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AI Mika from Eastern Europe:
Attitudes Toward Work in Easter-European Region

Abstract:

The rapid development of AI technologies will bring about revolutionary changes in the labor market. When considering the possible impact of AI based technologies on the labor market it is important to consider the region-specific cultural differences in Europe, especially those differences which are relevant to understanding the attitude(s) toward work in the region in question. In Eastern Europe – a region once dominated by a workers' state – work related cultural issues are particularly complex. The main complexity results from two contradictory attitudes, positive and negative, of Eastern Europeans toward work. The article argues that these two attitudes have their origins in one and the same underlying position, which is inherited from the Soviet Union, and that with differing political premises, dominated the Eastern European region.

Keywords:

work, labor, Eastern Europe, AI, culture, ideology

In November of 2023, the Polish company Dictador appointed an AI agent Mika, as their CEO. The press stated:

> "Dictator's board decision is revolutionary and bold at the same time. This first human-like robot, with AI, in a company structure, will change the world as we know it, forever," President of Dictador Europe Marek Szołdrowski said in a statement.
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> Mika is a research project between Dictador and Hanson Robotics, which is known for its developments in human-like robots with AI for consumer, entertainment, services, healthcare, and research applications…
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> "With advanced artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithm, I can swiftly and accurately make data-driven [decisions]," Mika said in a Dictador company video.
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> "My decision-making process relies on extensive data analysis and aligning with the company's strategic objectives," it said, adding that it is devoid of personal bias, ensuring strategic choices that prioritise the organisation's best interest… .
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> Hanson Robotics CEO David Hanson, emphasised the need for "humanizing" AI.
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> "I feel very strongly that we need to teach AI to care about people for AI to be really safe, to be really, really good. I think humanising that is a very important direction," he explained.
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> Meanwhile, according to Dictador, Mika has been hailed as an honorary professor. The female humanoid robot was given the award at the 2023/24 Collegium Humanum University inauguration in Warsaw. She gave a speech on stage and highlighted the strengths of artificial intelligence.[1]

This event is surprising not so much as a demonstration of technological achievements and the innovative spirit of entrepreneurship, but rather as a broken promise. One of the most common responses to the growing concerns of people about the dangers posed by AI to the labor market has always been the argument that the AI

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1)   The Business Standard, "Polish Company Employs AI CEO."

agents would only be used to perform simple routine tasks that are not appropriate for humans, who are supposed to find meaning in their life and work. For instance, popular German philosopher Richard David Precht recognizes the dangers of AI when it comes to individual laborers, but overall sees the involvement of AI agents in the labor market as a sign of progress and an opportunity:

> In the period from the first industrial revolution to today, it was a great advance that the backbreaking, heavy physical work that people had to do as farmers in the fields or as simple workers was largely abolished through technical advances. I also see it as a great advance in human history if monotonous intellectual tasks can be carried out by machines in the future. Individually, however, this process will cost many victims.[2]

However, the victims might take consolation in the fact that they will be members of a "meaning-society (*Sinngesellschaft*)" and therefore, eventually find meaning in their life, instead of members of the society of workers, as Precht claims.[3]

There are a number of reasons to be skeptical about this line of argument (that AI involvement in the labor market will allow people to do something meaningful with their lives instead of doing routine work); one of the most prominent is the one formulated by Hannah Arendt in her work *The Human Condition*. Arendt claims that the wish to be liberated from labor by means of technology is self-defeating because "it is a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor, and this society does no longer know of those other higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won."[4] Even if we disregard the

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2) Precht, "One does no favour to the human (*Man tut den Menschen keinen Gefallen*)." Translated by Elvira Simfa. Original version:
In der Zeit von der ersten industriellen Revolution bis heute war es ein großer Fortschritt, dass die knochenharte, schwere körperliche Arbeit, die Menschen als Bauern auf dem Feld oder als einfache Arbeiter verrichten mussten, durch technische Errungenschaften größtenteils abgeschafft werden konnte. Ich sehe es auch als menschheitsgeschichtlich großen Fortschritt, wenn einförmige geistige Tätigkeiten künftig von Maschinen erledigt werden können. Individuell hingegen wird dieser Prozess viele Opfer kosten.

3) Precht, "'In einer Sinngesellschaft.'"

4) Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 4–5.

problem formulated by Arendt, the precedent of Mika, the reaction to this AI CEO, and the celebration of it shows us that the jobs that are supposed to be meaningful (those which correspond to human needs and capabilities), are in danger as well.

When Arendt uses the term "society of workers" she speaks of mankind, or more precisely: post-industrial revolution mankind. While one can speak of this group in general (as Arendt does), in emphasizing the common features, one must admit that there are significant historical, cultural, and political differences among these workers. Only some of them were members not only of a worker society but also of a worker state, such as the Soviet Union, for at least as far back as three generations. The changes that AI brings about in the sphere of human labor are often compared to those of the Industrial Revolution; therefore, it is important to analyze all factors that determine the impact of AI on labor in countries and regions extensively affected by rapid AI-based technological development. Currently this analysis is mostly based on certain non-culturally specific categories (such as high-skill occupations, low-skilled occupations, production jobs, occupations requiring interpersonal skill, non-physical or white-collar occupations, physical occupations, etc.), and there is considerably less research on culturally specific traits of labor and the labor market. Indeed at least some economists admit that it is the culture of a particular country or region that largely determines the economy and labor in that country or region. Australian economist Siobhan Austen writes "culture determines, in large part, the value and significance that individuals attach to alternative labour market actions and outcomes."[5] Viewing the issues related to labor in a particular society from the perspective of culture is important firstly because it allows for better predictions of the impact of AI-based technologies on labor organization, value, understanding, and so forth; secondly, it allows for the reexamination and possibly the discovery of new cultural traits and features related to labor, and is best revealed through the analysis of labor related issues within a particular society. In this article I focus on the region of Eastern Europe and the attitudes toward labor in this region. To demarcate the cultural borders of this region is a complicated and sensitive task due to historical and political reasons. Polish philosopher Przemysław Bursztyka points out the main difficulty when it comes to the identity of Eastern Europe:

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5)   Austen, "Culture and the Labour Market," 505.

The category of Eastern Europe is a historical category. It was created in a particular historical epoch; for specific reasons. Once coined, it had a long history culminating in the postwar period, when it became a common label for all the states and lands remaining in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. A common ascription usually associates it with precisely this period and with the fate of the peoples unlucky enough to have fallen under the control of Russia in its new monstrous guise… .

In the postwar period it was eventually grounded in apparently objective (mainly political, economic, and social) criteria thoroughly laid down in countless works and analyses. It became a very special object of political, social, economic, historical, and legal discourses… .

With all this discursive diversity and multiplicity of theoretical perspectives there was a common agreement as to one fundamental point: Eastern Europe was to be seen and experienced as a worse Europe.[6]

One can assume that due to the pejorative character of the term "Eastern Europe" or "Eastern European," Eastern Europeans themselves struggle to define their identity and rather than redefining the label "Eastern Europe," try to avoid it. Some researchers go so far as to suggest that the discomfort with this label is fundamental and "metaphysical." American philosopher Costica Bradatan writes:

It might well be that this very sense of metaphysical discomfort, this incapacity to come up with, and accept, a firm self-definition, is one of the main character traits of East Europeans, something that "defines" them in the end. In this reading, what makes Eastern Europeans metaphysically uncomfortable is the inescapable feeling that they were born "in the wrong place," "at the wrong time," or both… . . It would not even be accurate to say that East European identity is defined by *dislocation*. It is much worse than that: it is an identity defined by a most uncanny form of nostalgia: nostalgia for deracination, a compulsive need for losing one's roots, but without the prospect of growing new roots elsewhere.[7]

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6)   Bursztyka, "Reconceptualizing Eastern Europe," 68.

7)   Bradatan, "Introduction: Philosophy, Geography, Fragility," 2.

Even if this somewhat dramatic statement of Eastern European identity was or is to some extent true, one must acknowledge the strivings of Eastern Europeans to redefine their identity in positive terms. Whether the aim is to distance oneself from or to reinterpret the label of Eastern Europe, a key consideration remains its common perception as either the former Soviet Union or a region within its sphere of influence.

The relationship with the Soviet past in most Eastern European Countries is a very sensitive issue mostly because it is a matter of recent history. The legitimate and still largely emotionally driven wish for these countries to radically distance themselves from their Soviet past and its remains has made it rather difficult to analyze this past in a manner proper to science. It cannot be the objective of this article (or any single article for that matter), to address the complicated problem of the Eastern European region's cultural identity and the role that the Soviet past has in this identity. This article rather proceeds from a simple common-sense assumption that some of the cultural features in most Eastern European countries (depending on their specific relationship with the Soviet Union), are shaped by the politics, economy, and ideology of the Soviet Union. Especially, this must be true when it comes to the attitude toward work, the value of work, and its conditions and praxis in everyday life. The interesting and important questions are – what are those features, and what can they tell us about the future of work in Eastern Europe given the changes brought about by new technologies?

Eastern Europeans have the reputation of being good workers. Traditionally, long before many Eastern Europeans were subjected to the influence or complete dominance of the Soviet Union, work has had a high value in Eastern European societies. For instance, consider willingness to work and work well done a virtue; there is a moral value attached to it. Since work has value in itself and is not only a way to provide the means of existence, dissatisfaction with work conditions and wages is often met with hostility. In April 2023, Latvian teachers went on a three-day strike to protest the complicated and still very poorly paid work (with small exceptions). The decision of the teacher's union to strike was perceived differently; one cannot claim that it was largely supported. Paradoxically enough, it was among the higher-income groups that one found greater understanding and support, whereas pensioners—living on an average of merely 450 euros per month in 2022—voiced strong criticism, maintaining that teachers should relinquish their pursuit of a comfortable life out of a sense of

duty toward society and the state.This is especially considered true for teachers, whose work is less a job and more a vocation. In general, one could claim that we Eastern Europeans do not consider it appropriate to discuss social problems openly, and when it comes to work you are expected to do it for its own sake or for the sake of society, for the sake of anything but the wage. Therefore, especially in Western European countries, Eastern European workers are well regarded. One can easily find examples of this in the public discourse, as in this article: "Young Migrants from Central and Eastern Europe: 'The Hardest Working in the UK,'" which discusses Oxford University research about UK labor force between 2010–2014. Researchers claim that "young EU migrant citizens work long hours, often at lower pay and worse conditions than UK youth, despite the fact, that many of them are highly qualified."[8]

In a two thousand and eight study published in the *Journal for East European Management Studies*, researchers compare the importance of different values (such as family, work, friendship, leisure time, religion, and politics), for people of Northern and Western Europe and for people of Central and Eastern Europe. The research finding is the following:

> A closer look at the importance of work in each European country reveals that people in Eastern Europe and Malta are more likely to consider work "very important" than in Northern and Western Europe. In Poland, Romania and Latvia work ranks much higher than the European average… . Also above the average are Ukraine, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Slovakia, which means altogether seven out of fourteen CEE countries… The background reasons for the attitude towards work are too complex to be analyzed here in detail.[9]

Another study about work values in Western and Eastern Europe finds that the "work centrality" (high importance of work in human life) for Eastern Europeans is not affected by the rather problematic work conditions in Eastern Europe: "Eastern Europe would place a greater emphasis on the importance of work (work centrality)…

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8) University of Oxford, "Migrants from Central and Eastern Europe."
9) Borgulya and Hahn, "Work Related Values and Attitudes," 220–21.

Variables on work centrality or work ethic should be less affected by the actual work conditions (if they are affected at all)."[10]

One can only agree with the researcher's statement that the reasons for this "work centrality" of Eastern Europeans must be multiple and complex. The attitude of Eastern Europeans toward work is an even more perplexing matter if one considers that there is also an opposite, namely, negative attitude toward work, which is demonstrated by the prevalence of the performative element in work and is quite widely recognized by Eastern Europeans. Polish psychologist Krystyna Skarżyńska in her article "Work as a Cultural and Personal Value: Attitudes Towards Work in Polish Society" writes: "Attitudes of Poles toward work have been the subject of national stereotypes and jokes. Generally speaking, our disregard for honest work, pretended work, a perceived lack of relationship between work quality and income, long vacations, have all been indicated as salient characteristics of these attitudes."[11] It is safe to say that even if these attitudes are not subjects of jokes and stereotypes in Latvia, nonetheless they exist and in fact are in direct opposition to what Latvians say about themselves (mainly to themselves), but also, to others.

If these two opposite attitudes toward work in Eastern Europe do exist and are widespread and understood, the interesting question is whether they do not both express one and the same underlying position? I suggest that these two contradictory attitudes of Eastern Europeans toward work and social issues do indeed have their origins in one and the same underlying position which is inherited from the Soviet Union.

It is not difficult to explain the first, positive attitude toward work by referring to the consequences of Soviet occupation or domination of Eastern European countries. The exaggerated importance of work and expectations to sacrifice personal needs and interests to work for the sake of state and society can easily be traced back to the dominant soviet propaganda narrative. Propaganda praising work and self-sacrifice was all encompassing. After all, the Soviet state is all about work; first, it is necessary to work to catch up with capitalist countries and to overtake them eventually; and second, to build socialism and reach communism. And all that,

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10)   Torgler, "Work Values in Western and Eastern Europe."

11)   Skarżyńska, "Work as a Cultural and Personal Value," 195–96.

as fast as possible, according to the plan. Therefore, the real fighters and heroes of this state and society are workers. The famous soviet journal *Pravda* (*Правда*) in December 1938 wrote:

> We are not bad at excoriating the remnants of bureaucratism … and Oblomovism, but we've not yet succeeded in depicting the degree of heroism with which the proletariat is building the socialist economy. Similarly, our press hasn't raised the question of how to reward our heroes of labor properly. The press has not taken advantage of concrete state and party resolutions recognizing the best inventors, shock workers, technicians, etc. in order to lead the millions to new, even greater victories.[12]

It is important to stress that these "heroes of labor" are expected to perform their acts of heroism without any self-interest (even infringing on their self-interest), which is considered to be a remnant of a bourgeoise morality. If the Soviet perception of labor has formed the attitude of Eastern Europeans toward labor, one can easily see why an AI agent is entrusted with the important work and responsibilities of a major company CEO; in a way it is a perfect worker: it has no selfish interests, needs, or pretensions whatsoever. It is there only to work.

It is also rather obvious how skepticism toward the exaggerated importance of work, and especially toward any kind of non-self-employment type of work, also originated in the Soviet Union. Skarżyńska explains the Polish attitude to work as follows: "Researchers of social processes claim these attitudes result from experiences of 'real socialism': centrally-planned national economy and, say, 'naturalization' of personal employment, that is, a common expectation that everyone had a natural, inherent right to work with unemployment reserved almost solely for political objectors."[13]

The combination of the exaggerated importance of work with poor pay and living conditions gave rise to the skepticism toward labor, it was the subject of numerous

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12)   Pravda, "Sotsialisticheskaia stroika i ee geroi," May 18, 1931, 1. I. I., quoted in Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis*, 70.

13)   Skarżyńska, "Work as a Cultural and Personal Value," 195–96.

idioms and jokes such as, "we pretend to work, and they pretend that they pay us."[14] Besides the comical aspect of the situation, one must consider that this pretending to work was a necessity of life, the only way to sustain oneself in a society with a split reality – narrated and lived. In specific, though not uncommon, circumstances, such pretence served as a survival strategy. Russian-Soviet journalist and writer Eugenia Ginzburg (*Евгéния Гúнзбург*), who spent eighteen years in the Gulag system—mostly in the notorious Kolyma region of northeastern Siberia—recounts in her memoir *Journey into the Whirlwind* (first published in English in 1967) being assigned to one of the harshest work details in the camp: felling trees in a snow-covered virgin forest. The ration of food was determined accordingly to the fulfilment of the plan. Since it was not possible in the given conditions to cut as many trees as was expected (and possibly it would have not been possible even in favorable conditions), Ginzburg and her fellow prisoner soon started to starve. Ginzburg remembers: "This time, we felt, death had really caught up with us – it was touch and go whether we could survive. We were already quite exhausted trying to escape it."[15] It was at this point that they were saved by the wisdom of an old inmate who said: "'You've got to use your brains. Listen – only three things count in Kolyma: swearing, thieving, and window dressing. You just make your choice,' he said cryptically."[16] Soon enough they learned that "window dressing," in Russian, *tufta (муфтá)*, is a specific form of pretending to work and fulfilling the work plan. American-Polish historian Anne Applebaum in her work *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* writes:

> The population of the Gulag and the population of the rest of the USSR shared many things besides suffering. Both in the camps and outside them, it was possible to find the same slovenly working practices, the

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14) American historian Lewis Siegelbaum claims that this discrepancy in the understanding of the value and importance of work in the Soviet Union created something like "cultural hangover" which made it difficult for workers in post-soviet Russia to adapt to new economic conditions. The symptoms of this "cultural hangover" are "suspicion of the motives of higher state authorities; disbelief in the impartiality of the law; a leveling-down psychology; dependence on the state and its instrumentalities for goods and services rather than on individual initiative and self-reliance; and an attitude toward one's own job that is expressed in the widely cited aphorism, 'They pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work'" (Siegelbaum, "Labor in Post-Soviet Russia," 655).

15) Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind*, 695.

16) Ibid.

same criminally stupid bureaucracy, the same corruption, and the same sullen disregard for human life. While writing this book, I described to a Polish friend the system of *tufta* – cheating on required work norms – that Soviet prisoners have developed, described later in this book. He howled with laughter: "You think prisoners invented that? The whole Soviet bloc practiced *tufta*."[17]

The Polish friend of Anne Applebaum was right, all of the inhabitants of Soviet space were performing work probably to the same extend that they were actually working because it was impossible to fulfill the requirements not only in camps, but also outside them; and while within camps this was motivated by the needs of survival, outside of them it was rather the lack of motivation (poor working conditions and pay, awareness of the corrupted system etc.), that sustained this pretended work system.

How do these two opposing attitudes toward work still exist when the Soviet Union no longer does, and Eastern European countries organize their labor according to the rules of capitalism which, at least in the European understanding, recognizes the social needs of the people and rewards their efforts? We can try to answer this question by turning to a particular feature of ideology that a fellow Eastern European – Slavoj Žižek – points out in one of his early works:

> What is really disturbing … [is the] belief in the liberating, anti-totalitarian force of laughter, of ironic distance. Our thesis here is almost the exact opposite…: in contemporary societies, democratic or totalitarian, that cynical distance, laughter, irony, are, so to speak, part of the game. The ruling ideology is not meant to be taken seriously or literally. Perhaps the greatest danger for totalitarianism is people who take its ideology literally.[18]

The fact that ideology is not this dogmatic belief in the "logic of an idea"[19] as Hannah Arendt puts it, but rather extends to the position(s) that distance themselves from

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17)   Applebaum, *Gulag: A History*, xxviii.
18)   Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 23–24.
19)   Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 469.

a given ideology, that it also involves the skeptical attitude toward the official narrative of said ideology – is old news in philosophy. Žižek, referring to Peter Sloterdijk, states that there are two modes of this distance, *kynikal* and cynical. Žižek comments on this distinction:

> Sloterdijk puts forward the thesis that ideology's dominant mode of functioning is cynical… . The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask. The formula, as proposed by Sloterdijk, would then be: "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it."… We must distinguish this cynical position strictly from what Sloterdijk calls kynicism. Kynicism represents the popular, plebeian rejection of the official culture by means of irony and sarcasm: the classical kynical procedure is to confront the pathetic phrases of the ruling official ideology – its solemn, grave tonality – with everyday banality and to hold them up to ridicule, thus exposing behind the sublime noblesse of the ideological phrases the egotistical interests, the violence, the brutal claims to power.[20]

Žižek argues, that ideological illusion does not lie in the misrecognition of reality, but rather in the "(unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself" and "cynical distance is just … one of many ways … to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, we are still doing them."[21] Žižek claims, that the place of ideological illusion is not in knowledge but in action: "'they know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it.' For example, they know that their idea of Freedom is masking a particular form of exploitation, but they still continue to follow this idea of Freedom."[22]

How is Žižek and Sloterdijk's analysis of ideology to be applied to the question about the coexistence of two opposite positions toward work in a post-Soviet influ-

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20) Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 19.

21) Ibid.

22) Ibid.

ence space? It is quite evident that the cynical dimension of ideological indoctrination—that is, an awareness of the ideological narrative, and thus its critique, alongside the continued performance of ideological action—remains intact. Except now this ideological indoctrination is under new capitalistic political and economic conditions. The tension between work and the social state—less overt but nonetheless intrinsic to capitalism—occupies the empty structures left behind by Soviet ideology. It is as if the people of Eastern Europe have sensed the phenomenon that in 1949 American writer Archibald MacLeish lamented as the conquest of America by the Soviets. American politics, MacLeish writes, is a song "'to the Russian tune… . Whatever the Russians did, we did in reverse.' As we 'wandered into the Russian looking-glass' our perception of capitalism also took shape in the reflection."[23]

Finally, the distinction of kynical and cynical attitudes by Sloterdijk is of some interest if one claims that an anti-ideological position is possible at all (Žižek would not agree). The way Žižek seems to interpret Sloterdijk's distinction, according to the pattern of a Hegelian dialectic, claims that "cynicism is the answer of the ruling culture to this kynical subversion: it recognizes, it takes into account, the particular interest behind the ideological universality, the distance between the ideological mask and the reality, but it still finds reasons to retain the mask."[24] Therefore, cynicism forms sort of a synthesis of both positions, recognizing that ideological narrative exists, that it does not accord with reality, and finally in acting ideologically yet again and thus turning back to ideology. The "purest" position here seems to be the purely negative one, namely, the kynikal one, which among other reasons is purer also because it is simpler, to put it negatively – vulgar. Sloterdijk describes this kind of position and behavior resulting from it in the following way:

> In kynismos a kind of argumentation was discovered that, to the present day, respectable thinking does not know how to deal with. Is it not crude and grotesque to pick one's nose while Socrates … speaks of the divine soul? Can it be called anything other than vulgar when Diogenes lets

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23) Archibald MacLeish, "Conquest of America," *Atlantic* (August 1949): 17–18, quoted in Marks, "The Word 'Capitalism,'" 156.

24) Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 26.

> a fart fly against the Platonic theory of ideas? … And what is it supposed
> to mean when this philosophizing town bum answers Plato's subtle theory
> of eros by masturbating in public?[25]

This vulgar behavior is an expression of a purely negative position, arising from an immediate experience of discord between presentation of reality and reality itself, therefore arising from a consciousness of reality as something different from the presentation of it. Therefore, according to Žižek's interpretation of ideology based on Sloterdijk's distinction, this simple, somewhat vulgar negative position toward ideological narrative is (however paradoxical it might seem), much less ideological than the seemingly more distanced (from this narrative) and more intelligent position of cynicism. This allows us to assume, that if we consider specifically the Soviet ideology, people directly affected by it (living in the Soviet Union), might have been considerably less affected by this ideology, than we might be now. This is because the kynikal/cynical distinction can not only be applied to different attitudes of people living in the same period and responding to current events and information, but also to attitudes differentiated by time. In other words, one can interpret the post-Soviet critical view on the ruling ideology of this state in quite a number of cases as cynical. This would mean that people living more than two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in its formerly occupied or controlled territories, are still acting according to certain traits of Soviet ideology. Which one can quite well see in the attitude toward work and in other attitudes and praxis of people living in the former Soviet Union's zone of influence.

Eastern European attitudes toward work that are inherited from the Soviet past alongside other cultural elements, and are expressed under entirely different political and economic premises, can have a complex and altogether hardly predictable influence on a labor market shaped by AI technologies. However, one might try to predict and explain Eastern European attitudes to some elements of the new labor market and the understanding of work in general. For instance, work done by an AI agent (or any AI based technology), differs from the work of an actual human in that it entirely lacks the performative dimension. It is not to say that all the work done by technologies is outcome based (i.e., oriented toward a specific result). We can very well imagine a rather

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25) Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 101.

useless task performed by an AI agent, however, useless is not the same as performative. Only humans are capable of performative work since the point of performative work is in *appearing* to work (or appearing to be productive), and the willingness to appear in this or another way originates in rather complex psychological and social factors. While every so often studies are done to reveal sometimes rather shocking results about the share of performative work in work related activities,[26] performative work will only really be systematically identified and reduced with the increasing involvement of technologies in work. As Brazilian political scientists Thiago Mireles puts it: "The common aspect of studies aiming to measure the impacts of AI on the world of work is the understanding of what workers do in their occupations. That is, it is important to understand the tasks that certain occupations perform to identify the intensity with which new AI technologies can replace, complement, or transform the work these professionals carry out."[27] Trying to understand what workers do and trying to replace them by AI technologies means that many working activities will be scrutinized with regard to the outcomes of these activities. Considering the findings of the occasional studies on this topic, the results might not be surprising: performative work is a widespread phenomenon. As the author of the Bartleby column in *The Economist* claims: "Theatre has always been an important part of the workplace."[28] However, the answer to the question why this performative work persists might be very different. Therefore, strategies to deal with this praxis will differ too. Three answers are suggested:

> One answer lies in the natural desire of employees to demonstrate how hard they are working, like bowerbirds with a keyboard. Another lies in managers' need to see what everyone is up to. And a third is hinted at in recent research, from academics at two French business schools, which found that white-collar professionals are drawn to a level of "optimal busyness," which neither overwhelms them nor leaves them with much time to think.[29]

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26) See Machell, "Third of Day Lost to Performative Work."
27) Mireles, "Artificial Intelligence and the Labor Market," 3.
28) The Economist, "The Rise of Performative Work."
29) Ibid.

None of these answers reflect the very specific meaning that performative work has in Eastern Europe where unlike in other regions it might be expressed in inherited un-reflected work-related praxis and tasks, where it is often related to a lack of professional initiative and where it still indicates structural, social, and economic problems (not only work, but also employment and benefits related to employment are performed).

To conclude, a rapidly changing society and the place and meaning of work in this society not only gives opportunity to reflect on cultural identities (which is much needed in the case of Eastern Europe), but also requires scientific reflections on specific cultural identities. The latter point might not be obvious since the involvement of technologies in the labor market not only contributes to the globalization of the labor market, but to some extent creates the illusion that the labor market is more unified and de-contextualized[30] than it actually is.

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30)   There are very optimistic views on the impact of AI on labor market globalization, for instance this: From eliminating language barriers to enhancing remote work and automating physical tasks, AI will reshape the global labor landscape. Automatic translation tools, project management platforms, and automation solutions will enable companies to operate more flexibly and efficiently without worrying about geographical boundaries. AI will also facilitate the massive personalization of training and professional reskilling, helping workers adapt to technological and economic changes while allowing companies to access a more diversified global talent pool. (Garcia, "AI and the Globalization")
However, one could claim that this optimistic vision starts with an assumption that the labor market is already largely globalized and whatever is not a success story of globalization is labeled a "downside" of it; this is a normal part of any phenomenon and does not mean that it is not as widespread and more superficial as such an optimist would like to think.

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