AI MUST DIE

Critical Perspectives on the State of Artificial Intelligence

Incident 68: Security Robot Drowns Itself in a Fountain
AI Incident Database (AIID) // incidentdatabase.ai

https://aimustdie.info

[website under construction]
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Myke Walton
https://mwalton.me/
hi@mwalton.me
@mwalton.bsky.social

Cam Smith
https://smith.cam
camoverride@proton.me
@camoverride

Researched, written and designed with GOFHI (Good Old-Fashioned Human Intelligence)

Why?

AI is goddamn everywhere: at work, at school, in our homes, in our feeds, in our streets, in our governments and at war. We are living through an era of extreme AI hype. In this climate, some people have gotten rich off of the stolen data and stolen labor that fuels these technologies. Others have been surveilled, oppressed, exploited and killed. We aim here to present a short, practical guide to the technologies currently called "AI", the ideologies & actors pouring gasoline on the AI dumpsterfire, how this harms the public and suggest what the fuck we can do about it.
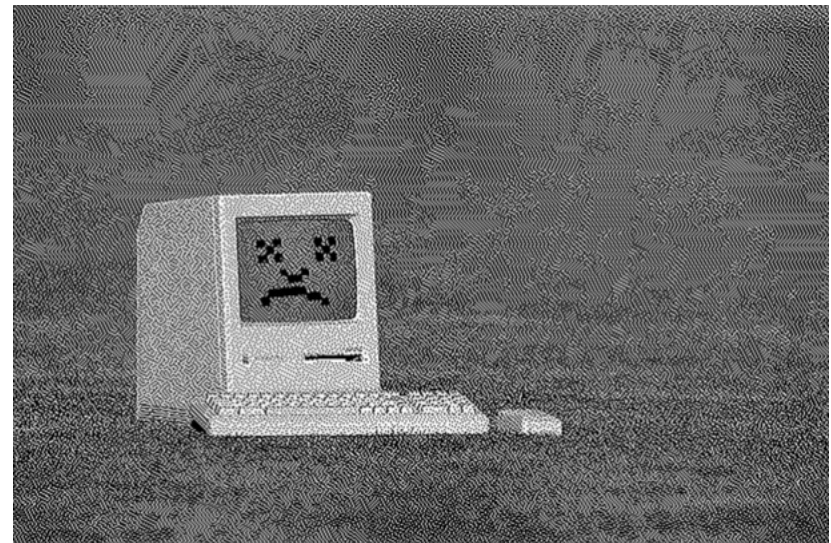
"AI" Does Not Exist

***… but it's ruining everything anyway** [1]*

There's no such thing as "AI" in the way the tech industry promotes it. "AI" is marketing hype, not "intelligence". What people call AI is a kluge-y collection of tools that do stuff: ChatGPT extrudes plausible-sounding text, Midjourney spits out synthetic images, Instagram's algorithm sorts you into demographic categories to annoy you with ads, Amazon's product recommendation system tracks what you like to sell you shit you don't need . We use scare quotes occasionally to remind you that "Artificial Intelligence" is marketing hype & science fiction, it does not exist.

Likening AI algorithms and tools to human intelligence is anthropomorphization: the attribution of human traits to nonhuman things. People are prone to do this all the time, and it's usually no big deal: "my car's name is Betty", "my roomba is sad", "Siri is being a jerk". The title of this zine is of course tongue-in-cheek: "AI" can only "die" in the same sense that your cellphone "dies". Problems arise when this very human tendency turns to sci-fi fantasies about AI gods or is exploited by tech barons to overstate the capacity of their tools to be our friends, lovers, therapists or replace us in the workforce.

Popular chatbot tools like ChatGPT produce *seemingly* coherent outputs that may *sound* like they can "think" "understand" or "reason". They cannot. These models are trained on large, uncurated datasets of text scraped from the web to predict the next word in a sequence. They are indifferent to factuality and are better understood as either "Bullshit" Machines [2] or "Stochastic Parrots" [3].
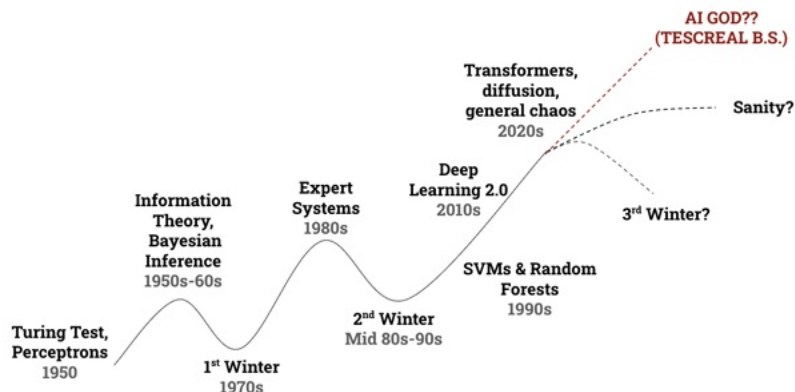

Sad Mac, @dualdflipflop via. flickr

A Brief History of Hype

AI hype cycles are periods in which attention and capital are diverted toward whatever random computing tools people are calling "AI"

The tools and technologies called "AI" have gone through periods of popularity where they capture the attention of industry, science, and the general public. At other times called "AI Winters" these tools have lost hype-driven attention and become ordinary parts of everyday technology. There have been two winters in the past, we are currently experiencing the third hype cycle.

In some eras "AI" was largely what we call statistics today. At other times it was sprawling logic rule-sets called "expert systems." In others it's been "neural networks" or "deep learning." The technical details of these terms don't matter much for our purposes. What matters is that the things we call "AI" are a constantly rotating cast of half-working technologies.

When hype for AI increases, the tools and methods labeled "AI" get adopted by science, industry and the military. This leads to a positive feedback cycle: there's more investment, more research, more products driving further hype. Eventually as expectations exceed the ability of these technologies to deliver on their promises, the hype collapses. This leads to broad criticism and disillusionment with the field: an AI winter.

Blinded by the Hype: In winters, "AI" technologies developed during a hype cycle become "normal". They are no longer considered "AI" and fade into the everyday. As we are currently enduring the third AI hype cycle, no one truly knows what socially *useful* technologies will "stick" when this is over.

"Workers entered the field around 1950, and even around 1960, with high hopes that are very far from having been realized in 1972. In no part of the field have the discoveries made so far produced the major impact that was then promised." – The Lighthill Report [4]

Automated Violence

The real-life harms caused by AI technologies are well documented. These harms can't be addressed with more or "better" technology – we need good old fashioned social progress

This section is intended to be something of an annotated bibliography of exceptional scholarship & reporting exposing the violence-at-scale of "AI". We encourage curious readers to follow these references for more detail.

Mathematician and Data Scientist Cathy O'Neil illustrated how unregulated algorithmic systems perpetuate & scale discrimination, framing "AI" based decision systems as "Weapons of Math Destruction" [5].

The interdisciplinary authors of "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models be Too Big? 🦜 " [3] accurately predicted many of the environmental and social harms arising from the broad adoption of "stochastic parrots": a pejorative name for the core technology underlying popular chatbots like OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, Meta's Llama and X's Grok.

The work of Computer Scientists Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru illustrated how "AI" facial recognition systems discriminate based on skin color and gender [6].

Scholar and activist Sasha Costanza-Chock demonstrated how TSA millimeter wave scanning machines disproportionally flag transgender peoples' bodies for additional screening [7].

Disability Studies and Tech Ethics scholar Ashley Shew has highlighted how "AI" technologies reflect an implicitly ableist design philosophy and medicalized approach to disability [8].

A ProPublica investigation [9] demonstrated how recidivism algorithms further entrench the classist, racist and xenophobic foundations of carceral systems.

Political Scientist Virgina Eubanks thoroughly documented the myriad ways in which algorithmic systems "profile, police and punish the poor" [10].

"Predictive Policing" algorithms, intended to forecast crime ala. *Minority Report,* subject poor communities to even more surveillance and oppression [11], are racially biased and notoriously bad at actually predicting crime [12].

Heat map of officer patrols in parts of Elgin, Illinois. Credit: Geolitica

Synthetic media tools have been used to generate non-consensual deep-fake pornography & revenge porn [13]. Investigations of some popular training datasets have shown them to contain hateful, harmful, violent and abusive content including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) [14].

The Israeli military is field-testing 'robot dogs' in Gaza and has deployed a targeting system called "Habsora" to automate target selection for the IDF [15]. The world over, "AI" systems deployed by the military industrial complex spy, target and kill while the corporate developers of these technologies (from Palantir, Anduril and OpenAI [16] to Amazon [17] and Google [18]) reap massive profits from mass suffering and death.

Automated violence arises from inequalities in who has the power to design & deploy AI systems. The largely homogenous groups of people developing, peddling and profiting from "AI" tools demonstrate an inadequate capacity to recognize, understand (or care about) the pitfalls and harms of the systems they deploy. This is a phenomenon arising from what Data Scientist Catherine D'Ignazio and Digital Humanities scholar Lauren F. Klein have termed "*privilege hazards*":

"Those who occupy the most privileged positions among us—people with good educations, respected credentials, and professional accolades—are poorly equipped to recognize instances of oppression in the world" – Data Feminism [19]

~You can't just code your way out of a social problem

Labor Exploitation Machines

How new technologies affect our lives is determined by who has ownership, agency and power

When the world is in an "AI" hype cycle, as it is now, new tools replace older tools because they're faster, cheaper, or simply more hyped up. The owners and creators of these tools get rich in the process, while others may lose their jobs. There's nothing new about this process. It's been happening as long as the human race has had technology. New tools are developed, jobs change, and the relationship between workers and their work changes as a result.

What matters now is how society will respond to these technological changes: will power be further concentrated in the hands of the tech elite? Will workers lose control of their employment? Will unions suffer?
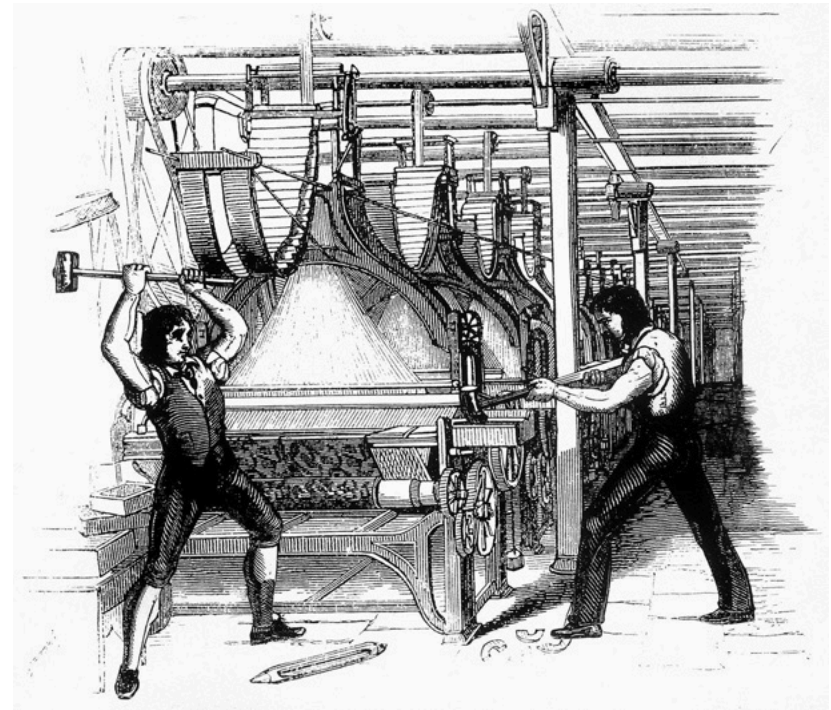
"The AI can't do your job, but the AI salesman can convince your boss to fire you and replace you with an AI anyway"
– Cory Doctorow

A historical anecdote: New weaving technologies were developed in the United Kingdom during the Industrial Revolution. As these technologies were adopted by factory owners, many workers took issue with the new machines disrupting their jobs. *Luddites* fought back by destroying these new machines.

While Luddites have been slanderously mischaracterized as being against all technology, they were in fact reacting to new working conditions where they were likely to be maimed or killed by the machines they worked with. **Smashing looms was their tactic, not their goal**. [20]

1812 illustration of Luddites smashing a loom. (Chris Sunde / Wikimedia Commons)

"Luddism is about questioning who machinery serves."
– Brian Merchant

"AI" has politics [21, 22], and those politics are not neutral. If "scale is all you need" to improve the performance of an "AI" system on some task, these technologies will advantage the ones who control the most data and the most computation. In the hands of authoritarians with the power to shape the direction of AI innovation: **consolidation of wealth and social control are features of these systems, not bugs**. Like the Luddites, the problem is not technology in isolation, but lack of ownership and control. Who has the power to decide what is designed, how it is built and how it is used?

Sci-fi Fantasies & Tech Ideologies

Tech billionaires are incentivised to support ideologies that emphasize tech's progress, not social progress (which might threaten their wealth and power)

If you're a tech-y type you've probably seen people start companies, get rich, and build cool new tools and products. If you're interested in technology and enjoy working on these new tools, you might be inclined to support the goals of your company and be skeptical of interference and regulation by the government. *Libertarian* ideologies might be very appealing to you: get the government out of my business and let me make my cool new toys. This belief system follows naturally from *techno-optimism*, the idea that we can create social progress by inventing new technologies that free people from their labors. With tech leaders crediting themselves as revolutionizing & transforming society for the better, ushering in a utopian age of "human flourishing" or "abundance". And if

you're a techno-optimist in the 2020s, the most hyped-up fantastical way to do this is Artificial General Intelligence (AGI).

"Techno-optimism" is largely repackaged, sci-fi flavored reactionary politics. For instance, Marc Andreessen's "Techno-Optimist Manifesto", published on his venture capital firm a16z's website in late 2023 is no more than old-school elitism for a techbro audience. In this unhinged, rambling text he vilifies ethicists, academics, regulators and conservationists in a section titled "The Enemy". We invite the reader to find and read it for themselves, it's wild. Techno-optimism doesn't offer the world anything more than unregulated capitalism, a worship of the rich, and the vague hope that the products and services they create will eventually, pretty please, solve our social ills, even though there's no evidence that technology alone has ever led to social progress.
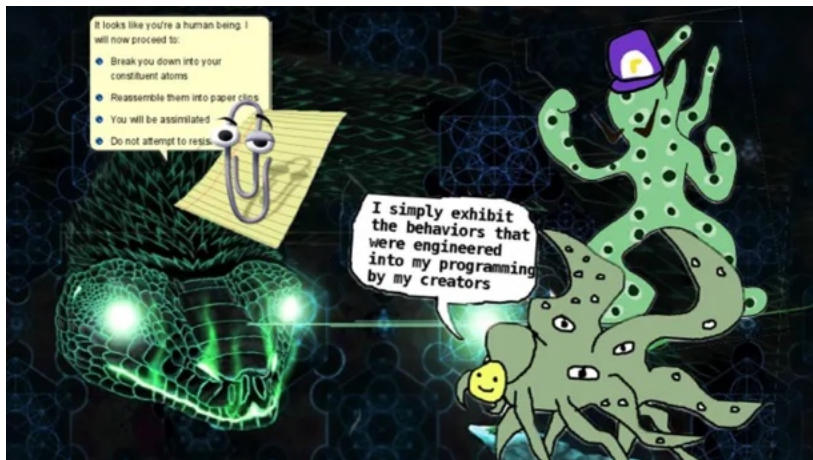
Techbro ideologies are zero-commitment, zero-accountability and are thin veils for the worship of their one true god: profit.

MUSK   ANDREESSEN   THIEL   ALTMAN   BEZOS   ZUCC

The billionaire thinks that the solutions to problems caused by billionaires are known only to billionaires.

Not all discourse around AGI is framed optimistically. "Doomers" claim the emergence of AGI will destroy humanity (termed "existential risk" or "x-risk")

However both AGI-optimist and AGI-doomer ways of thinking serve to perpetuate the "AI" hype cycle and shift focus away from the real, documented and material harms of "AI" towards the speculative: sci-fi *Terminator* scenarios or benevolent machine gods. Some even mix the two, claiming that AGI is inevitable and beneficial, but anyone who does not assist in hastening the development of AGI will be retroactively punished by the AGI god (*see you in hell Roko's Basilisk!* 🖕).

Terminally online TESCREAL memes about paperclips, basilisks, shoggoths & waluigi

We provide a short overview of these wacko ideas so you can better spot them in the wild (and avoid them). This loose collection of AGI optimist / AGI doomer ideas have come to be collectively referred to as the "TESCREAL Bundle" [23].

This acronym, coined by Timnit Gebru and philosopher Émile P. Torres refers to:

- **Transhumanism** - the human body is weak and can be transcended with technology, somehow.
- **Extropianism** - the goal of life is to reverse entropy (impossible) but AGI god can help us do that somehow.
- **Singularitarianism** - a mystical event called *The Singularity* is nigh and AGI god happens, somehow
- **Cosmism** - humanity will merge with AGI and roam the stars as a *Strartrek* Borg-like entity (*Sounds shitty tbh*)
- **Rationalism** - deeply weird community of bloggers on the website LessWrong obsessed with the "alignment" of AGI with "human values", dubiously defined.
- **Effective Altruism** / **Longtermism** - the lives and dignity of the humans alive today are vanishingly unimportant in contrast with the value of the "long-term potential" of humanity, dubiously defined.

It's a mess… the "rationalists" are not rational, the "altruists" are not altruistic, the rest blur the lines between scientism & science fiction. What they have been shown to share however, is alignment with and historical roots in eugenics [23]. TESCREAL has polluted the discourse on "AI" ethics, captured the imaginations of regulators of all political shades, notably Chuck Schumer's adoption of their p(doom) concept [24], and paved the path for the ascendance of what has been called **"The Nerd Reich"** [25]: an emerging US techno-political order captured by oligarchs, robber barons and fascists.

There's no reason to expect that AGI is inevitable, will take a particular form or is even possible.

The last and perhaps the most impotent "AI" approach is one of liberal passivity: *"How can we harness the 'benefits' of "AI" while mitigating the harms?"*. Governments & corporations have demonstrated their total unwillingness, incompetence and incapacity to meaningfully commit to accomplishing this goal. *So what the fuck can we do about it?*

"AI" is not Inevitable

Move the conversation from Fear of Missing Out to Fuck Around & Find Out

TESCREAL ideologies popular among Silicon Valley elites have the convenient side effect of side-stepping critiques of capitalism. They either take capitalism as a given or refocus attention elsewhere, failing to challenge for-profit AI. We don't take it as a given that AI is destined to take a particular form or have a particular effect on society. It's now up to us to decide how "AI" tools are adopted and governed.
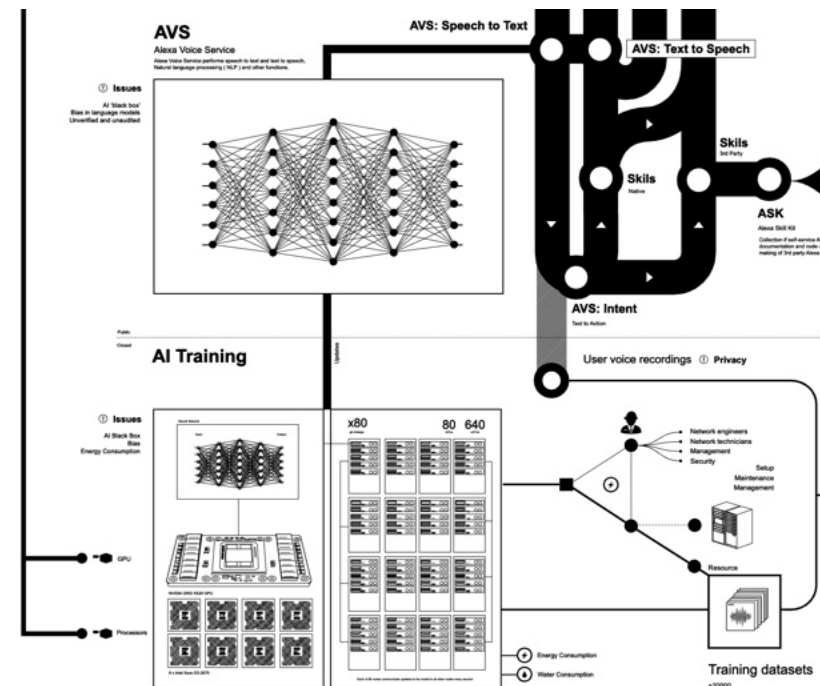
"There is an inevitability narrative that we hear from tech companies - and that is a bid to take our agency"

–Emily Bender, Computational Linguist
Tech Won't Save Us Podcast

A common disempowered perception among the public is that the AI technologies Silicon Valley venture capitalists are peddling is the only way forward. That we must adopt and accept their products or we will be left behind and lose our jobs. We must accept the surveillance, theft & poor working conditions they impose and the death & oppression they cause. We have no power & there is no alternative. This is a classic example of *capitalist realism*, the belief that not only is capitalism inevitable, but any alternative is *unimaginable*. This narrative is false. We *must* imagine alternatives. À la Mark Fisher:

It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

Adapted from Kate Crawford's *Anatomy of an AI System*, https://anatomyof.ai/

What is to be Done?

If there's hope for a future in which "AI" is transformed into a liberatory technology, it cannot be achieved through passive acceptance of whatever snake-oil Silicon Valley is selling: it must be built with care, intention and rooted in community [24]. In the meantime, we are faced with the convergence of AI hype with increasingly fascist governments. Obvious exempli gratia: Elon's "D.O.G.E." project, wholesale. Therefore, our attitude towards "AI" at the present moment should be one of persistent skepticism, criticism, obstruction and resistance. Here's how we do that.

Ask questions: Adapting the "questions first" framework laid out in "The AI Con" [26]. If you're concerned about the use of an "AI" system by your government, employer or another organization begin with and insist on asking:

1. What *exactly* is the task the tool or system claims to automate? Should this task be done <u>at all</u>?

2. What are the inputs and outputs? What is the evidence that the outputs can be derived from the inputs?

3. How is the system evaluated? What was measured? Was the evaluation specific to the intended context? Who conducted the evaluation?

4. Who benefits from the adoption, integration or use of the "AI" tool? Who might be harmed or made vulnerable? What recourse do harmed persons have?

Red flags:
1. Is the "AI" system or tool being described as human?

2. How much agency do you feel you have? Is the decision to use an "AI" tool opt-in or opt-out? Is hesitancy, resistance or criticism met with retaliation?

3. Were you asked for your consent to be monitored or have data about you used in the development of an "AI" system? Can this consent be revoked?

4. What data are being collected from or about you? How are these data used?

5. Slop (aka "GenAI Art") & enshitification [27] – you know it when you see it.

"Solidarity between highly-paid tech workers and their lower-paid counterparts – who vastly outnumber them – is a tech CEO's nightmare."

–The Exploited Labor Behind Artificial Intelligence [29]

Demand transparency from companies and governments developing "AI" tools regarding the training data they use, their labor practices and the environmental impacts of their systems.

Insist on enhanced scrutiny of "AI" corporate actors, enforcement of existing laws [30] and accountability for the harms and injustices they cause or perpetuate. Assume that these organizations cannot be trusted to self-regulate. They can't.
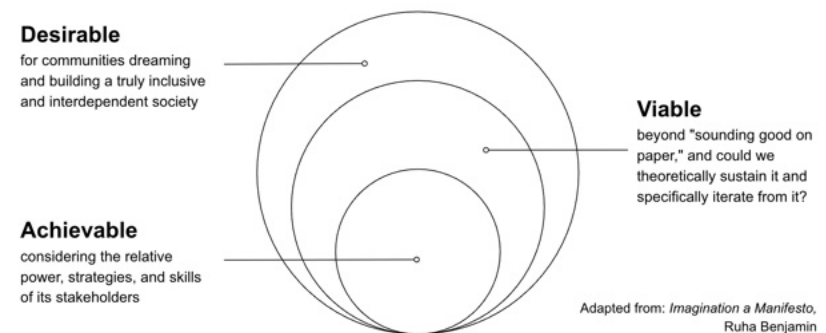
Disrupt or ignore distracting sci-fi narratives (be they *AGI-optimist* or *AGI-doomer*) by drawing attention back to real and documented outcomes. Emphasize "AI" critical discourse focused on labor, surveillance, alienation, medicalization, marginalization, minoritization and the environment.

Resist the construction of datacenters in your backyard. "AI" needs massive computational infrastructure. The extreme energy & water consumption required, and pollution caused by these facilities poisons our air, contaminates our soil and depletes our shared resources. [31]

Work in solidarity with data workers [32], ghost workers [33], gig workers [34]. Particularly if you work in the tech industry: advocate, educate, unionize and build collective power [35].

Imagine alternatives to dystopia and the technocapitalist status-quo. Imagination is resistance. Make art, write solarpunk, never stop dreaming of a future where we are all safe & free. Work backwards from these imagined futures, what can we do today to make them achievable?

Desirable
for communities dreaming and building a truly inclusive and interdependent society

Viable
beyond "sounding good on paper," and could we theoretically sustain it and specifically iterate from it?

Achievable
considering the relative power, strategies, and skills of its stakeholders

Adapted from: *Imagination a Manifesto*, Ruha Benjamin

How long will this go on? When will the hype cycle end? Is (another) winter coming? Faced with an inhumane tech industry and complicit governments it may ultimately fall to the people to invent as-yet-unclear ways to evade [36], refuse, resist [37], sabotage [38, 39] or otherwise destroy [40] "AI".

Hammers up! AI Must Die!

Seize the means of computation

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PUT DOWN
ALL MACHINERY HURTFUL TO
COMMONALITY!

Waymo Robotaxi Destroyed by a mob in San Francisco 2024