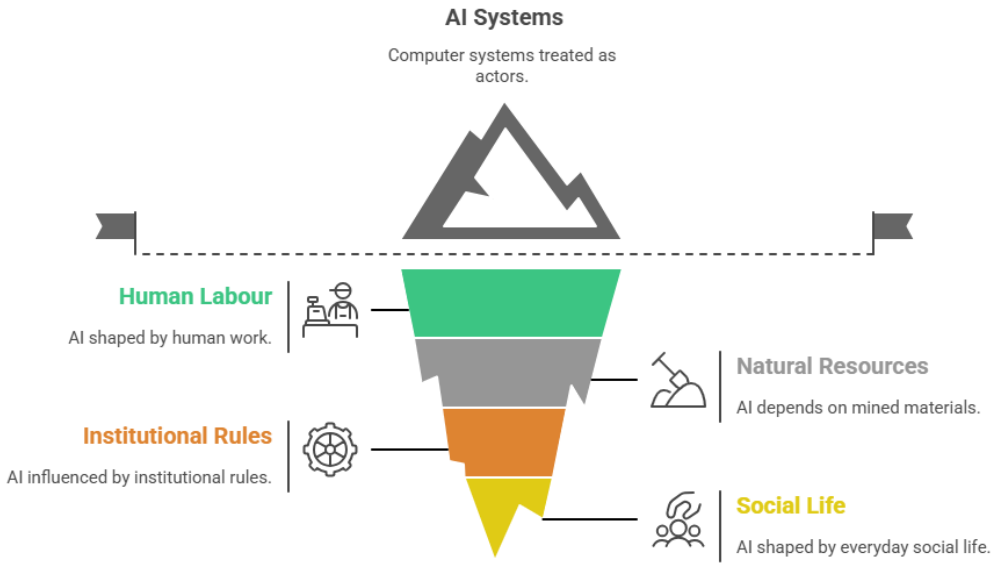

Fig. 1: Anthropological Perspectives on AI beyond Technical Reductionism

From this view, AI is not just a machine or software. It is a cultural, political, and material process that needs to be studied in real social contexts. Research shows that AI is "embodied" because it depends on mined materials and human work, "discursive" because it is often described as objective or neutral, and "performative" because it changes social life by sorting people, ranking data, and guiding decisions in governance and institutions (Crawford 2021). (Fig.2)

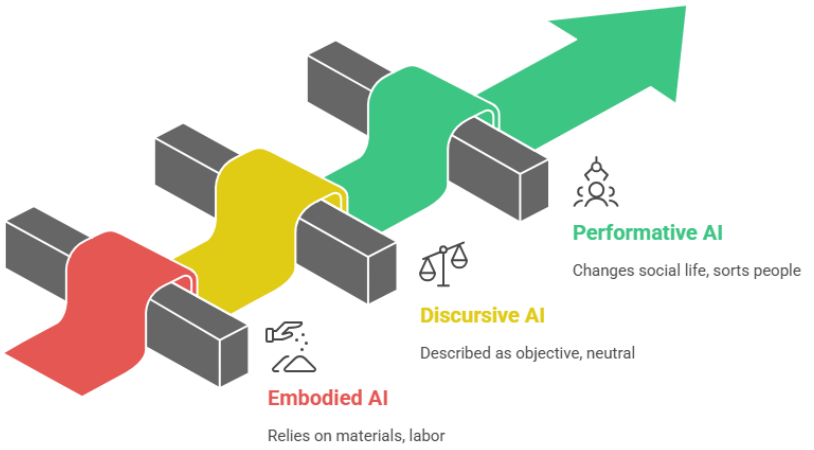

Fig. 2: Socio-Material, Discursive, and Performative Dimensions of AI

Theoretical Foundations and Significant Concepts

The anthropology of AI is based on ideas from anthropology, Science and Technology Studies (STS), and political economy. These approaches do not treat AI as a neutral or value-free technology. Instead, AI is understood as a "socio-technical system" shaped by society, culture, institutions, and power relations. Algorithms are seen as part of social life, influenced by human values and existing inequalities. This section explains some significant concepts used by anthropologists to study AI, including materiality, algorithmic culture, situated interaction, and algorithmic power. (Fig. 3)

Fig. 3: Core Anthropological Concepts for Interpreting AI

Materiality and Extraction

AI is a material and social system rather than a purely digital technology. It depends on physical resources, infrastructure, and labour, including datasets, energy-intensive data

centres, mineral mining, data labelling, and content moderation. Anthropologists use this view to show how environmental damage and labour exploitation are hidden in technical narratives, and to challenge myths of neutrality while promoting ethical, sustainable, and socially responsible AI governance in everyday global contexts today. (Fig. 4)

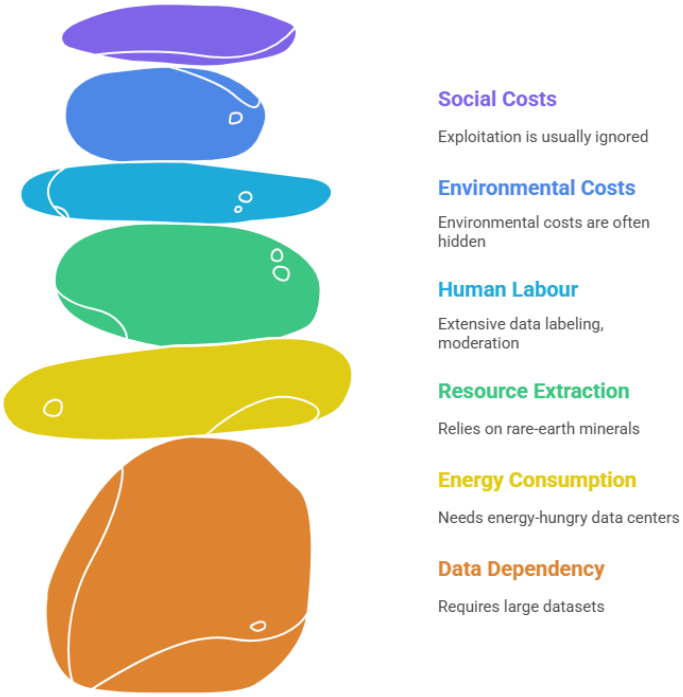

Fig. 4: Material and Labour Foundations of AI Systems

AI Is Not Truly "Artificial"

Although AI is often described as digital and immaterial, it is deeply connected to the physical world. AI systems depend on hardware such as servers, chips, and cooling systems. Data centres that store and process AI models consume large quantities of electricity and water, contributing to environmental impact (Crawford 2021, Ribes & Jackson 2013). This material dependence shows that AI development is inseparable from ecological concerns, infrastructural investment, and global resource consumption, making sustainability a central issue in discussions about future AI technologies.

Hidden Natural Resource Use

AI technologies depend on rare-earth minerals like lithium, cobalt, and silicon, which are extracted from mines across the world. Mining often damages ecosystems, pollutes water sources, and disrupts local communities. These environmental and social costs are usually hidden in narratives that describe digital technologies as "clean" or

sustainable (Crawford 2021, Helmond 2015). Anthropological perspectives help make these invisible impacts visible by connecting everyday AI use with distant sites of ecological and social harm.

Human Labour Behind AI

AI also depends heavily on human labour. Workers involved in data annotation, transcription, and content moderation train, correct, and maintain AI systems. These workers frequently face low wages, insecure employment, and emotional stress from repeated exposure to disturbing content. Despite their essential role, their contributions remain largely invisible in public narratives that portray AI as autonomous and self-operating technologies (Gray & Suri 2019, Roberts 2019).

Unequal Costs and Benefits

Crawford (2021) in *Atlas of AI* explains that while large technology companies gain profit and influence from AI, the environmental and social burdens are mostly carried by marginalised communities. Using a material perspective, anthropologists reveal unequal labour conditions, harmful resource extraction, and deep power imbalances. This approach challenges purely technical views of AI and draws attention to the need for more just, inclusive, and accountable AI development practices.

Algorithmic Cultures and World-Making

Algorithms shape culture, knowledge, and social reality. Instead of merely processing information, they actively influence what people see, know, and believe. Anthropology studies these processes to understand how digital systems participate in cultural production and social power. This perspective shows that algorithms help construct everyday meanings, identities, and hierarchies, making them important social actors rather than neutral technical tools (Gillespie 2014, Striphas 2015). (Fig. 5)

Algorithms as Cultural Actors

Algorithms are not only technical tools but also cultural agents. They decide which content is promoted, ignored, or valued. Through search engines, social media feeds, and recommendation systems, algorithms guide everyday choices in reading, watching, shopping, and even thinking (Gillespie 2014). As Striphas (2015) notes, these systems actively shape cultural taste, public attention, and shared understandings in contemporary digital societies.

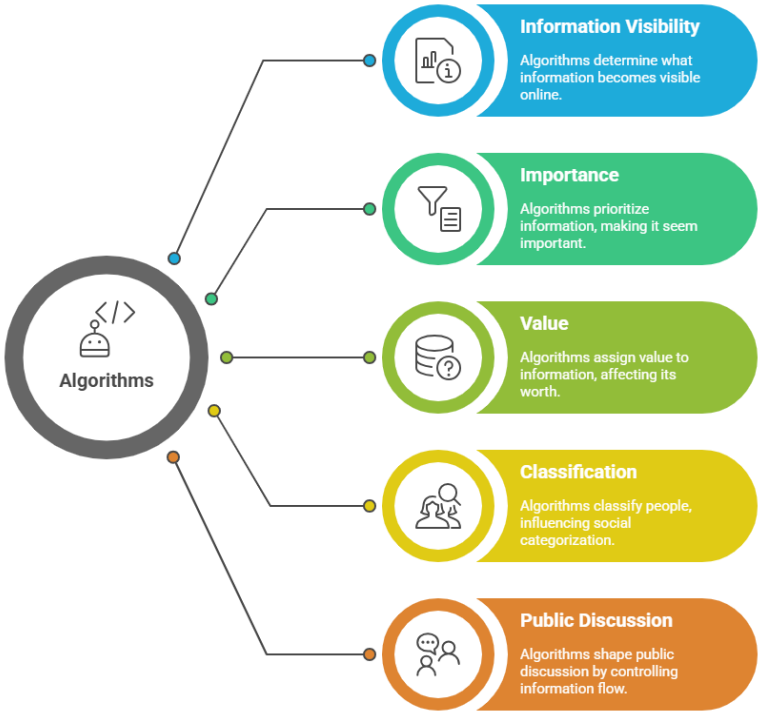

Fig. 5: Algorithmic Culture and the Production of Social Meaning

Shaping Knowledge and Truth

Algorithms influence which information appears trustworthy, visible, or popular. News ranking systems, search results, and trending lists shape how people understand social and political events. Knowledge is therefore not produced only by humans but is also organised and filtered by machines. This process changes how truth, authority, and expertise are socially constructed, often privileging certain voices while marginalising others in digital public spaces (Gillespie 2014, Bucher 2018).

Power and Inequality

Algorithms often reflect the values and priorities of the institutions that design them. They can reproduce social biases linked to gender, class, race, and language. Some groups gain greater visibility and influence, while others remain marginalised. Anthropologists examine these patterns to show how algorithmic systems do not simply mirror society, but actively reinforce existing power relations and social inequalities in digital environments (Bucher 2018, Benjamin 2019).

World-Making Processes

Algorithms do not simply represent reality; they actively help create it. By shaping attention, memory, and interaction, they influence how people experience everyday life. AI systems therefore participate in “world-making” by defining social priorities, cultural

meanings, and collective imagination. Anthropological perspectives show that these digital systems are deeply involved in organising social realities, rather than operating as neutral or passive technologies (Striphas 2015, Couldry & Mejias 2019).

Situated Action and Human–Machine Interaction

Human interaction with AI is always shaped by social, cultural, and institutional contexts. People do not use AI systems in the same way everywhere. Instead, they interpret, adapt, question, and sometimes resist AI according to their everyday situations. Anthropology and Science and Technology Studies (STS) examine these lived experiences to show how AI functions in real life, beyond technical design and theoretical assumptions (Suchman 1987, Orlikowski 2000). (Fig. 6)

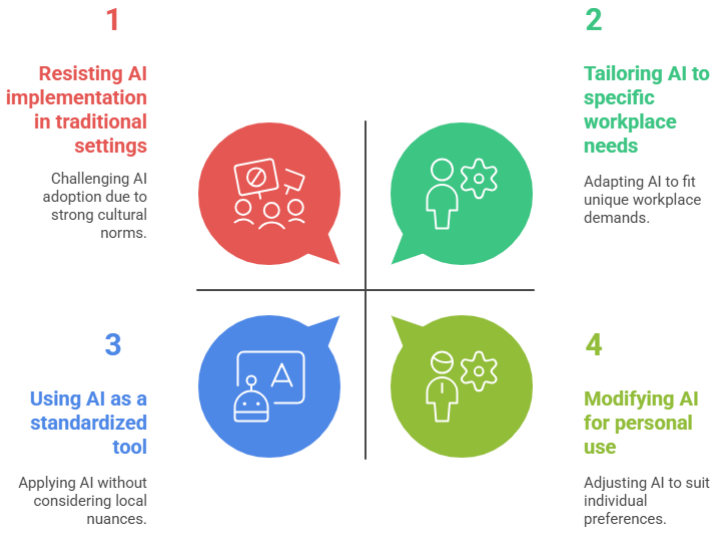

Fig. 6: Situated Human–AI Interaction in Everyday Social Contexts

The Idea of Situated Action

Suchman (1987) explains that human actions cannot be fully predicted by rules, plans, or instructions because people respond to situations as they develop in real time. This idea is important for AI studies, as users often behave differently from what designers expect. Therefore, AI systems should be understood within everyday social contexts, not only through technical models or programmed intentions (Suchman 1987, 2007).

Everyday Use of AI

In everyday life, people use AI in flexible and creative ways. Teachers adapt AI tools to suit classroom needs, doctors combine AI suggestions with professional

judgment, and workers may question or ignore automated instructions. These practices show that AI does not fully control human behaviour. Instead, human agency, experience, and decision-making remain central in shaping meaningful and responsible human–machine interaction (Orlikowski 2000, Suchman 2007).

Adaptation and Resistance

Users may trust AI in some situations and reject it in others. They often modify systems, create shortcuts, or use AI in unintended ways. This shows that human–machine interaction is dynamic rather than fixed. Anthropologists study these everyday adaptations to understand how power, authority, and control are continuously negotiated between humans and machines within changing social and institutional contexts (Suchman 1987, Orlikowski 2000).

Ethnographic Importance

Ethnographic methods allow researchers to observe AI use in real settings such as hospitals, offices, schools, and homes. This approach reveals the gap between how AI is designed and how it is actually used. Ethnography shows that AI gains meaning only through everyday human practice, interpretation, and social interaction, making lived experience essential for understanding the real impact of AI technologies (Suchman 2007).

Algorithmic Power, Opacity, and Politics

Algorithms are systems of power rather than neutral technical tools. They shape decisions, visibility, and authority in society, often in ways that ordinary users cannot easily understand or challenge. Anthropological perspectives help uncover these hidden processes and show how algorithmic systems influence democracy, justice, and everyday life, raising important questions about transparency, accountability, and social responsibility (Bucher 2018, Pasquale 2015). (Fig. 7)

Algorithmic Power

Algorithms decide who receives loans, jobs, medical attention, and social media visibility, directly shaping people's life chances. Because these systems operate on a large scale, their influence is often stronger than that of individual human decision-makers. Bucher (2018) explains that algorithmic power works quietly through every day digital interactions, making its effects appear natural, neutral, and difficult to question or resist in ordinary social life.

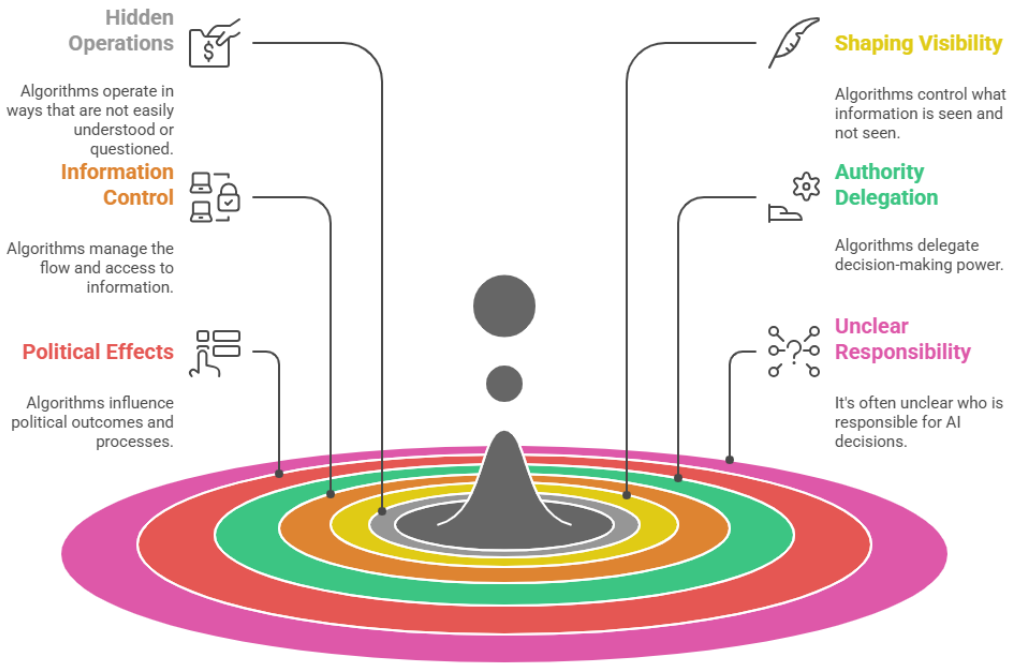

Fig. 7: Algorithmic Power, Governance, and Social Consequences

Opacity and Lack of Transparency

Most algorithms function as "black boxes," with internal processes hidden from users. People rarely know how decisions are made or which data is used. This opacity makes it difficult to challenge unfair or harmful outcomes (Pasquale 2015). Even organisations may not fully understand algorithmic decisions. Anthropologists view this lack of transparency as a serious political and ethical problem that affects accountability and public trust (Ananny & Crawford 2018).

Politics of Categories

AI systems classify people into categories such as risky, trustworthy, or profitable. These categories are not natural or objective but socially constructed. They reflect the values, assumptions, and interests of designers and institutions. Such classifications can strengthen stereotypes and reproduce existing inequalities related to class, race, gender, and geography, making categorisation a deeply political process rather than a neutral technical activity (Bucher 2018, Pasquale 2015).

Responsibility and Accountability

In complex AI systems, responsibility often becomes unclear. When harm occurs, it is difficult to identify who is accountable—the programmer, the company, the institution, or the algorithm itself. Anthropology examines how responsibility is distributed, shifted, and sometimes hidden within technical and organisational systems.

This lack of clear accountability makes democratic control, ethical governance, and social justice more difficult to achieve in AI-driven societies (Ananny & Crawford 2018).

Methods in Anthropological AI Research

Anthropological research on AI mainly uses qualitative and interpretive methods. These approaches help researchers understand AI as a social and cultural system rather than only a technical tool. Instead of focusing only on algorithms and models, anthropologists study people, institutions, meanings, and power relations surrounding AI. This perspective links everyday AI practices with wider political, economic, and global systems, offering a deeper and more critical understanding of AI in society (Suchman 1987, Crawford 2021). (Fig. 8)

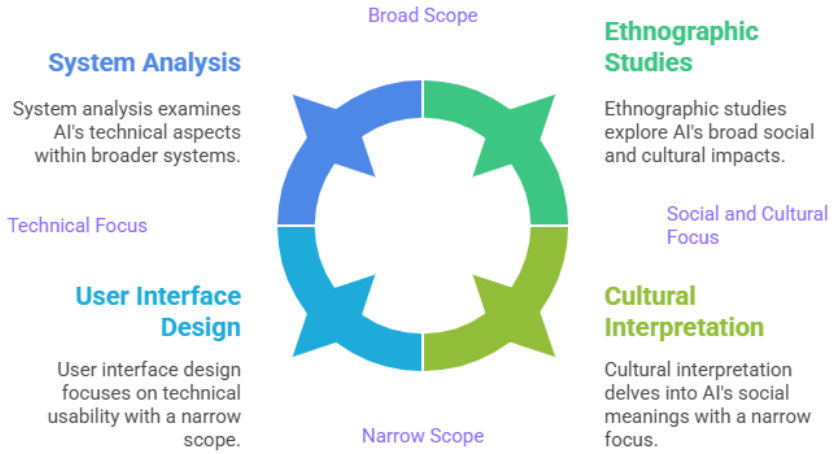

Fig. 8: Qualitative and Ethnographic Methods in the Anthropology of AI

Multisited Ethnography

Multisited ethnography is an important method in the anthropology of AI. Instead of studying AI in only one place, researchers follow technologies, data, and people across several interconnected sites. This approach reveals how AI is produced through global networks of labour, infrastructure, and power. It helps anthropologists understand how local practices are shaped by broader political, economic, and technological systems (Marcus 1995, Burrell 2009). (Fig. 9)

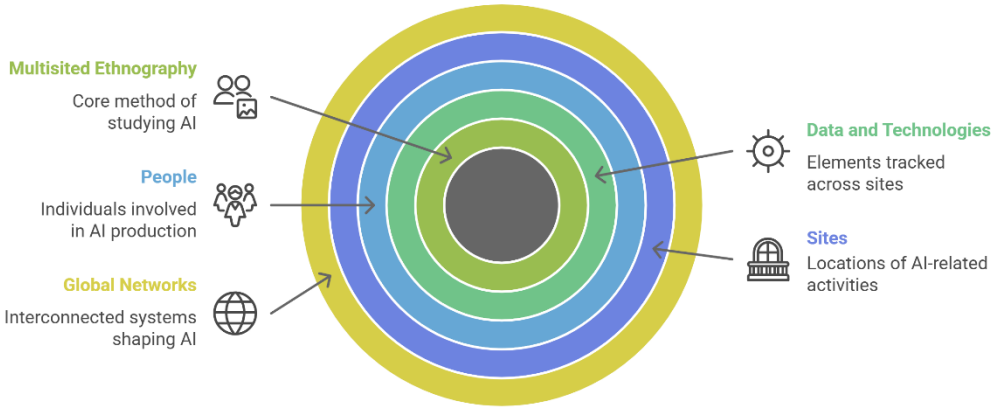

Fig. 9: Multisited Ethnographic Framework for AI Research

Following Technologies Across Sites

Researchers examine software companies, data centres, cloud platforms, and policy offices to understand how AI systems are designed, managed, and regulated. They also trace how data travels across countries and institutions. This approach shows that AI production is not confined to one place but is globally distributed. It highlights how international networks of labour, capital, and governance shape the development and impact of AI technologies (Marcus 1995).

Tracing Human Labour

Multisited ethnography enables anthropologists to follow the workers behind AI, including data annotators, content moderators, and platform workers. These workers are often located far from AI developers and major companies. This method reveals unequal working conditions, low recognition, and limited protection. It also highlights how essential human labour remains largely invisible, despite its central role in sustaining and improving AI systems (Burrell 2009, Crawford 2021).

Connecting Resource Extraction

AI also depends on material resources. Anthropologists study mining regions where minerals are extracted for chips and hardware production. By connecting these sites with technology companies and data centres, researchers show how environmental damage, labour exploitation, and social inequality are closely linked to digital innovation. This approach reminds us that AI development is grounded in physical landscapes and human lives, not only in virtual or technical spaces (Crawford 2021).

Power and Global Inequality

By moving across multiple sites, anthropologists link wealthy technology centres with poorer labour and mining regions. Crawford (2021) shows that AI systems depend

on unequal global relations shaped by capitalism and historical inequality. Multisited ethnography makes these hidden power structures visible by revealing how benefits concentrate in powerful locations while social and environmental costs are carried by marginalised communities across different parts of the world.

Design Ethnography and Participant Observation

Design ethnography is an important method in anthropological AI research. It involves close engagement with AI developers, engineers, and designers. By observing and participating in design environments, anthropologists explore how social values, cultural beliefs, and institutional priorities become embedded in technical systems. This approach shows that AI design is not purely technical, but deeply shaped by human choices, assumptions, and power relations (Forsythe 1999, Suchman 2007). (Fig. 10)

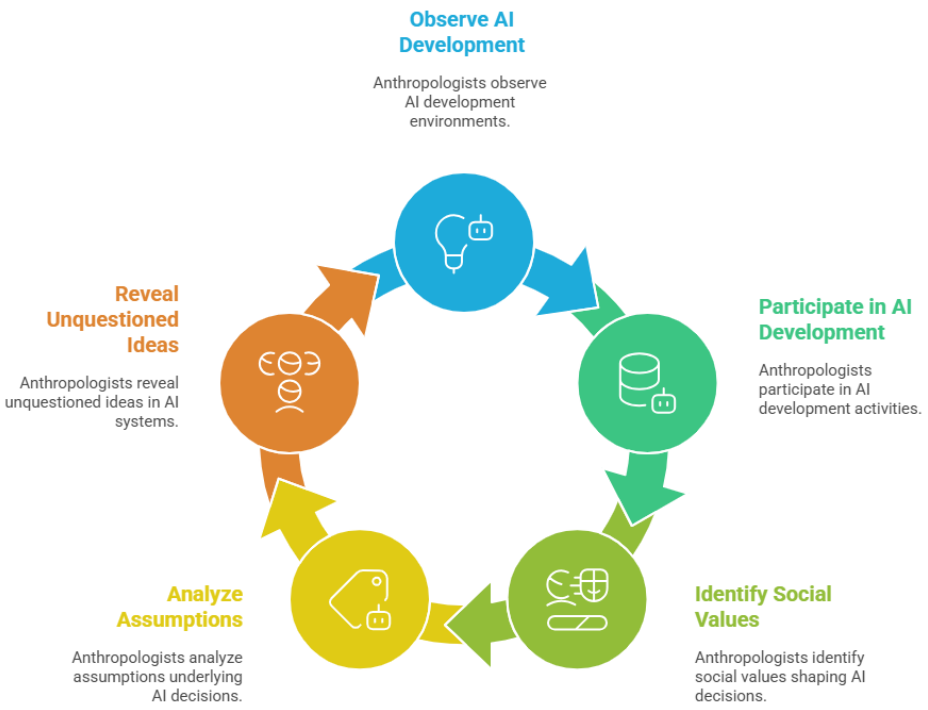

Fig. 10: Design Ethnography in the AI Development Process

Working Inside Design Spaces

Researchers spend time in laboratories, software companies, and innovation centres. They attend meetings, observe coding practices, and participate in everyday discussions. This close involvement helps them understand how decisions about algorithms, data, and system goals are made in real work settings. It reveals that technical

choices are influenced by organisational culture, deadlines, power relations, and personal judgments, not only by scientific or logical reasoning (Forsythe 1999).

Social Values in Technical Design

AI systems are shaped by values such as efficiency, speed, neutrality, and scalability. Although these seem technical, they are deeply social and political. Design ethnography shows how these values become embedded in system architecture, interfaces, and software logic. This reveals that AI design always reflects human priorities and institutional interests, rather than being purely objective or value-free technological development (Dourish 2006).

Questioning Neutrality

Suchman (1987) argues that technology design is never neutral. Designers always imagine particular users, goals, and behaviours. These assumptions shape how AI systems function in everyday life. Through participant observation, anthropologists identify these hidden expectations and examine their social consequences. This method reveals how design choices can privilege certain groups while excluding others, showing that neutrality in AI design is more a claim than a reality.

Linking Design and Power

Design ethnography connects technical decisions with wider power structures. Corporate goals, market demands, and institutional pressures strongly influence AI design choices. As a result, some social concerns are prioritised while others are ignored. This approach shows that AI design is shaped not only by innovation, but also by economic interests and organisational authority, making technology development a deeply political and social process (Suchman 2007).

Workplace and Labour Studies

Anthropologists study the labour that supports AI systems to show that AI is never fully automated. Behind every AI system are human workers who label data, correct errors, monitor content, and maintain systems. Workplace and labour studies make this hidden human contribution visible. They also reveal how working conditions, pay, and job security shape the everyday realities of people who sustain AI technologies (Crawford 2021, Gray & Suri 2019). (Fig. 11)

Fig. 11: Hidden Human Labour within AI Production Systems

Hidden Human Work

Many AI tasks depend on workers who label images, translate texts, and verify information. These workers are often employed through online platforms and receive low wages. Their labour is essential for training and improving AI systems, yet it is rarely recognised or valued in public discussions. Anthropologists highlight this invisibility to show that AI success relies heavily on human effort, not only on advanced technology (Gray & Suri 2019).

Content Moderation and Emotional Labour

Content moderators review disturbing images, videos, and texts to keep digital platforms safe. This work involves intense emotional stress and can have long-term psychological effects. Although their labour protects millions of users, moderators often remain invisible and undervalued. Anthropologists study these experiences to reveal the human cost of maintaining digital "cleanliness" and to question the ethical responsibilities of technology companies toward their workers (Roberts 2019).

Challenging the Myth of Automation

AI is often presented as independent and intelligent. However, workplace studies show that AI systems continuously depend on human correction, supervision, and support. Workers adjust errors, update data, and manage system failures. This challenges the idea that AI replaces human labour. Instead, AI reorganises and hides human work behind technical interfaces, making labour less visible but no less essential to AI functioning (Crawford 2021).

Labour, Power, and Inequality

Most AI-related labour is carried out in economically weaker regions for companies based in wealthy countries. This pattern reflects global inequalities within digital economies. Anthropologists use labour studies to link AI development with capitalism, outsourcing, and unequal power relations. This perspective shows how technological progress often depends on invisible and undervalued work performed by marginalised workers across different parts of the world (Crawford 2021).

Discourse and Archival Analysis

Discourse and archival analysis help anthropologists understand how AI is described, promoted, and justified in society. By examining language in policy documents, corporate reports, media articles, and technical texts, researchers explore how AI gains social authority and legitimacy. This method reveals how particular narratives shape public expectations, political decisions, and ethical debates, influencing how AI is understood and accepted in everyday social and institutional life (Fairclough 2013, Crawford 2021). (Fig. 12)

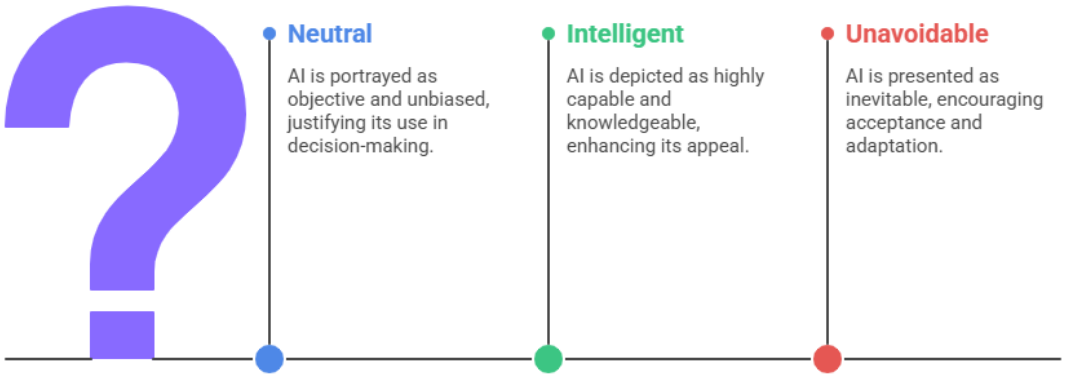

Fig. 12: Discursive Construction of AI in Public Narratives

Language and Metaphors of AI

AI is often described using terms such as “intelligent,” “objective,” and “inevitable.” These metaphors present AI as more reliable than human judgment. Anthropologists show that such language hides human decisions, institutional interests, and political power behind technical expressions. By analysing these metaphors, researchers reveal how language shapes public trust in AI and reduces critical questioning of its social and ethical consequences (Bucher 2018).

Building Technological Authority

When AI is presented as neutral, scientific, and objective, its decisions become difficult to question. Discourse analysis shows how institutions use language to create trust, obedience, and dependence on AI systems. This process strengthens technological authority in governance, business, and everyday life. As a result, AI decisions are often accepted without debate, even when they affect people's rights, opportunities, and social positions (Pasquale 2015).

Justifying Control and Surveillance

AI discourse often supports increased surveillance, data collection, and automated decision-making by presenting them as necessary for security, efficiency, and progress. Anthropologists study how these narratives make monitoring and control appear normal and acceptable. This analysis shows that language plays a key role in shaping public consent, while hiding the risks to privacy, freedom, and democratic values within seemingly technical and beneficial AI practices (Crawford 2021).

Archival Perspectives

Archival research examines historical documents to trace how ideas about automation, intelligence, and machines have developed over time. This method shows that present AI narratives are not entirely new but are rooted in earlier political, scientific, and cultural traditions. By studying these continuities, anthropologists reveal how past hopes, fears, and power interests continue to shape contemporary understandings and expectations of artificial intelligence in society.

Participatory and Decolonial Approaches

Participatory and decolonial approaches aim to make AI research more ethical, inclusive, and socially responsible. Rather than treating communities only as research subjects, these methods involve them as active partners in research and design. Anthropology uses such approaches to challenge power inequalities in knowledge production and technology development. They also promote respect for local knowledge, cultural diversity, and social justice in shaping future AI systems (Smith 2012, Escobar 2018) (Fig. 13).

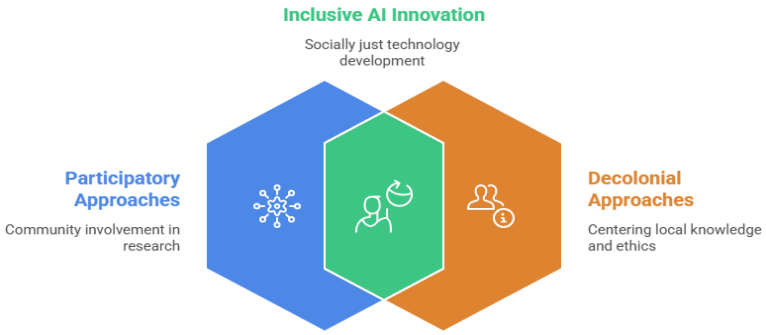

Fig. 13: Participatory and Decolonial Approaches to Ethical AI Research

Participatory Research Practices

Participatory methods involve community members in defining research problems, collecting data, and interpreting results. This ensures that AI research reflects real needs and local priorities rather than only expert opinions. Such approaches reduce the distance between researchers and participants and promote shared ownership of knowledge. They also encourage trust, transparency, and mutual learning, making AI research more socially relevant, democratic, and ethically grounded (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995).

Challenging Extractive Research

Traditional research often extracts information from communities without offering meaningful benefits in return. Decolonial approaches strongly criticise this practice and demand ethical responsibility from researchers. They argue that knowledge produced by marginalised groups should be respected as equally valuable. This perspective promotes fairness, respect, and collaboration, ensuring that research supports community interests rather than only academic or institutional goals (Smith 2012).

Valuing Local Knowledge

Local experiences, languages, and cultural understandings are essential for meaningful AI design. Participatory anthropology shows that AI systems created without cultural sensitivity can cause harm or exclusion. Decolonial approaches help integrate diverse worldviews into technological development. This ensures that AI reflects social diversity, respects community values, and supports inclusive innovation rather than imposing one dominant cultural or technological perspective on different societies (Escobar 2018).

Focus on the Global South

Participatory and decolonial approaches are especially important in the Global South, where AI is often introduced through foreign companies and policies. Anthropologists examine how such technologies can reproduce colonial patterns of

control and inequality. By involving local communities in research and decision-making, participatory methods support more just, inclusive, and culturally respectful technological futures that reflect local needs and social realities (Couldry & Mejias 2019).

Towards Socially Just AI

Participatory and decolonial methods promote AI that respects human dignity, cultural diversity, and social justice. They shift AI research away from profit-driven and corporate-centred models toward people-centred and community-oriented practices. This approach encourages ethical responsibility, inclusion, and fairness in technology development. By valuing human rights and local knowledge, these methods help create AI systems that support social well-being rather than increasing inequality or exclusion.

Representative Empirical Topics and Findings

Empirical research in the anthropology of AI relies on ethnographic case studies to understand how AI systems are created, used, and governed in real-life settings. These studies focus on everyday practices and institutional contexts rather than abstract theory. They examine issues such as labour, classification, user interaction, and policy implementation. Overall, this research shows that AI often reproduces, reshapes, and sometimes strengthens existing social inequalities. The following sections present key empirical themes identified by anthropologists across different social and cultural contexts. (Fig. 14).

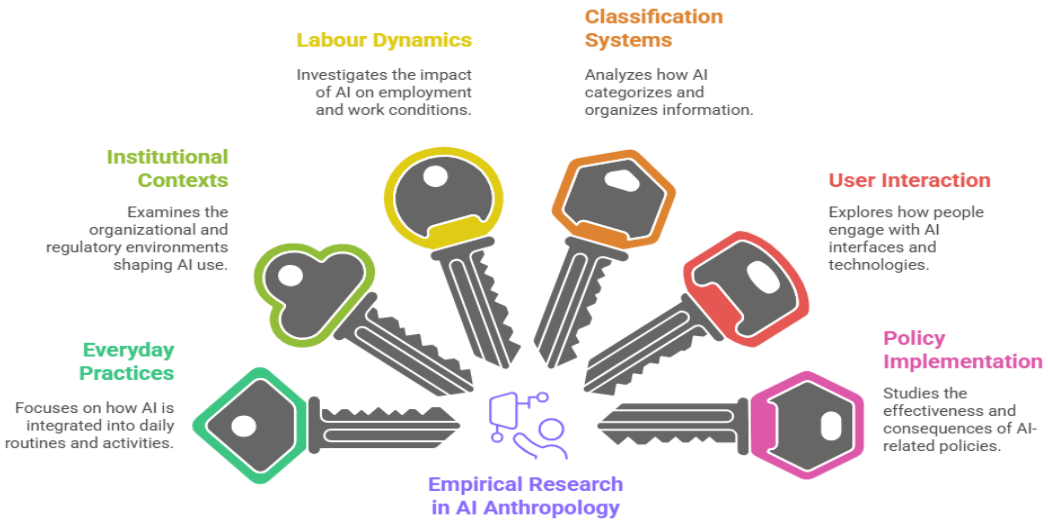

Fig. 14: Foundational Themes in Anthropological AI Research

Data Work and Invisible Labour

Ethnographic research clearly shows that AI systems depend heavily on human labour. Although AI is often described as automated, its functioning relies on workers who prepare, correct, and monitor data. This hidden labour is central to how AI systems learn and perform. Anthropologists highlight these processes to challenge popular ideas of full automation and to recognise the human effort that makes AI possible (Crawford 2021, Gray & Suri 2019) (Fig. 15).

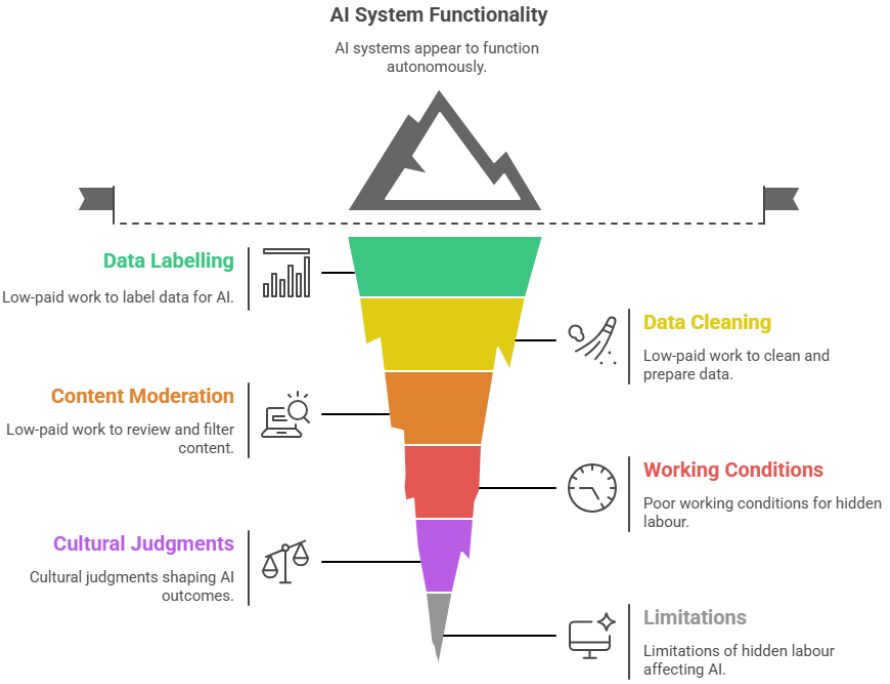

Fig. 15: Human Data Work and Invisible Labour in AI Systems

Forms of Data Work

Data workers label images, tag emotions, translate text, and clean datasets. Content moderators review harmful material to keep platforms usable. These tasks require human judgment, cultural understanding, and emotional effort. However, they are often treated as low-skilled and easily replaceable. Anthropological studies show that this undervaluation hides the complexity and importance of data work, even though AI systems cannot function properly without these human contributions (Roberts 2019).

Invisibility of Workers

Most data workers remain invisible to both users and companies. Their labour is hidden behind the image of intelligent and autonomous machines. This invisibility reduces public awareness of their working conditions, wages, and emotional stress. As a

result, demands for fair treatment and labour protection remain weak. Anthropologists argue that making this hidden workforce visible is essential for building more ethical and responsible AI systems (Crawford 2021).

Shaping AI Outcomes

The decisions made by data workers directly shape AI behaviour. Their cultural backgrounds, language skills, and personal interpretations influence how AI systems classify, rank, and respond to information. This means that AI outcomes are not purely technical but socially produced. Anthropologists use this insight to challenge claims of objectivity and to show that AI systems always carry human values and social influences within their operations (Gray & Suri 2019).

Inequality and Exploitation

Data work is frequently outsourced to economically weaker regions, where workers receive low wages, insecure contracts, and limited labour protection. Meanwhile, large technology companies earn high profits from AI products. Anthropologists argue that this arrangement reproduces global inequalities and creates new forms of digital exploitation. It shows that AI development is closely connected to unfair labour systems, rather than representing purely progressive or equal technological advancement (Crawford 2021, Roberts 2019).

Bias, Classification, and the Politics of Categories

Anthropological research shows that algorithmic categories such as “risk,” “fitness,” and “suspicion” are not neutral or purely technical. These categories are socially constructed and shaped by historical power relations, institutional goals, and cultural assumptions. Anthropology therefore goes beyond technical discussions of bias to examine the politics behind classification itself. This approach reveals how categorisation systems influence inclusion, exclusion, and unequal treatment in everyday social life (Bucher 2018, Bowker & Star 1999). (Fig. 16)

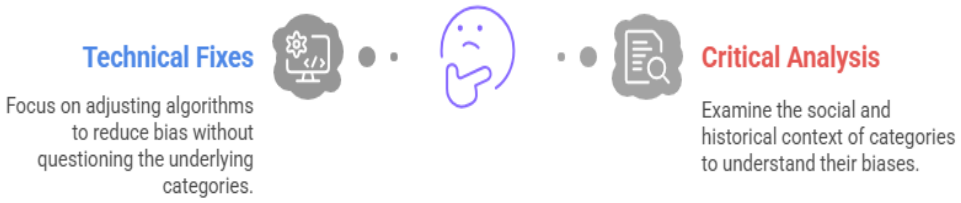

Fig. 16: Politics of Algorithmic Classification and Bias

Categories as Social Constructions

Categories used in AI systems reflect human decisions about what is considered important and measurable. These decisions are shaped by social values, economic interests, and political priorities. Bowker and Star (1999) show that classification systems always include certain realities while excluding others. Anthropology highlights that such categories are never neutral, as they organise knowledge and power in ways that affect people's identities, opportunities, and social positions.

Institutional Power and Design

Algorithmic categories are mainly created by powerful institutions such as governments, corporations, and security agencies. These institutions decide what is considered "normal," "risky," or "valuable." As a result, AI systems often reflect institutional priorities more than public needs. Anthropologists show that such design choices can strengthen existing power structures and limit alternative perspectives, making AI an instrument of governance and control rather than a purely neutral technology (Bucher 2018).

Effects on Marginalised Groups

Anthropological studies show that algorithmic classification often harms marginalised communities. For instance, predictive policing systems may label certain neighbourhoods as high-risk using historically biased data. This strengthens cycles of surveillance, suspicion, and punishment. Instead of reducing inequality, such systems can reproduce existing social discrimination. Anthropologists use these findings to argue that AI must be evaluated not only for accuracy, but also for its social and ethical consequences (Benjamin 2019).

Beyond Technical Bias Fixes

Instead of focusing only on improving datasets or algorithms, anthropologists argue for questioning the social goals of AI systems. They ask whose knowledge is included, whose experiences are ignored, and who benefits from automated decisions. This perspective shifts the discussion from technical correction to social responsibility, showing that fairness in AI requires changes in power relations, institutional priorities, and decision-making processes, not only better technical design (Bucher 2018).

Everyday Encounters and Interpretations

Ethnographic studies show that people do not interact with AI in a single or uniform way. Instead, users develop different meanings, feelings, and strategies while engaging with

AI systems in daily life. These everyday encounters shape how AI is socially understood and culturally accepted. Anthropology highlights that AI becomes meaningful only through human interpretation, experience, and social context, rather than through technical design alone (Gillespie 2014, Striphas 2015). (Fig. 17)

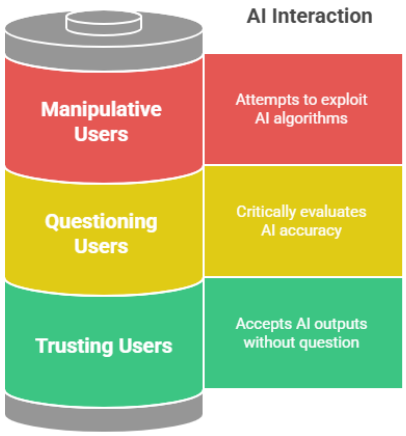

Fig. 17: Diverse User Interpretations and Everyday Engagements with AI

Trust and Doubt

Some users trust AI recommendations, such as navigation apps or online suggestions. Others remain doubtful and compare AI results with their own knowledge or advice from others. This shows that trust in AI is not automatic but socially learned and shaped by experience, culture, and context. Anthropologists study these patterns to understand how confidence in technology develops and how users negotiate reliability in everyday digital interactions (Gillespie 2014).

Gaming and Manipulation

Many users try to "game" algorithms. For example, content creators change titles, keywords, and posting times to increase visibility. These practices show that users do not passively follow algorithms but actively negotiate with them. Anthropologists view this as evidence that human agency remains strong in digital spaces, as people continuously adapt their behaviour to influence and reshape algorithmic outcomes (Striphas 2015).

Local Meanings and Practices

People interpret AI differently depending on culture, education, and personal experience. In some contexts, AI is viewed as helpful and modern, while in others it is seen as threatening or unreliable. These differences shape how people choose to use or avoid AI technologies. Anthropologists study such local meanings to understand cultural

diversity in AI use and to show that technological acceptance is always shaped by social and cultural factors.

Designer Intent vs. User Practice

Ethnographic studies often reveal a gap between how designers expect AI systems to be used and how people actually use them. Users creatively adapt, resist, or reinterpret technologies according to their own needs and situations. This gap highlights human agency in technological environments and shows that AI meaning and function are shaped by everyday practice rather than by design intentions alone (Gillespie 2014).

Institutional Adoption and Governance

Anthropological research shows that AI systems are not adopted in the same way across all institutions. Their use in areas such as criminal justice, education, healthcare, and welfare depends on existing rules, professional cultures, and political priorities. As a result, AI becomes part of complex bureaucratic systems rather than acting as a neutral technical tool. This perspective highlights how institutional power shapes the impact and meaning of AI in public life (Crawford 2021, Ananny & Crawford 2018). (Fig. 18)

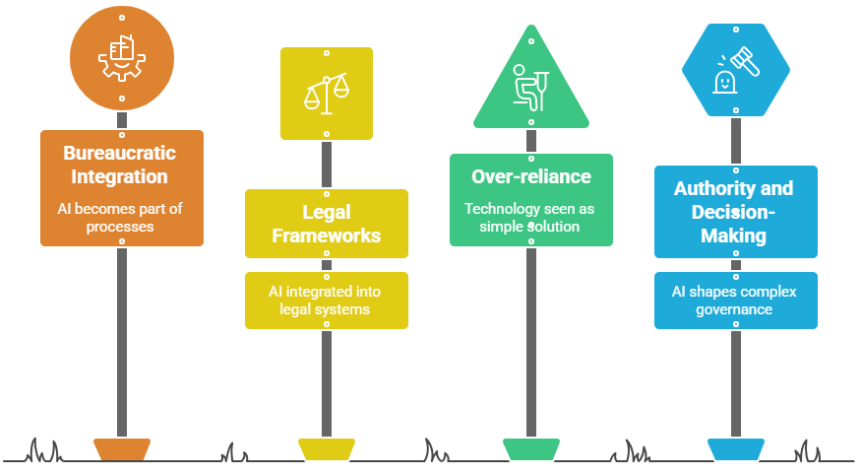

Fig. 18: Institutional Contexts and Governance Challenges of AI Adoption

AI in Bureaucratic Systems

When AI is introduced into institutions, it must fit within existing legal procedures and administrative routines. In criminal justice, for example, AI risk assessment tools influence sentencing and parole decisions. However, these systems do not replace human judgment; instead, they reshape how decisions are justified, documented, and defended.

Anthropologists show that AI becomes part of bureaucratic authority rather than functioning as an independent or neutral decision-maker (Ananny & Crawford 2018).

Uneven Adoption

Some institutions adopt AI quickly because they have strong funding, political support, and technical expertise, while others lack resources or confidence in these systems. This uneven adoption creates new inequalities between regions, schools, hospitals, and government offices. Anthropologists show that AI does not spread evenly or fairly, but follows existing patterns of social and economic inequality, often benefiting already powerful institutions more than disadvantaged ones (Crawford 2021).

Authority and Legitimacy

AI systems often gain authority because they are presented as scientific, objective, and data-driven. Institutional actors may rely on AI decisions to justify actions and reduce personal responsibility. Anthropologists study how this reliance shifts accountability within governance structures. They show that when AI is treated as unquestionable, it can weaken democratic debate and hide human responsibility behind technical systems, making power less visible and harder to challenge (Pasquale 2015).

Importance of Institutional Ethnography

Institutional ethnography helps researchers understand how AI systems are used in real administrative contexts. It reveals gaps between official policy claims and everyday practice. This method shows how power operates through technological systems and organisational routines. By studying institutions closely, anthropologists uncover how AI shapes decision-making, accountability, and social relations in ways that are often hidden in formal policy descriptions (Crawford 2021).

Implications for Ethics, Policy, and Practice

Anthropological research on AI offers important guidance for developing ethical, socially responsible, and context-aware AI systems. By focusing on human experiences, power relations, and cultural differences, anthropology helps policy discussions move beyond purely technical solutions and narrow efficiency goals. This approach encourages more inclusive, reflective, and justice-oriented decision-making in AI design, governance, and everyday use (Bucher 2018, Crawford 2021). (Fig. 19)

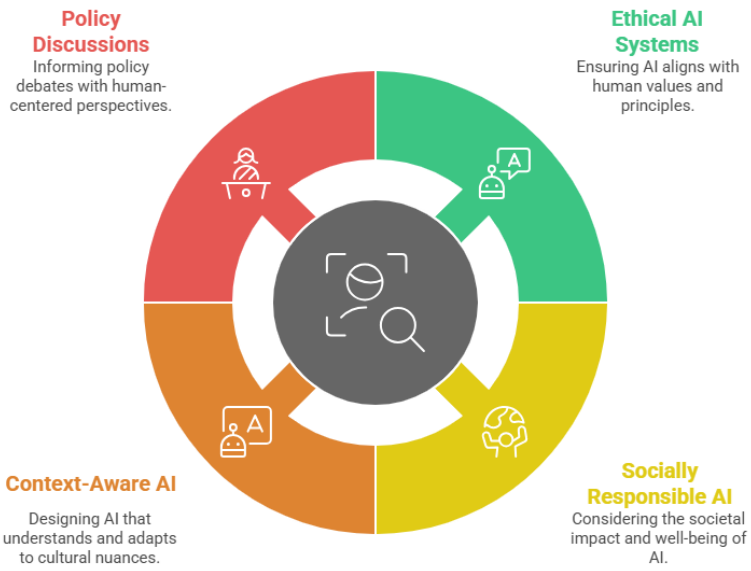

Fig. 19: Anthropological Contributions to Ethical and Responsible AI Development

Regulation of AI Supply Chains and Labour

Anthropological research shows that AI systems depend on long and complex global supply chains. These include mineral extraction, hardware production, data centres, and extensive human labour such as data labelling and content moderation. Ethical AI governance must therefore go beyond algorithms and outputs to examine the full social and environmental costs of AI production. This perspective supports stronger labour protection, environmental responsibility, and transparency across all stages of AI development (Crawford 2021). (Fig. 20)

Fig. 20: Global AI Supply Chains and Ethical Accountability

Global Supply Chains and Inequality

AI hardware depends on minerals such as lithium and cobalt, which are often mined in economically weaker regions. These mining activities frequently cause environmental damage, health risks, and unsafe working conditions. Anthropologists connect these practices to global economic inequalities and colonial histories. This perspective shows that modern AI technologies are built on older patterns of exploitation, making ethical responsibility essential in regulating AI supply chains (Crawford 2021).

Labour Rights and Protection

Data workers and content moderators are essential to the functioning of AI systems, yet they often face low pay, insecure contracts, and limited mental health support. Their work involves emotional and cognitive strain, but remains poorly recognised. Ethical regulation must therefore acknowledge these workers as central to AI production and ensure fair wages, safe working conditions, and legal protection of their labour rights (Gray & Suri 2019, Roberts 2019).

Environmental Responsibility

Data centres consume large amounts of electricity and water, contributing to carbon emissions and resource depletion. Ethical AI governance must therefore include strong environmental standards to reduce ecological harm. Anthropology connects digital innovation with planetary sustainability by showing that technological progress cannot be separated from environmental responsibility. This approach encourages policies that balance AI development with long-term ecological protection and social well-being (Crawford 2021).

Cross-Border Accountability

Because AI supply chains operate across many countries, responsibility for labour and environmental harm often becomes unclear. Ethical regulation must therefore establish strong international standards that hold companies accountable across borders. Anthropology supports this approach by showing how global production systems hide responsibility within complex networks. Cross-border accountability is essential for ensuring justice, transparency, and ethical responsibility in the global development of AI technologies (Crawford 2021).

Transparency, Accountability, and Contestability

Transparency is often presented as a key ethical principle in AI governance. However, anthropological research argues that transparency must be meaningful and socially useful,

not only technical. Simply sharing code or complex explanations does not help ordinary people understand how AI affects their lives. Anthropology therefore emphasises transparency that supports public questioning, accountability, and the ability to challenge AI decisions in everyday social and institutional contexts (Bucher 2018, Ananny & Crawford 2018). (Fig. 21)

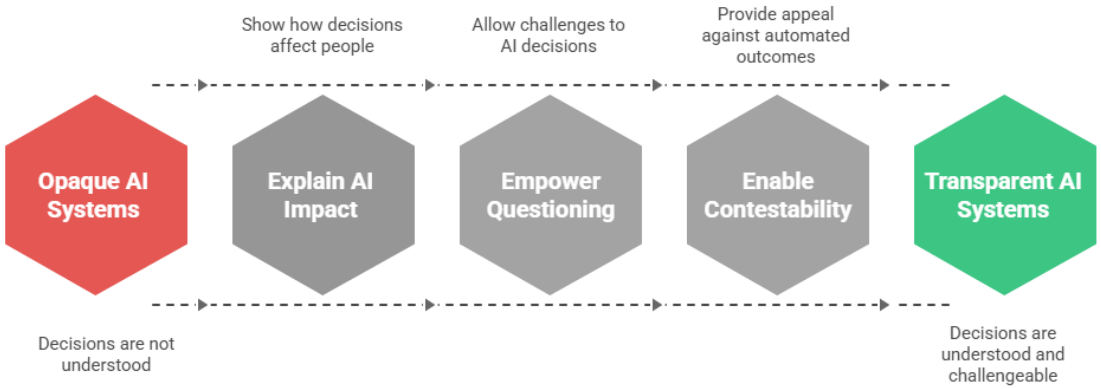

Fig. 21: Framework for Transparency, Accountability, and Contestability in AI

Meaningful Transparency

Meaningful transparency means that AI decisions are explained in clear and accessible language. People should understand what data is used, which criteria are applied, and how outcomes are produced. Without such clarity, transparency remains symbolic rather than practical. Anthropology supports this approach by emphasising that explanations must match the needs and experiences of ordinary users, not only the understanding of technical experts (Bucher 2018).

Accountability in Decision-Making

Anthropologists stress that responsibility for AI decisions must be clearly assigned. Institutions should not hide behind algorithms when harm occurs. There must be clear systems to identify who is accountable, whether designers, companies, or authorities. This clarity supports justice, trust, and ethical governance. Without accountability, AI systems risk becoming tools that protect powerful actors while leaving affected individuals without proper explanation or remedy (Pasquale 2015).

Contestability and Democratic Rights

Contestability refers to the right of individuals to question, appeal, and challenge automated decisions. This right is especially important in areas such as welfare, policing, education, and employment, where AI directly affects life opportunities. Without

contestability, AI systems can silently reproduce injustice and exclusion. Anthropologists argue that democratic societies must ensure accessible mechanisms for review, explanation, and correction of AI decisions to protect human rights and social fairness (Bucher 2018).

Trust Through Participation

When people are able to understand, question, and challenge AI decisions, public trust in technology increases. Anthropology therefore supports participatory governance models that involve citizens in AI oversight and evaluation processes. Such participation encourages transparency, shared responsibility, and democratic control. It helps ensure that AI systems serve social interests rather than only institutional or corporate goals, strengthening ethical and accountable AI governance (Ananny & Crawford 2018).

Contextual Evaluation of AI Systems

Anthropological research shows that AI systems do not operate in the same way in all settings. Their effects depend on social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Therefore, ethical evaluation of AI should not rely only on universal or fixed standards. Instead, it must consider local realities and everyday practices. This approach helps identify context-specific risks, benefits, and inequalities, leading to more responsible and culturally sensitive AI governance (Suchman 1987, Suchman 2007). (Fig. 22)

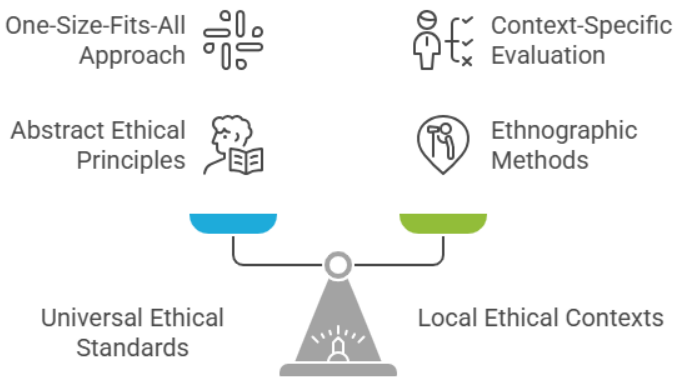

Fig. 22: Context-Sensitive Ethical Evaluation of AI Systems

Limits of Universal Standards

Global AI guidelines often assume that the same ethical rules can be applied everywhere. Anthropology challenges this view by showing that values, risks, and expectations differ across societies. What is considered acceptable in one context may be

harmful in another. This perspective encourages flexible and culturally sensitive ethical frameworks that respect social diversity rather than imposing one uniform model on all communities (Suchman 1987).

Role of Ethnographic Evaluation

Ethnography allows researchers to observe how AI systems are actually used in specific settings such as hospitals, schools, courts, and villages. This approach helps identify unexpected consequences, hidden power relations, and practical challenges that technical audits often miss. By focusing on everyday practice, ethnographic evaluation provides a deeper understanding of how AI affects real people and supports more responsible, context-aware policy decisions (Suchman 2007).

Interaction with Local Norms

AI systems interact closely with local customs, languages, and moral values. When these factors are ignored, AI may cause misunderstanding, exclusion, or resistance among users. Contextual evaluation helps designers and policymakers recognise cultural differences and adapt AI systems accordingly. This approach ensures greater cultural sensitivity, social acceptance, and ethical responsibility in AI design and everyday use, making technology more responsive to real human environments.

Addressing Existing Inequalities

AI systems often enter social settings where inequalities already exist. Context-based evaluation helps reveal whether AI reduces these inequalities or makes them stronger. Anthropology therefore connects ethical assessment with social justice concerns. By examining who benefits and who is disadvantaged, this approach ensures that AI governance focuses not only on technical performance but also on fairness, inclusion, and the protection of vulnerable groups (Suchman 1987).

Decolonizing AI Research and Practice

Decolonial approaches in anthropology argue that AI research and development should not be dominated only by Western knowledge systems, languages, and values. Instead, AI must reflect cultural diversity, local knowledge, and social realities. Without this shift, AI risks reproducing colonial patterns of control and exclusion. Anthropology therefore promotes plural perspectives in AI design to support dignity, equality, and global social justice (Crawford 2021, Smith 2012). (Fig. 23)

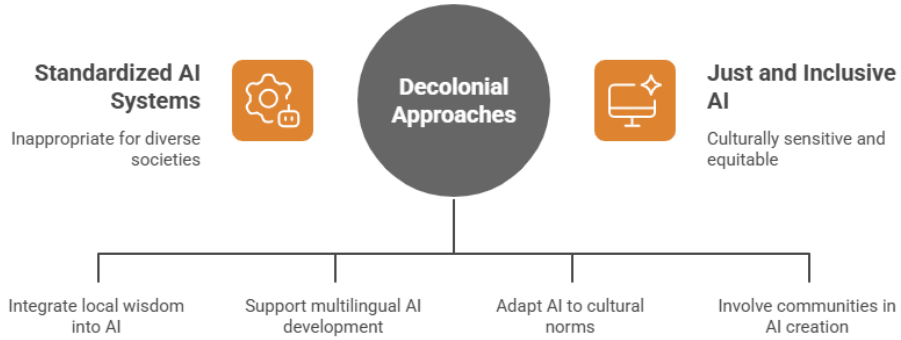

Fig. 23: Decolonial and Culturally Inclusive AI Design

Limits of Standardized AI Systems

Standardized AI systems are often designed in powerful countries and applied globally without proper adaptation. Anthropology warns that such systems may ignore local languages, cultural practices, and social problems. This can lead to misunderstanding, misclassification, and injustice. Decolonial perspectives therefore argue for flexible and locally informed AI design that respects cultural diversity and reduces the risk of technological harm (Crawford 2021).

Valuing Local Knowledge

Decolonial approaches emphasise that local communities hold valuable knowledge about their own social realities. Including this knowledge in AI design improves relevance, fairness, and social acceptance. Anthropology treats local knowledge as equal to technical expertise rather than as secondary or informal. This perspective supports respectful collaboration and helps ensure that AI systems respond to real community needs instead of imposing external assumptions (Smith 2012).

Participatory and Culturally Sensitive Design

Decolonizing AI requires participatory methods in which communities actively take part in decision-making processes. This involvement helps create AI systems that are culturally sensitive and socially meaningful. By respecting local identities, traditions, and values, participatory design reduces the risk of exclusion and misunderstanding. Anthropology supports this approach to ensure that AI development is guided not only by technical efficiency but also by cultural respect, social responsibility, and human dignity (Escobar 2018).

Challenging Power Inequalities

Anthropology examines who controls AI knowledge, funding, and institutions. Decolonial approaches challenge the dominance of global technology companies and

powerful states in shaping AI agendas. They promote more democratic, inclusive, and community-centred AI practices. This perspective highlights the need to redistribute decision-making power so that AI development reflects broader social interests rather than only corporate or geopolitical priorities (Crawford 2021, Couldry & Mejias 2019).

Towards Inclusive AI Futures

By decolonizing AI research and practice, anthropology supports more just, inclusive, and sustainable technological futures. This approach ensures that AI reflects cultural diversity, social equality, and ethical responsibility. AI thus becomes not only technically smarter, but also socially aware and human-centred. Such inclusive futures aim to reduce global inequality, respect local knowledge, and promote technology that genuinely serves the well-being of all communities.

Gaps and Future Directions

Although research in the anthropology of AI has expanded rapidly, important gaps still remain. These gaps are theoretical, methodological, and geographical. Addressing them is necessary to make AI governance more ethical, inclusive, and socially grounded. Anthropology therefore calls for deeper reflection, broader participation, and more diverse research contexts to strengthen understanding of AI's long-term social consequences (Crawford 2021, Striphas 2015) (Fig. 24).

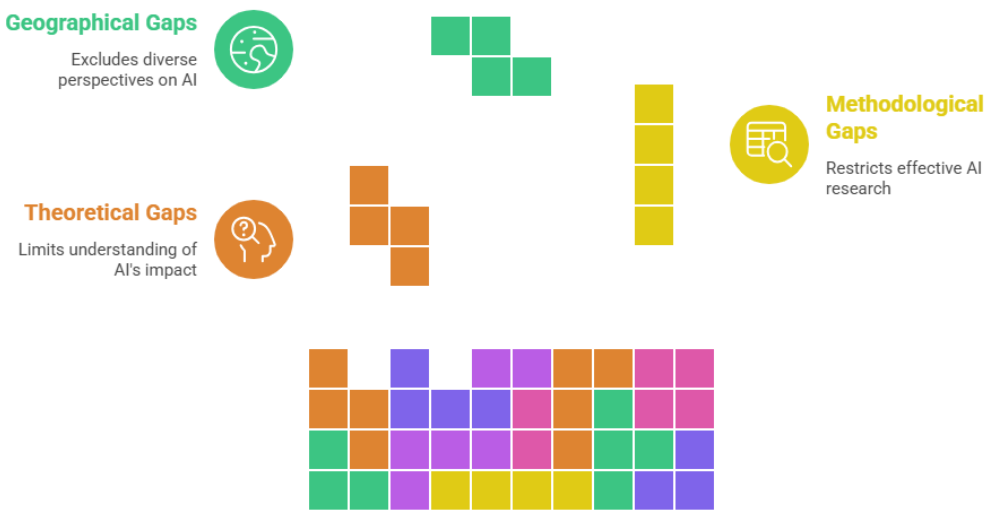

Fig. 24: Main Research Gaps in the Anthropology of AI

Need for Global South and Marginalised Perspectives

Most anthropological research on AI has focused on Europe and North America, especially where AI systems are designed and marketed. However, AI is increasingly used in the Global South, where social, economic, and technological conditions are very different. Anthropology therefore stresses the urgent need for research that represents marginalised communities and diverse regional experiences. Including these perspectives helps challenge dominant narratives and supports more balanced, inclusive, and globally relevant understandings of AI (Crawford 2021, Couldry & Mejias 2019) (Fig. 25).

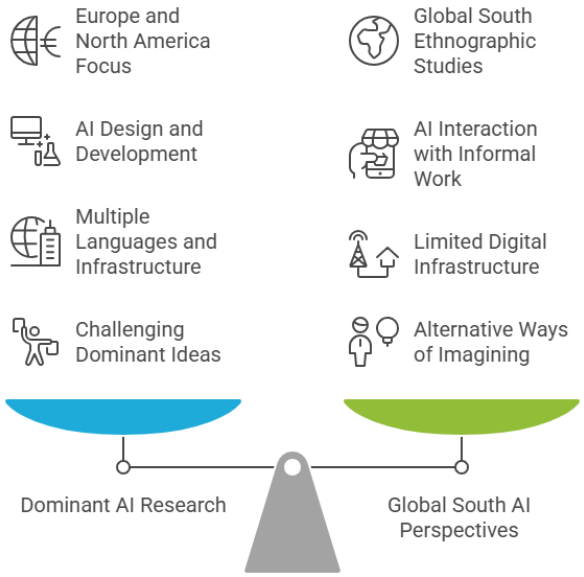

Fig. 25: Global South Perspectives in AI Research and Innovation

AI in Different Social Contexts

In the Global South, AI interacts with informal economies, multiple languages, uneven internet access, and varied educational systems. These conditions strongly shape how AI is understood, trusted, and used. Ethnographic research helps reveal everyday practices, adaptations, and challenges that remain invisible in Western-focused studies. By documenting these local experiences, anthropology shows that AI does not function in the same way everywhere, and that social context is essential for meaningful and fair AI analysis.

Challenging Dominant Narratives

Dominant narratives often present AI as modern, efficient, and universally beneficial. Marginalised perspectives challenge these claims by showing how AI can also increase exclusion, surveillance, and inequality. Anthropological research highlights voices that are usually ignored in policy and industry debates. This helps reveal the social

costs of AI and encourages more critical, honest, and socially responsible discussions about technological progress (Crawford 2021).

Valuing Local Knowledge and Innovation

Communities in the Global South often develop creative and practical ways to use technology despite limited resources. Anthropology recognises these alternative forms of innovation as valuable contributions to global AI knowledge. By valuing local problem-solving, adaptation, and cultural insight, researchers challenge the idea that technological progress comes only from powerful institutions. This perspective supports more diverse, inclusive, and balanced understandings of how AI can evolve across different social settings.

Ethical and Political Importance

Including marginalised voices is not only an academic requirement but also an ethical and political responsibility. It ensures that AI development does not serve only powerful groups but reflects wider social interests. By amplifying excluded perspectives, anthropology supports more democratic, fair, and inclusive AI futures. This approach strengthens social justice by linking technological progress with human rights, equality, and collective participation in shaping digital societies (Couldry & Mejias 2019).

Longitudinal Studies of Human–AI Relations

Most existing studies of AI are short-term and focus on specific moments or single cases. Although valuable, they cannot fully explain how human–AI relationships develop over time. Anthropology therefore emphasises the importance of longitudinal ethnographic research to understand long-term social, cultural, and ethical impacts of AI. Such studies can reveal changing patterns of trust, dependence, resistance, and adaptation across different life stages and institutional settings (Suchman 2007, Pink et al. 2016) (Fig. 26).

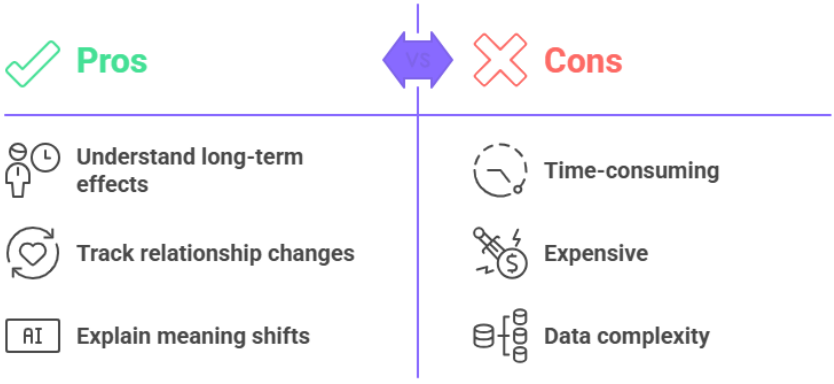

Fig. 26: Longitudinal Approaches to Human–AI Relationships

Limits of Short-Term Studies

Short-term research captures only immediate reactions to AI systems. It cannot show how people's trust, fear, dependence, or resistance changes over time. Long-term studies allow researchers to observe learning processes, habit formation, and shifting attitudes toward AI. Anthropology values such longitudinal approaches because they reveal how technology gradually becomes part of everyday life, shaping identities, relationships, and social expectations in deeper and more lasting ways.

Changing Trust and Dependence

Over time, people may begin to rely more on AI, or they may lose trust because of errors, bias, or harmful outcomes. Trust in AI is therefore not stable but continuously changing. Longitudinal research helps explain how trust is built, broken, and sometimes rebuilt through repeated interactions. Anthropology uses this approach to show that human–AI relationships evolve with experience, memory, and social learning rather than remaining fixed or predictable (Suchman 2007).

AI Across Life Stages and Generations

AI is experienced differently by children, adults, and older people. Younger generations may treat AI as a normal part of everyday life, while older generations may remain more cautious or critical. Longitudinal studies reveal how meanings, expectations, and emotional responses to AI shift across life stages and generations. Anthropology uses these insights to understand how technological change reshapes identity, learning, and social relationships over time.

Institutional and Social Change

Institutions such as schools, hospitals, and workplaces also change their use of AI over time. Long-term ethnographic research shows how policies, routines, and power relations evolve as AI becomes more deeply integrated. This approach helps reveal gradual shifts in authority, responsibility, and professional roles. Anthropology therefore highlights that AI not only transforms individual behaviour but also slowly reshapes institutional cultures and social structures.

Revealing Long-Term Ethical Effects

Some ethical problems of AI, such as loss of skills, increased surveillance, or growing dependency, appear only after long periods of use. Short-term studies often fail to capture these slow and hidden consequences. Longitudinal research helps identify how such effects develop gradually over time. Anthropology values this approach because it

allows ethical evaluation to consider future risks, not only immediate benefits or technical performance.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Future research on AI must encourage strong collaboration between anthropology and other disciplines such as computer science, law, ethics, policy studies, and design. AI is not only a technical system but also a social, legal, and political one. Therefore, no single discipline can fully understand or govern it alone. Interdisciplinary work allows diverse forms of knowledge to shape AI development, leading to more balanced, ethical, and socially responsive technological futures (Striphas 2015, Suchman 2007) (Fig. 27).

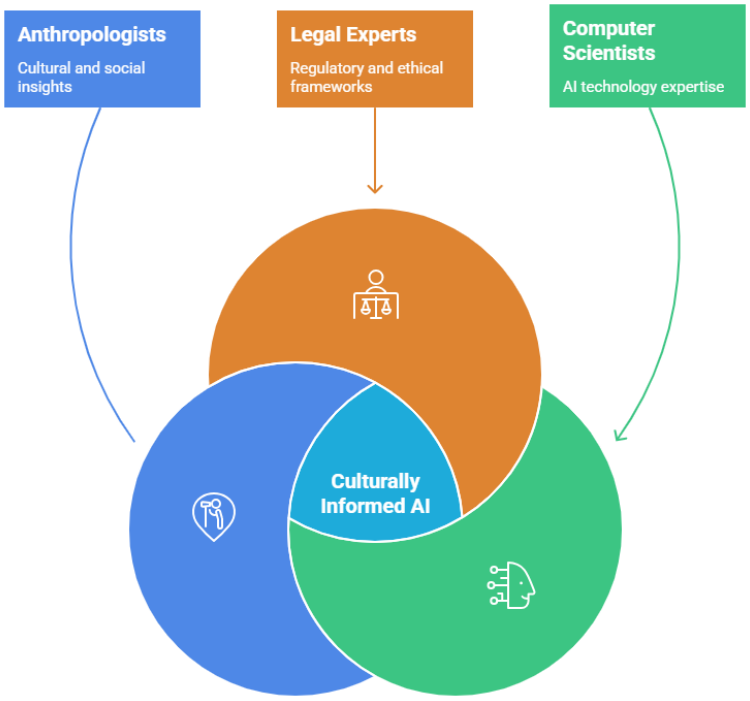

Fig. 27: Interdisciplinary Collaboration for Socially Responsible AI

Bridging Social and Technical Knowledge

Anthropologists offer insights into culture, power, and everyday practice, while computer scientists focus on algorithms, data, and system performance. When these perspectives are combined, AI design becomes more socially aware and ethically grounded. This collaboration helps ensure that technical innovation responds to real

human needs. Anthropology thus supports interdisciplinary dialogue to create AI systems that are not only efficient but also socially responsible and culturally sensitive (Suchman 2007).

Informing Law and Policy

Legal scholars and policymakers can use ethnographic findings to understand how AI affects real people in everyday situations. This knowledge helps create laws and regulations that are realistic, fair, and context-sensitive, rather than only technically informed. Anthropology therefore strengthens policy design by connecting abstract legal principles with lived experience, ensuring that AI governance protects human rights, social justice, and public trust (Ananny & Crawford 2018).

From Research to Practice

Interdisciplinary collaboration helps transform anthropological knowledge into practical tools such as ethical guidelines, design frameworks, and governance models. This process ensures that cultural values, social concerns, and human experiences are included at every stage of AI development. By moving from theory to application, anthropology contributes to more responsible and inclusive technological practices. Such collaboration helps AI systems reflect not only technical efficiency but also ethical awareness and social responsibility (Striphas 2015).

Shared Responsibility

AI affects society as a whole, not only technical experts or companies. Interdisciplinary collaboration promotes shared responsibility among designers, researchers, governments, and communities. Anthropology supports this collective approach to ensure that AI serves the public good rather than narrow corporate interests. By distributing responsibility across different actors, AI governance becomes more democratic, accountable, and socially balanced (Crawford 2021).

Toward Holistic AI Futures

Through interdisciplinary collaboration, AI can be developed as a balanced system that respects human values, social justice, and cultural diversity. Anthropology plays a central role in building these holistic and inclusive AI futures by connecting technology with lived experience and ethical reflection. This approach ensures that AI progress is measured not only by technical success, but also by its contribution to human well-being and social harmony.

Environmental and Infrastructural Impacts

Future research in the anthropology of AI must pay greater attention to the environmental and infrastructural foundations of AI systems. Although AI is often imagined as digital and immaterial, it depends heavily on physical resources such as electricity, water, minerals, and large technological infrastructures. Anthropology connects these material realities with ethical and social responsibility, reminding us that AI development always has ecological and human consequences (Crawford 2021) (Fig. 28).

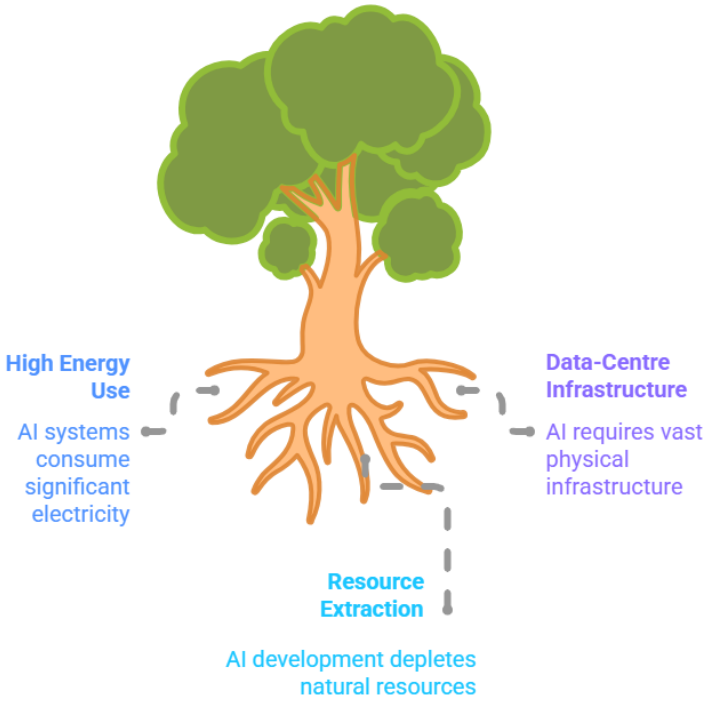

Fig. 28: Environmental and Infrastructural Foundations of Artificial Intelligence

Energy Consumption and Climate Impact

AI systems rely on powerful data centres that consume enormous amounts of electricity for computation and cooling. This high energy use contributes to carbon emissions and climate change. Anthropological research links AI development with global environmental inequality, as energy burdens and pollution are often carried by poorer regions. This perspective highlights the need for environmentally responsible AI policies that consider both technological growth and planetary sustainability (Crawford 2021).

Data Centres and Local Communities

Data centres affect local environments through heavy land use, high water consumption, and constant noise and heat pollution. Communities living near these infrastructures often have little voice in planning and decision-making processes. Ethnographic research documents these everyday experiences, conflicts, and forms of resistance. Anthropology thus highlights how digital infrastructures create local social and environmental impacts, reminding policymakers that AI development must respect community rights, participation, and ecological balance.

Resource Extraction and Ecological Damage

AI hardware depends on minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements. Mining these resources often leads to deforestation, soil degradation, and water pollution. Local communities may lose land, livelihoods, and environmental safety. Anthropology connects these practices to global economic systems and historical patterns of exploitation. This perspective shows that AI development is closely tied to ecological harm and social inequality, making environmental justice an essential part of ethical AI governance (Crawford 2021, Couldry & Mejias 2019).

Linking Technology and Sustainability

Anthropologists argue that AI development must be evaluated not only by efficiency and innovation, but also by long-term environmental sustainability. Ethical AI should include ecological responsibility as a core principle. This approach encourages policymakers and developers to consider resource use, waste, and environmental impact alongside technical performance. By linking technology with sustainability, anthropology promotes AI systems that support both human progress and planetary well-being.

Towards Responsible AI Infrastructures

By studying AI infrastructures ethnographically, anthropology supports more responsible planning, regulation, and public awareness. This approach helps reveal the hidden environmental and social costs of digital systems. It encourages policymakers, companies, and communities to consider ecological care as part of AI governance. Through such responsible infrastructure planning, AI development can move toward sustainability, transparency, and long-term social and environmental accountability.

Conclusion

The anthropology of AI helps us understand Artificial Intelligence as a system deeply embedded in society, culture, material infrastructure, and political power rather than as a purely technical invention. Through ethnographic and interpretive methods, anthropology reveals how AI is shaped by human labour, environmental resources, institutional practices, and cultural beliefs. From this perspective, issues such as bias, opacity, and exclusion are not simply technical problems but expressions of broader social inequalities and power relations.

Anthropological research also shows that people engage with AI differently across social and cultural contexts. Everyday habits, local values, and institutional settings influence how AI systems are interpreted, adapted, or resisted. As a result, AI does not produce uniform effects; its impact varies according to social conditions and lived experience.

By emphasising accountability, ethics, participation, and social justice, the anthropology of AI makes a valuable contribution to policy debates and responsible technology design. It highlights the need for culturally informed, participatory, and context-sensitive approaches to AI governance. Overall, this perspective confirms the continuing importance of anthropology in understanding and shaping human–machine relationships in an increasingly algorithm-driven world.

***Conflicts of Interest*:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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