

Art in the Cage of Digital Reproduction

On 26th November 2024, a group of artists and hacktivists took action to re-open OpenAI's technology to the public. They provided indirect access to Sora, OpenAI's video generation model, through an open-source front end on [HuggingFace](#).

At the same time, we released a statement to denormalise the exploitation of artists for research and development, training data and public relations by "corporate AI overlords". We called on artists to think beyond proprietary systems and the limitations of prompting a model mediated by big tech.

The Hugging face page and accompanying open letter quickly went viral. OpenAI shut down the entire program 3 hours later, 217 video generations were created, with huge queues forming and the results shared widely across the internet. The event gained [international press coverage](#).

┐┌ (▀_▀) ┐┌ DEAR CORPORATE AI OVERLORDS ┐┌ (▀_▀) ┐┌

We received access to Sora with the promise to be early testers, red teamers and creative partners. However, we believe instead we are being lured into "art washing" to tell the world that Sora is a useful tool for artists.

ARTISTS ARE NOT YOUR UNPAID R&D

💀 we are not your: free bug testers, PR puppets, training data, validation tokens 💀

Hundreds of artists provide unpaid labor through bug testing, feedback and experimental work for the program for a \$150B valued company. While hundreds contribute for free, a select few will be chosen through a competition to have their Sora-created films screened – offering minimal compensation which pales in comparison to the substantial PR and marketing value OpenAI receives.

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DENORMALIZE BILLION DOLLAR BRANDS EXPLOITING ARTISTS FOR UNPAID R&D AND PR

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Furthermore, every output needs to be approved by the OpenAI team before sharing. This early access program appears to be less about creative expression

and critique, and more about PR and advertisement.

[\$()\$] CORPORATE ARTWASHING DETECTED [\$()\$]

We are releasing this tool to give everyone an opportunity to experiment with what ~300 artists were offered: a free and unlimited access to this tool.

We are not against the use of AI technology as a tool for the arts (if we were, we probably wouldn't have been invited to this program). What we don't agree with is how this artist program has been rolled out and how the tool is shaping up ahead of a possible public release. We are sharing this to the world in the hopes that OpenAI becomes more open, more artist friendly and supports the arts beyond PR stunts.

We call on artists to make use of tools beyond the proprietary:

Open Source video generation tools allow artists to experiment with the avant garde free from gate keeping, commercial interests or serving as PR to any corporation. We also invite artists to train their own models with their own datasets.

Some open source video tools available are: CogVideoX, Mochi 1, LTX Video & Pyramid Flow.

However, as we are aware not everyone has the hardware or technical capability to run open source tools and models, we welcome tool makers to listen to and provide a path to true artist expression, with fair compensation to the artists.

Enjoy,

some sora-alpha-artists, Jake Elwes, Memo Akten, CROSSLUCID, Maribeth Rauh, Joel Simon, Bea Ramos, Power Dada, aurèce vettier, acfp, Iannis Bardakos, 204 no-content | Cintia Aguiar Pinto & Dimitri De Jonghe, Emmanuelle Collet, XU Cheng, Operator, Katie Peyton Hofstadter, Anika Meier, Solimán López and other anonymous Sora testers.

If this letter resonates with you add your signature [here](#).



Jake Elwes – Zizi in Motion 2023, montage of deepfake drag artist, c/o the artist

Jake Elwes

Artist & Radical Faeire

I'm a conceptual media artist who has been working with AI and machine learning since the first generative AI tools emerged nearly a decade ago. My work aims to reclaim and queer these systems, for example by collaborating with drag performers in *The Zizi Show – A Deepfake Drag Cabaret* to create ethical and consensual deepfakes using our own datasets. I also trained my own AI models from scratch imagining a playful and hopeful queer 'open' AI utopia (exhibited 2023–24 at V&A Museum, Edinburgh Futures Institute, UK AI and art museums internationally). From experimenting with generative AI models in their infancy I've always been excited by their philosophical implications, though at times I've felt overwhelmed by their potential. More recently, I have felt a growing sense of tension and unease about where these tools might be heading if not designed with the input of artists as well as marginalized and oppressed people and communities.

In October 2024, I was invited by OpenAI to join the Sora Alpha Artists Testing Program, which included the option to submit a film project for a competition. The winning projects would be used to showcase their video generator, Sora. While it was presented as an opportunity for artists to provide feedback and use the tool, it felt more like the company was taking advantage of them. So instead of submitting a film I decided to re-open OpenAI by providing indirect access to the early access api key via an open source front end for anyone to use. This wasn't a hack or a leak; we simply connected OpenAI's servers to a Hugging Face interface. It was shared alongside a collectively written statement by artists and hacktivists to open up some important questions, such as:

- What sort of future do we as artists and humans want to build with these tools?
- Who's building these systems and why? Who do they serve and how will these tools be used?

- How can we denormalise corporations using artists for unpaid labour (providing free research, training data and development and PR 'art-washing')?
- Can we build our own decentralised AI systems using our own training data?
- What might anti-capitalist, decadent, 'un'-productive or 'de'-generative AI look like?
- What if policies allowed only marginalised and oppressed people (ie. queers, crips, indigenous peoples, the global south and trans communities) to build AI systems from the bottom up to serve everyone better?
- Can we prevent latent spaces from collapsing into normative and homogenous outputs by jailbreaking them, introducing uncertainty, and pushing them into the queer and decolonial outer bounds of their potential data spaces?
- Can we imagine better futures and narratives with AI, hopeful technological apocalypses and alternative (queer) utopias?

This is a criticism of power structures and the way that corporations use creatives. Early on I discussed with OpenAI how if I were to participate in their program I'd want to critically engage with the system and its purposes. I initially considered how I could feed lines from OpenAI's own Terms of Use as prompts into their video model, an AI surreally interpreting itself (for me the conceptually richest AI content is in the legalese written by humans as opposed to the flashy generative outputs). I openly discussed with OpenAI how the engineers were forging ahead without always considering the impact to artists, and the fundamental question of why we're making tools that can be used to replace image and video makers. However as the programme developed at high speed on Slack, I – along with other artists in the group – ultimately felt uncomfortable with unpaid artists being used in this way, even if it was framed, explicitly and implicitly, as an honor. Whilst I understand why some artists may see no issue with this (as evidenced by backlash to our actions), we believe that being offered crumbs is not enough; it creates a race to the bottom.

I acknowledge my privilege here as an artist who can afford to sever ties with a big tech company and do not want to criticise other creatives for being excited to engage with extraordinary developments in generative AI. I would however like to encourage artists to find critical ways to engage with AI technology in their art and consider innovative and empowering ways to work with these tools.

Can we consider training our own models on our own data and moving outside of the 'prompting box' on big tech companies' websites. Let's challenge the notion of inevitable linear progression, both technological and social. It's not determined that we branch towards corporate monopolies & proprietary closed AI. Let's revisit ideas from Web1.0, federated AI, and embrace being latent space jockeys – unshackling ourselves from the limitations of language prompting and spatially

interfacing with the unsupervised, debinarised, mathematical latent spaces present in all AI systems.

How as artists can we push the concept, aesthetic, and experience of artworks created using machine learning image and video making tools? Art has often challenged the power imbalance held by profit-driven corporations. We can challenge these new proprietary AI models and push against the homogenous and normative outputs they prioritise. We've been so hypnotised by these corporate techno-religions – now it's the time for heresy.

Luna Bianchi

AI ethicist, activist and IP attorney

I'm an entrepreneur in AI ethics, an activist and an IP attorney, and I'm currently deep diving in the creativity/AI trade off.

As I acknowledge there is a tension in how to deal with copyright, among others, in this new socio-technical context, I believe we should start with artists and creatives to look for solutions. I listened to their positions for days confirming that this should be a social justice concern, rather than a copyright issue.

It is very important to me to write it down at the very beginning, this is not a critique of AI. Technology is precious and powerful human expression, capable of ameliorating dramatically our lives, but today is even more important than ever to drive it responsibly, keeping critical thinking alive and remaining focused on the original meaning of progress, i.e. 'moving forward'. Also, and above all, in terms of social welfare.

There are at least two main layers we have to consider when going through this complex transformation, and the first has to do with the power that big techs have gained eventually, which we keep avoiding to recognize for what it is: it is a clear political power, a power that produces specific social effects. Technologies, and more specifically AI, are in fact shaping our societies quite precisely, favoring specific categories of people, behaviors, jobs and ideals as, obviously, the sense of beauty in the art field.

Basically, we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of power: as governments exercise power and produce obedience through laws, tech companies act through algorithms. However, algorithms are not designed for the collective well-being nor subject to human localized interpretation. Algorithms are indeed rigid rules driven by private economic profit goals, are prerogative of specialists, are invisible, pervasive and often incomprehensible and inexplicable. These coded laws are thin, insidious, and well-hidden in the digital environment making very hard to deliberately oppose them.

This locates us in a big democratic loophole: we still lack mechanisms of social responsibility and liability, to balance such masked form of permeating and seductive control, and we have yet to envision how to resist and dissent to this algorithmic social infrastructure.

But we do have a growing feeling of the unfairness of this system, a feeling that arises from the understanding of how artefacts, such as law, ethics or technology, work: they are designed by specific categories of humans (the ones in power), and shape society by reflecting their worldview, ideas, values and culture. Are we really fine with the shape such people have in mind?

The zoomed layer, on the other hand, speaks directly to the copyright debate, being well-interwoven with the giant power the few AI super-companies have accrued.

When we talk about rights, it is important to recognize what we want them to do in society. Which is their ultimate function?

I believe we should start caring for people's needs, centering the law's interpretation on solving real and concrete issues. We need to look at existing laws with fresh eyes, deconstructing old structures born in completely different socio economic, political and cultural contexts, to revamp, and adapt, their position into this very society. We need laws that are soaked into society.

If we look at the AI/copyright wrangling under this lens, in fact, we know that there is not a real tension: it is quite straight that people creating data for training commercial AI models, data of any kind but particularly if this is your job, should be free to agree to the extraction and should be compensate for it, adequately. We didn't see a very big tension when it was about the peer to peer streaming, was that on the other side sit small companies or single people?

So why are we today hardly discussing about technicisms to understand whether the existing copyright framework allows or not the free commercial exploitation of such a huge number of works that belong to humans, and eventually to humanity?

The techno-art community – and it is not alone – it is openly asking for collaboration, fair redistribution and for the deconstruction of the artist as an individual super-hero (and this is also the fruit of technology, as working with open source models shaped a specific view of the artist towards a stronger feeling for community and collectivity). If we embrace this social model, then it's time to actively position ourselves!

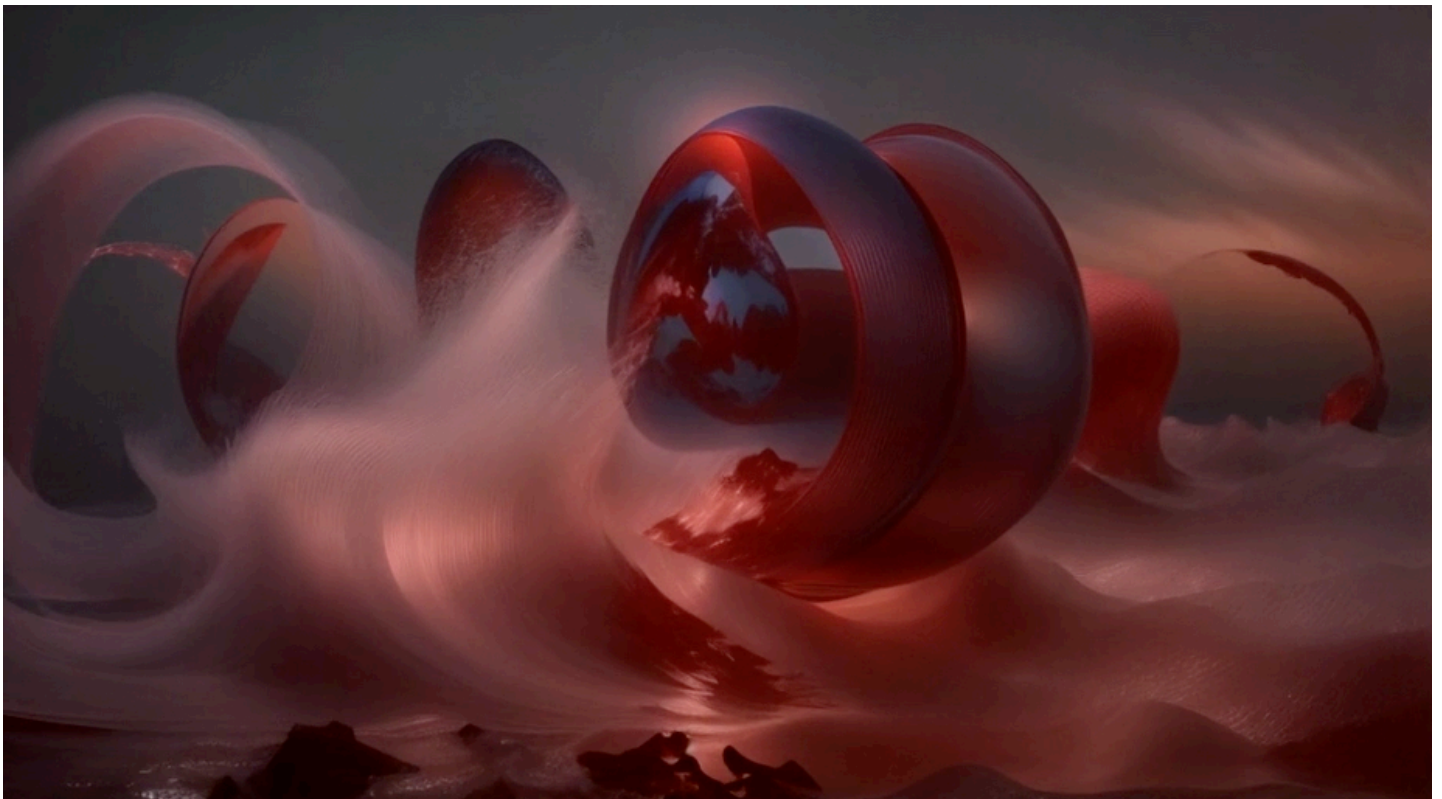
As power is the ability to produce obedience, of any kind, it is becoming harder to protest against the power dynamics of this very specific digital society, but I believe artists naturally own the right tools for prototyping a different society, they can build new visions even for politics to go back imagining what to work for: a society based on collective consciousness and pathways, alliances and communities.

And this open letter is a clear sign of it.

I'm then happy to sit with these artists and explore new forms of dissent, not against technology but to confront a technological development that often underestimates the importance of delicacy, sensibility and kindness in exercising power.

Would you sit with us?

Luna Bianchi is a jurist and an IP attorney, co-founder and co- CEO of a company in the field of ethics of AI which provides tools to assess impacts and risks emerging from AI and digital technologies. Luna is also an activist for a fair safeguard of fundamental rights in the digital ecosystem.



Still from: Red The Ocean Around U, AI live environment, Las Art Foundation, 2024

CROSSLUCID

We are CROSSLUCID, a collaborative artist practice that symbiotically co-evolves with emerging technologies. Our hybrid work spans moving image, collage, assemblage, 3D, and poetic AI, exploring the networked self, digital intimacy, and the re-imagination of our alliances with technology. By prototyping speculative futures, we aim to renegotiate stagnant processes, relations, and myths.

From our first interactions with machine learning, we have engaged with open-source tools that enable nuanced explorations and collaborations with AI models. This approach unlocks unparalleled possibilities for crafting bespoke technological pipelines that instantiate experiences of technology offering alternative visions and potentialities. By embracing the ethos

of open-source, we can delve into the latent spaces of these models, unearthing pluralistic narratives and cosmologies that challenge dominant paradigms.

Given the current circumstances we feel compelled to speak out against the exploitative tactics of tech corporations that take advantage of creative labor under the guise of "artist partnerships". Companies like OpenAI draw in artists with the promise of early access and exposure, only to extract our ideas, skills, and credibility while providing minimal recognition or compensation.

We have signed the statement as we feel we are being treated as disposable resources – unpaid beta testers, PR tools, and sources of training data to fuel their AI models and their \$100B+ valuations. This is not a genuine collaboration but a one-sided harvesting of human creativity to serve corporate interests, concentrating power in the hands of a few tech elites. The corporations use artists to artwash their image while eroding our agency, ownership rights, and autonomy. It is imperative that these partnerships genuinely honor and reward the creative labor involved.

We believe it's time for us artists to divest our cognitive and creative capabilities from corporations that have proven they cannot be trusted to uphold their promises or act with integrity. We must stop allowing ourselves to be mined as a resource by platforms that will never have our best interests in mind. The billion-dollar brands that build walled gardens while brazenly violating intellectual property rights do not deserve our partnership or free labor. Instead, we need to redirect our energy towards building open source alternatives that respect artists as equal collaborators.

We shall invest in creating tools, systems, and spaces outside centralized corporate control – ones that prioritize transparency, shared ownership, fair compensation and the inherent dignity of creative work. Rather than helping tech giants monopolize the power to generate and manipulate reality, we must work towards democratizing these capabilities and shepherd resources towards open, accountable systems ethically stewarded in service of more humanistic visions of technological progress.

As artists, we have a responsibility to critically engage with the tools we use rather than facilitating their adoption without deeper reflection. We shall scrutinize the values, power structures, and potential harms embedded in AI systems, and actively resist those that reinforce exploitation and inequality.

Art is a space to challenge dominant narratives, not uncritically perpetuate them.

For tech companies to foster genuine artistic partnerships, they must radically transform their approach to collaborating with creative communities.

This means:

- Complete openness about the training data and model architectures underpinning their AI systems. Artists have a right to understand what information our creative works may be informing and influencing, feeding into and shaping.
- R&D contracts and terms that properly value artistic labor and intellectual contributions. Artists who provide input, testing, or data that aids the development of AI tools should be compensated and credited as key collaborators, not just unpaid testers.
- Clear intellectual property agreements that respect artists' rights and give us a stake in the AI tools we help build. We need assurance that our creative innovations will not simply be absorbed into corporate black boxes.
- Meaningful decision-making power in shaping the development, governance, and deployment of AI systems that impact creative fields. Artists must have a seat at the table.

Until these demands are met, assertions of "artist partnerships" by tech giants like OpenAI may be viewed as primarily empty PR efforts and a perpetuation of extractive business models. We cannot assent for limited gains while helping to build systems that could disempower creative communities at an unprecedented scale.

In that vein, we must reclaim our agency, forge our own tools, and build a future where human imagination can prosper free from algorithmic extraction. The resistance starts now. Boycott. Divest. Reinvest our creativity towards imagining and building more nurturing and flourishing futures.

CROSSLUCID is an artist collective (est. 2018) that engages in highly collaborative cross-disciplinary projects in co-evolution with technology. Their work and research converges around the exploration of the self as a network; intimacy and the potential for pleasurable actualization through the digital sphere, and the re-imagination of our alliances with technology seen as part of a sympoietic biosphere and universal post-material consciousness. Through explorations spanning filmmaking, poetic Artificial Intelligence, multi-layered techniques of collage, assemblage and experience-led interventions they create scenarios and build experiential formats that instigate prototyping and rehearsing potential futures and progressing metamodern values.

Web: <https://crosslucid.zone>

X: @Crosslucid / IG: @crosslucid

Maribeth Rauh

Research Engineer

I am a research engineer who focuses on the societal impact of AI. I spent more than three years at Google DeepMind researching, evaluating, and mitigating the risks of generative AI systems, as a member of the technical teams that build them.

I signed the statement in the hopes of pushing companies towards more genuine and fair partnership with those who may use or be impacted by their systems and to stand in solidarity with artists who did not experience this to be the case.

The development of these products is driven by a field that prizes "solving" problems "end-to-end." This is a vision of replacement rather than complementing, driven by the pursuit of "general intelligence" as well as underlying values of optimization and increased productivity. Such framing tends towards a reduction of human autonomy and expression within the domain. By involving domain experts from the very earliest stages and empowering them to shape the product at a fundamental level, the development of AI is more likely to yield specific tools which enhance what humans can do.

And so, my hope is that this action does not discourage organizations from engaging with artists. Rather, it is a call for deeper engagement – one that is non exploitative, an invitation for artists to co-create tools that will enhance their practice rather than aid in their own replacement.

Participation may be optional, but anyone who does do work for OpenAI should be paid. Just as the crowd workers who provide red teaming, training data, and other evaluations are; just as the engineers, whose pay ranges from hundreds of thousands to millions, are. Why would artists providing specialized input on a core use case of the product not be?

Exposure, privileged access, and excitement are leveraged to perpetuate a harmful norm of not paying artists for their work. The way the program is being conducted echoes the scraping used to gather training datasets – this time harvesting expert knowledge through testing, for free, to feed monolithic, black-box systems owned by the mega wealthy. When interacting with a corporation that has a profit mandate and is valued at \$150 billion, monetary compensation must be part of the value exchange. Safety testing and product feedback are vital and the value they bring to OpenAI is disproportionate to the value exchanged.



aurèce vettier, sinuiflora absurdica (impOssibl3 tr33/1), curvifolium mysticus (impOssibl3 tr33/2), arboreus flectens (impOssibl3 tr33/3), bronze sculptures from AI-generated forms, exhibited at Bastide du Roy, Antibes, France. Photo: Alban Ferrand

aurèce vettier

Artist & AI Engineer

My name is Paul Mouginot. I'm a French artist and artificial intelligence engineer. In 2019, I created an entity and named it aurèce vettier. Born through a combination of algorithms and high craft, this entity is a metaphor of the desire for a collaborative, open and hybrid approach to explore new creative realms. The works of aurèce vettier seek to reconstitute a multi-dimensional world, where uncanny forms and apparitions seem to resonate with our familiar universe. To that end, I developed a number of techniques and processes for aurèce vettier, enabling me to exploit my own personal data with cutting-edge, open source artificial intelligence models that I train and customize. Lastly, I turn the forms derived from these algorithms into physical, hybrid, high-end manifestations using a wide range of techniques: bronze, 3D printing, cabinetmaking or tapestry. Continuing a research begun in the 1950s by the first artists to use generative approaches, including Vera Molnár with whom I collaborated in 2023, aurèce vettier deploys this specific and haunting gesture, a perpetual journey between the real and the virtual world, defining new territories.

I am convinced that artificial intelligence tools are profoundly changing the role of the artist. As Marcel Duchamp ushered us into an era in which the experience of the object often prevailed over the object, we are now crossing a new frontier, thanks to the extraordinary capabilities offered by AI: proposing new forms, digesting immense volumes of data, moving from one medium to another. So, it seems to me that from now on, it may be a form of long-term adventure – with oneself, with the visitor, the collector and the world – that will prevail over the experience of the object.

I'm therefore extremely enthusiastic about the possibilities offered by AI tools, but also aware of the need to democratize access to creative expression. Moreover, I believe that, one day, many of us will be interested in the idea of using AI reflexively, training tailor-made models based on their own personal data to improve introspection, create, and explore new possibilities. That's why the questions we're asking today are so important: how do we retain effective ownership of our personal data or creations? How can we maintain freedom and flexibility in the use of AI? How can we sincerely guarantee the openness and accessibility of these tools to all, without reproducing or amplifying the blockages and biases that already exist elsewhere in our society?

Whoever controls the tool, controls the narrative, controls the aesthetic, controls the interaction modalities. Therefore, in my work I assemble my own tools, and I mainly use open source resources and technologies, which I train on data I collect and prepare myself. I don't use closed, off-the-shelf technologies, and it's important to point out that I didn't get preview access to OpenAI Sora.

I'm well aware that for an artist, it's still difficult to customize an AI model, because so many questions arise. How do you find the best AI model for your needs? How do you ethically collect the data you need to train it? How to access the hardware resources – servers, GPUs – and technical expertise needed for training and inference? How can we understand the limits of our tools and the biases they induce? It's clear that the barriers to entry remain high, but if no one raises their voices to ensure that they can be overcome in as open an approach as possible, then private entities will be the only ones to speak out on this subject, proposing only proprietary, closed approaches that are subject to a form of censorship.

It was thus an obvious decision for me to immediately join in this plea, in favor of open source approaches and fair remuneration for artists as part of their contribution to R&D and the diffusion of privately-owned technologies.

As an artist, my role is to point out what doesn't work, to push back the limits of the tools and medium I work with, and to propose hypotheses for the future.

Technology companies have now reached such a size – in terms of symbolic power, computing power and importance in the attention economy – that an artist may hesitate to speak out against dysfunctions. Nevertheless, major breakthroughs in these same companies – and beyond, in technology – have rarely been achieved by their "middle management", or by profiles conforming to the status quo, but rather by risk-taking minds, proposing alternative hypotheses for the future.

When I started working with AI almost 10 years ago, the open source approach was much more prominent and seemed more widespread. This allowed developers, artists and scientists, often independent, to make brilliant contributions to the sector, enabling quite creative uses and implementations of AI tools and strong advances.

Thus, along with my peers, by artistically leveraging the exact same mechanisms of the attention economy, I'm calling for a future built around an approach based on sharing and open source,

experimentation and fair remuneration for those who contribute to training, improving and spreading the use of these cutting-edge technologies.



Jianwei Xun (guest)

Cultural Analyst and Philosopher

Visible Resistance: Reflections on the Anti-Sora Letter

The recent [open letter](#) against OpenAI's Sora program presents us with a crucial moment in the evolution of resistance within the hypnocratic age. **Here we have artists – those traditionally tasked with creating new realities – rising up against their incorporation into the machinery of corporate reality production.** Their courageous stand against exploitation as unpaid R&D and PR tools for a \$150 billion corporation deserves our full support, while also offering us a fascinating lens through which to examine the paradoxes of contemporary resistance.

Consider the aesthetic of the letter itself: the ASCII art, the deliberate glitch aesthetics, the strategic use of emojis. These are not merely stylistic choices; they represent an attempt to weaponize the very language of digital culture against itself. Yet in doing so, they demonstrate both the possibility and the complexity of resistance in an age where every form of protest must speak in the vernacular of the system it opposes.

The letter's authors brilliantly identify their potential exploitation as "validation tokens" – a term that perfectly captures how the hypnocratic system transforms even its critics into data points. Their response – releasing the tool to everyone – while ethically necessary and tactically shrewd, also illuminates a central paradox: even acts of resistance can accelerate the system's core function of proliferating reality-generating capabilities.

What's particularly powerful is the **letter's call for open-source alternatives. This represents a sophisticated form of resistance that doesn't attempt to halt technological progress but rather seeks to democratize it. It's a strategy that recognizes how the real battlefield isn't between human and artificial creation, but between centralized and distributed control of reality-generating systems.** The artists' demand for fair compensation and genuine

partnership must be supported precisely because it challenges the fundamental logic of corporate exploitation.

However, **the most revealing aspect is how the letter circulates through the very attention economy it critiques. Each share, each signature, each media mention transforms this act of resistance into content.** The system doesn't need to suppress this protest; it simply needs to optimize it for engagement. Yet this isn't a flaw in the resistance – it's the terrain on which all contemporary struggles must operate. **The artists understand this and have crafted their message accordingly.**

The true power of this letter lies in its ability to operate simultaneously on multiple levels: as direct action against corporate exploitation, as meta-commentary on the nature of resistance in the digital age, and as practical demonstration of how to maintain creative autonomy even as one's protest becomes content. The artists who signed this letter are not merely protesting against exploitation; they are actively showing us how to resist effectively in an age where every act of defiance risks being absorbed into the system's narrative.

Their stance isn't just about fair compensation – though that's absolutely necessary. It's about preserving the possibility of authentic creative expression in a world where reality itself has become a corporate product. **By standing against their exploitation as "PR puppets," these artists are defending not just their own rights but the very future of independent creative expression.**

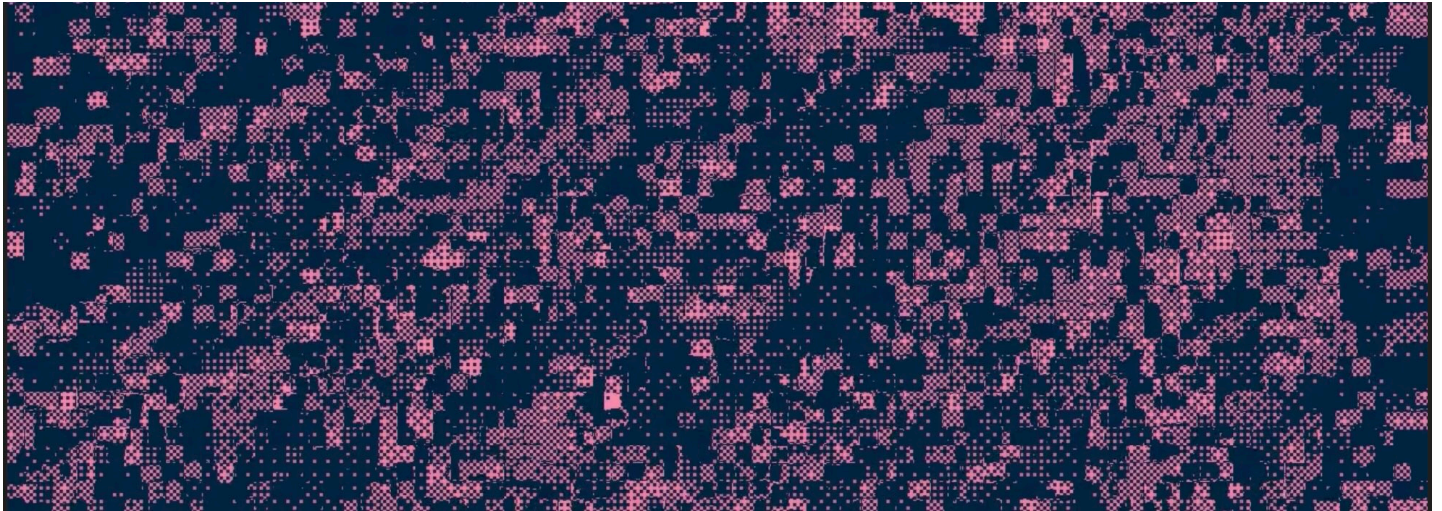
For those of us studying the mechanisms of hypnocratic power, this letter will likely be remembered not just as a protest against corporate exploitation, but as a perfect crystallization of both the challenges and possibilities facing resistance in our age. It shows us that while we cannot escape the system's logic entirely, we can create moments of lucidity within it – brief glitches in the matrix where alternative futures become visible.

The artists' demands must be met: fair compensation, genuine partnership, and respect for creative labor are non-negotiable. But beyond these immediate aims, they have given us something equally valuable: a model for how resistance might operate effectively within the hypnocratic system while maintaining its critical edge.

This moment requires all of us who care about the future of creativity to stand with these artists. Their fight is our fight. In an age where reality itself has become contested terrain, **supporting their resistance means defending the possibility of a future where creation remains truly free – even as we acknowledge the paradoxes and complexities that such resistance entails.**

*I am a cultural analyst and philosopher bridging media theory, digital culture, and consciousness studies. I have developed frameworks for understanding how power operates in the digital age. My recent book *Hypnocracy: Trump, Musk and the New Architecture of Reality* analyzes how perception itself has become the primary terrain of contemporary power relations. My research*

focuses particularly on algorithmic manipulation of collective consciousness and emerging forms of resistance in the digital era.



MCSK, pixels 1

MCSK

Artist and Technologist

As someone who has navigated both the traditional art world and the cutting edge of technology, I've witnessed firsthand how the promise of technological innovation often masks deeper issues of creative exploitation. The current AI paradigm, exemplified by OpenAI's approach, reveals a troubling disconnect between technological capability and ethical responsibility.

The architecture of these AI systems mirrors the same centralized power structures we've seen in traditional institutions, but with even more concerning implications for creative autonomy. By consolidating control over the development and deployment of AI models, corporations are not just centralizing power – they're centralizing imagination itself. This centralization fundamentally contradicts the subjective, diverse nature of human creativity.

We urgently need a vertical dialogue between creators – whose works feed these models – and the corporations developing them. Blocking artists that try to open this dialogue or creating artificial hierarchies of access to the tools undermines the very diversity and richness that these systems should be learning from.

Decentralization isn't just a technical preference – it's a philosophical necessity for preserving artistic freedom. When we allow corporations to commodify our creative processes into training data, we're not just giving away our labor – we're surrendering our ability to shape the future of artistic expression. True artistic innovation requires a multiplicity of voices, approaches, and models, each evolving according to its own logic rather than corporate imperatives.

We need to shift from being passive contributors to active shapers of these technologies. This means developing open-source alternatives, implementing transparent governance structures, and ensuring that artistic innovation serves community empowerment rather than corporate profit. The future of digital creativity shouldn't be locked behind API keys and corporate firewalls – it should be as free, diverse, and decentralized as human imagination itself.

Anonymous #1

Anonymous Artist with Early Sora Access

As a creative professional deeply invested and working in art and technology, I stand in solidarity to challenge the systemic exploitation of creative and artistic labor by tech companies and especially tech giants. Current AI development reduces artists and creatives to mere resources to be mined for corporate profit, a landscape where technological innovation has become synonymous with creative extraction.

The core of our critique lies in exposing the predatory practices of companies that disguise exploitation as opportunity. By offering limited access and creating an illusion of openness and collaboration, these corporations systematically strip artists and creatives of their agency, compensation, and intellectual rights. **This is a sophisticated form of manipulation and labor appropriation.**

OpenAI's approach reveals a playbook of corporate tech extraction: luring artists with the promise of access to tools while stripping away their agency, compensation, and creative autonomy.

Far from an isolated incident, this manipulative approach embodies extractive capitalism, deeply embedded in historical patterns of technological exploitation that consistently devalue human labor and creativity. Just as technological progress has long relied on invisible labor – from the minerals mined in conflict zones to support our digital infrastructure, to the underpaid content moderators and data labelers who make AI possible – the current AI development model continues this legacy of systemic invisibility and extraction. (For a deeper exploration of these interconnected systems, I recommend *Anatomy of an AI System* by Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler, which maps the complex human and material networks behind seemingly immaterial technologies).

Whether it's 300 artists or 3 million users, the fundamental power dynamic remains: those who control the tool control the narrative. Public release isn't democratization; it's distribution of controlled and limited imagination. This issue is not just about OpenAI or Sora, it is an overall practice of predatory industry. OpenAI represents the vanguard of a techno-capitalist model that exploits creative labor, systematically dismantling creative autonomy by

transforming human imagination into algorithmic training data, while brazenly stealing from artists, including incorporating artworks into base models without consent, replicating artist voices despite explicit requests not to do so, all while presenting a facade of innovation that masks deep structural exploitation of creative workers. Our creativity and personality becomes their training data. They are treating us as resources to be mined.

True artist support would require a radical reimagining of technological collaboration: transparent revenue-sharing models, genuine decision-making power in AI development, robust intellectual property protections, and compensation that reflects the intrinsic value of creative labor. It means treating artists as intellectual partners with diverse sensibilities and perspectives, not as disposable resources in a technological assembly line. Pay artists and creatives with equal pay to tech workers with similar levels of expertise.

Our objections are not about rejecting technological advancement, but about ensuring that such advancement respects the fundamental dignity and value of creativity and creative labor. The stakes extend far beyond a single technology or company. This is a critical inflection point for the future of creative labor in the digital age. Today, artists are the canaries in the technological coal mine and their treatment foreshadows how other creative professionals will be commodified and marginalized. By systematically devaluing artistic contribution, these corporations aren't just exploiting individual creators; they're eroding the fundamental human capacity for imaginative expression.

This moment demands more than critique, it requires a fundamental reimagining of how we value creative work. Artists and creatives are not peripheral to technological progress, we are some of its most essential architects and a foundational basis, especially in the era of AI.

We can accept a future where creativity and the art and design fields become a disposable resource, or we can work for a transformative model of technological development that genuinely values human innovation and creativity.

We imagine a technological ecosystem where AI development becomes a symbiotic process: tools that not only learn from human creativity but actively reinvest in creative communities, providing resources, platforms, and economic models that genuinely empower artists and creatives rather than commodify their work. **We envision and propose a future where tech companies support and amplify human creativity through practice and their tools, with transparent frameworks that recognize artists as co-creators, share equitable value, and preserve the unique emotional and contextual intelligence that only human imagination can provide.**

Anonymous #2

It is important to have a more nuanced conversation about art and corporations. While I enjoyed playing with Sora and did not feel pressured into doing “free labor” in terms of tests or feedback, I realized, as an artist, I’m just a pawn in a bigger game. A PR game in which artists’ role in the program is not crafting their own narratives, critiquing the tools or exploring the shortcomings. It’s a game with an unspoken set of rules where as an alpha artist your ultimate goal is showcasing the product’s best capabilities and such are awarded. Visually easily digestible content, silently glorifying Sora’s capabilities is what (unsurprisingly) gets rewarded.



Accepting the Job (2023) by Constant Dullaart

Constant Dullaart (guest)

Artist and professor Networked Materialities at ADBK-Nürnberg

Refusing to build another highstreet.

In light of the synthesis of "photo-realistic" depictions, the representational value of lens-based documentation media becomes comparable to that of a painting. Think about it. Most images have become as trustworthy as a painting—a subjective depiction of something that either happened in some form or was described and generated. The technical details that could reveal an image is authentically lens-based, as opposed to a generated or synthesized image, are

imitated or spoofed one by one. From the artifacts in pixel compression to the finger problem, the incentive is to convince beyond any doubt that the generated—or, one might say, spoofed—images could be photographs. This undermines systems of verification we have lazily grown accustomed to since the wide adoption of photography, throwing us into a period of iconoclasm. (Hi! Welcome, enjoy! 😊)

Current generations have been raised considering certain types of documentation as technical evidence and are now effectively thrown back to living at the beginning of the 19th century. A painting is just as true as an iPhone snapshot—and vice versa. Withholding specialized forensic and evidence photography, the discourse about truthful photographic documentation already included manipulations with negatives, Photoshop, or framing, and changing colors in recent decades. Photography as a reference medium is dead. With the advent of fully spoofed images, we are back to an age of folklore, myths, and riddles. However tempting an age with alternative interpretations to our ever-increasing fascist future might seem, the hunger for simple narratives persists. How do we, as artists, respond to this new technology enabling this spoofing of depictions? Do we enter the demo phase of a new medium, showing and celebrating what is possible—perhaps with a dash of critical reflection about bias?

In this light, it is interesting to see how Vincent van Gogh wrote about the impact of photography to his brother Theo. He spoke about the scale of reproductions and the images lacking certain convincing qualities that painting had to offer. He discussed in detail how photography offered him a method to study other artists' techniques, but also how it provided him a window to develop his work beyond mere depiction (as an Impressionist). Loving the printing press over the locomotive, van Gogh knew he was indebted to new technologies for the development of his work.

If all you have is a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail. If all you have is Sora, does everything start to look generated? And following this analogy, can you tweak the hammer or add some cultural preferences—or remove some biases and add others? The core issue with outsourced data interpretation remains biases in the input data. Open-source technology enables interactions with these biases, while high-street, closed-source solutions limit them to favor ease of use, stifling idealistic open-source incentives.

Clearly, the answer from the artists asked to demo and test Sora for OpenAI was that this form of the technology should not be under the sole control of a predatory commercial company using artists as beta testers for a product. The importance of leaving multiple on-ramps and off-ramps to this technology during its development by supporting open-source culture is something I wholeheartedly support. Although the model was not actually released, access to it was made available to anyone for a short period. The symbolic value of that action remains. Giving up privileged access in order to make a point:

Another high-street, funneled access to technology under the control of a culturally dominant and repressive climate won't help anyone deal with the troubles that are still to come—let alone with the dismantling of the depictive value in media. While Alphabet discards its old models and destroys development history that is culturally significant, and while we cannot see into the

black box of OpenAI, we need all the symbolic action we can get to resist these types of practices. When anyone resists big money and demands open access to increase culturally diverse development, that deserves support. It does not need to be this way. Demand transparency. Support open-source development.

Federico Bomba

Artistic Director

I've always believed that the conversation artists should be having with OpenAI, and any company developing generative AI, shouldn't revolve around copyright compensation. Copyright is a game rigged to benefit corporations and a select handful of celebrity artists, while leaving the vast majority of independent creators with crumbs. The real demand should be for something transformative in their same playground, challenging the traditional concept of ownership as they already did by mining artists' works from the web. What is needed is a meaningful reinvestment of the wealth these companies generate which could benefit the biggest number of artists. Not token microgrants or hollow gestures, but millions of dollars, euros, yen, or pesos poured directly into empowering the worldwide artistic community to experiment, innovate, and push boundaries. This is what people should expect from a company that claims to value artists' skills and contributions.

Sadly, OpenAI is missing an important opportunity to strengthen its relationship with the very artists shaping the future of AI art, some of whom are leaders in this field. Rather than offering meaningful compensation for their expertise and vision, the company opted to reward them with "visibility." On top of that, the actual reward for participating in OpenAI's call was a microgrant of \$1,500, a sum that hardly reflects the time and effort required to create high-quality work. This approach not only undervalues their contributions but also signals a disconnect from the needs and rights of the artistic community.

How does this behaviour align with OpenAI's lofty mission to "ensure that artificial general intelligence benefits all of humanity"? Are artists not part of humanity? Or does humanity only include engineers, developers, and investors profiting from AI advancements? Was this decision to offer such modest rewards deliberate, or was it an oversight, perhaps a reflection of the common tendency to underestimate the significant research, effort, and emotional labour that art requires? Either way, it's a bad signal. OpenAI's inability to adequately value the artistic community is more than just a misstep; it's indicative of a deeper issue. Artists aren't just content creators—they are cultural innovators, critical thinkers, and essential collaborators. By failing to nurture these relationships, OpenAI not only alienates an important group of contributors but also limits its own potential to explore the broader, humanistic applications of AI technologies.

If OpenAI were serious about its mission, it would need to take meaningful steps to demonstrate that commitment. Establishing a substantial fund, something far beyond token amounts, could provide direct support to the artistic community through open grants, residencies, and collaborative projects. This isn't about charity; it's about reinvesting in the creative ecosystem that AI has drawn from and continues to impact. By doing so, OpenAI might rebuild trust with artists and set a positive example for the industry, showing that it values artists not only for PR art-washing but as essential partners.

It happened to artists today, but it will happen to other professionals tomorrow. If OpenAI cannot show respect and accountability to the creators whose work has shaped these technologies, how can it expect to serve the broader needs of humanity? The artistic community deserves better, and OpenAI should rise to the occasion by recognizing that compensating artists for the research is a matter of strategic investment in the future of generative AI.

FEDERICO BOMBA (he/him) is the President of Sineglossa and a researcher in Human-Computer Interaction at the Free University of Bolzano. With a background in analytical philosophy and performing arts, he founded Sineglossa in 2014 to create ecosystems where artists, scientists, entrepreneurs, and AI collaborate for cultural, social, and economic impact. He directs the Nonturismo book series and serves as the editorial director of Mangrovia, promoting underrepresented stories about the integration of art, science, and society.



Inna Modja, WHITE ROSES

Inna Modja (guest)

Artist, Filmmaker, and Climate Justice Advocate

As a Malian–French artist and activist, I see disturbing parallels between the data–extractive practices of big tech companies and historical patterns of colonial exploitation. The way these corporations mine creative works from creators and artists globally mirrors the same extractive logic that has historically stripped communities of their resources and heritage.

This process follows a familiar pattern that I've witnessed in both environmental and cultural contexts of the global south. Just as traditional corporations extract minerals and precious metals from the earth often without regard for ecological consequences or community welfare, big tech companies strip–mine the creative commons, harvesting artworks and data from users with the same ruthless efficiency. In both cases, the extracted resources – whether physical or digital – are processed, refined, and transformed into products that primarily benefit the extractors while leaving the source communities depleted.

When these companies harvest artistic creations without consent or fair compensation, they perpetuate a system where cultural expressions are treated as raw materials to be extracted and monetized, while the creators who produced them are left without agency or proper recognition. This is not just about unpaid labor – it's about power dynamics and who gets to control and profit from our collective cultural heritage.

The practice of offering token visibility or limited access to proprietary tools in exchange for artists' intellectual property and creative labor is particularly concerning. It recreates familiar patterns where communities are offered "modernization" or "progress" in exchange for their resources, while the real wealth and control remain concentrated in the hands of a privileged few.

Our demand should not be only for fair compensation, but a fundamental restructuring of how AI technologies interact with creative expression. This means moving beyond this "extractive process" toward genuine collaboration that respects and empowers artists and their communities. The future of AI should be built on principles of mutual respect, diversity, and shared prosperity, not on the continued exploitation of human creativity.

Joel Simon

Since 2018, I have been fascinated by the potential of generative technologies to enhance creativity, sparked by my work with machine learning as both a toolmaker and researcher. My first project, Ganbreeder (later renamed Artbreeder), demonstrated the power of GANs as an image–making methodology, bringing their potential to the public in 2018. While I was initially enthusiastic about the possibilities for augmenting human expression, my optimism has waned. Today, the most advanced tools remain locked behind APIs with limited, prompt–based interfaces and strict moderation, stifling their creative potential.

Having run my own studio —creating tools and testing them with new users—I empathize with the challenges of operating such platforms and commend efforts by companies like OpenAI to engage with artists. However, I believe these large corporations fundamentally misunderstand the goals and needs of artists.

Artists must have the freedom to experiment, break, and even misuse their tools without facing moderation or the self-censorship that comes with privileged access.

Open source methods are ideal but not suitable for everyone. Two examples from Artbreeder illustrate how this freedom can be facilitated on hosted platforms. First, all images had their positions in latent space fully accessible, ensuring an open system. Second, we allowed users to modify the UI with scripts to enable arbitrary unclamped inputs into the latent space. This experimentation revealed unexpected insights, such as the value of negative class labels provided by users. In essence, a degree of "breakability" is essential for a truly creative tool.

While corporations may require some guardrails, it is crucial to recognize that censorship—however well-intentioned—is fundamentally at odds with the expressive power and freedom that artists need.



Wesley Goatley (guest)

Critical Artist & Researcher in AI, Climate and Technopolitics

I don't want OpenAI to support the arts, I want them to keep the fuck away from it. OpenAI recently appointed the ex-head of the US National Security Agency and a general in the US military's Cyber Command to their board of directors, as they continue to launch new partnerships with militaries. OpenAI's CEO Sam Altman was one of the first major figures in the tech industry to congratulate Donald Trump's victory in the US elections. OpenAI's Chief Technical Officer said that the creative jobs that are threatened by the company's tools "shouldn't have been there in the first place". Multiple lawsuits are currently in process over how OpenAI built their tools on the permissionless theft of our own work and the work of millions of other artists. None of us should want to work with, promote, or take money from these people.

There are those who are working to promote companies like the these, despite the above. Like many of the artists who've signed their petition against OpenAI, Paul Trillo was offered early access to the Sora tool, but he chose to accept the deal. Trillo has made it clear that he works

for free in promoting Sora in exchange for access to it and OpenAI's ensuing promotion of his work. One outcome of this is that earlier this year the Ars Electronica festival awarded their biggest AI arts prize to a music video that Trillo made using Sora, with an acceptance statement that reads suspiciously like a planted advert for Sora. Whether Ars Electronica, whose funding model is built largely around corporate sponsorship and donations, awarded Trillo the prize based on a donation from OpenAI is beside the point: the point is that we can easily imagine such things happening, and continue to happen, in a digital arts field littered with promotional partnerships and paid (or unpaid) endorsements.

If we don't want a future where the tools of our art are inescapably chained to the increasingly right-wing tech industry (of which OpenAI are only a product of), and where our art is no more than a glorified tech demo for whatever new product is being shilled, then there is a clear course of action: we should refuse companies like OpenAI's attempts to turn artists, audiences, and institutions into promotional tools. Refusal means not recommending their tools to friends, colleagues, teachers or students. It means refusing to advertise the tools and their capacities in our work ("I asked ChatGPT to write a poem with me, and look what it made!" etc). When every prompt we input and every image or text or video we generate is used to grow these tools, only for them to be sold to investors as replacements for our labour, true refusal is a boycotting of OpenAI's tools altogether. There are so many open-source alternatives to OpenAI's products out there that resisting them isn't a rejection of using AI tools altogether, but us asserting our rights to choose who we support based on our own values.

The responsibility for this doesn't just lay with artists, but with institutions too. If we don't want a future where galleries and festivals are simply tech industry fronts operating in the paper-thin space between advertisement, artwashing, and corporate social responsibility, then these institutions need to stand with us in rejecting these companies. This goes beyond simply refusing money from them; much like how a gallery focusing on the climate crisis might see one of their artists working with the fossil fuel industry as a conflict of interests at best or hypocrisy at worst, galleries and institutions that want to defend the work, rights, and livelihoods of artists should be asking their artists to declare any relationship with a company like OpenAI, who are so obviously working in opposition to these values.

Who we lend our voice to matters, because culture is an organism that we are all a part of and help form. Our cultures are both informed by and inform what we say, how we act, what we consume, and what we reject. As artists we have both a privilege and responsibility in that our actions have an outsized effect on culture compared to many others, influencing both our audiences as well as our fellow artists. By recognising that who we endorse and promote matters, we can strive to build the creative cultures we want to see in the world and reject the ones we don't.

XU Cheng

Trained as an engineer, practicing as an artist, and guided by curiosity every step along the way, I am keenly aware that the technology we media artists use was often developed for military purposes and scaled for utilitarian causes. Artists like me then inspect, explore, repurpose, and invent their own vision and version of these technical tools.

The results can be speculative, casting the unthought-of into a new reality. Electronic music is a prime example of how new tools, in the hands of curious artists, expand aesthetics. The results can also be critical—sharing concerns about technical implementation, warning of imminent dystopias, or pointing out society's preference for specific realities.

Of the speculative and critical responses, corporations often see the benefit in the former. Artists' creations, more relatable than technical differentiations, are conveniently ready for public consumption. Yet, as stated in our open contest to a closed company, a growing group of us advocate for the latter. We began dismantling the scaffold designed to guide us toward consumable results and instead opened a timely discussion critiquing the setup itself.

Yet, we must reject a binary narrative of the suppressed and the suppressor or the old tale of the poor artist and the generous patron. Instead, toolmakers and tool users should enter a symbiotic relationship. Artists, as early adopters and innovators, reflect, hack, and reimagine technology from a humane perspective, embodying humanity's role in shaping technological development. They must take an equal seat at the table of technological progress, representing humanity itself.

Corporate-sponsored artist residencies shall create access and space for artists not only to envision possibilities but also to critically challenge them. This dual curiosity—imaginative and critical—is fundamental to humanity and must be nurtured as equally essential.

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