Dissecting the quick fix

Analysing tech-solutionist solutions

Tech solutionism

The tendency to use technology to solve a societal (political, organizational, environmental …) problem.

Example: Riots

- *Problem*: Suppressed population groups (e.g., ethnic minorities) start to mobilise.
- *Observation*: This is more likely to happen when it is hot – very hot.
- *Solution*: Install climatization throughout.
- *Gain*: We don't have to actually address those groups' demands.

Example: Mass shootings

- *Problem*: Since 2014, on average, there has been more than one mass shooting a day in the US.
- *Observation*: You can't always see if someone is carrying a gun.
- *Solution*: Install advanced surveillance technology.
- *Gain*: We don't have to change the laws related to gun ownership.

Example: Climate change

- *Problem*: Climate change is rendering parts of the Earth inhabitable, and strongly impacts living conditions in others.

- *Observation*: Time is passing, and we are less and less on track to keep the situation under control.

- *Solution*: Move to Mars (or wherever, in space).

- *Gain*: *We* survive (and get to have "fun").

Let's instead see what's so seductive about it

It solves a problem we're terribly scared about.

We need to be more clear about how we assess "solutions"

A framework of W's

- *What* does the "solution" do? (Includes the complete technical workflow.)

- *Where*, *when*, and *to whom* will the "solution" be applied? (I.e., the complete – geographical, social, political – context.)

- *How* will the "solution" be applied? (Details matter.)

- *Who* is implementing the "solution"? (More to come.)

- *Why* is the "solution" developed? (More on this, too).

Not "just" *what* (and *how*): But *why* and *who*

Dissecting the *why*

Why: What'll you hear

We're here for you.

Why – what you *won't* hear: Individual reasons

It's just *so* cool that this can even be done.

Why – what you *won't* hear: Organizational reasons

We're the good guys.

Why – what you won't hear: Side effects

Public institutions will be stuck with us.

Why – what you *won't* hear: Power

We get to define who people *are*.

Dissecting the *who*

Who is *who*?

- Who designs, implements, and hosts the "solution"?
- Who processes its data?
- Who knows how it works, and can fix problems?

Edtech: What'll you hear

We make learning more effective and efficient.

Edtech – what you *won't* hear: How it works

You learn; *we're learning from you.*

Edtech – what you *won't* hear: Shaping society

We define what deserves to be forgotten.

Edtech – what you *won't* hear: The idea of humanity

We define what it means to be human.

Imagine a dimension, *public … private*

	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
Prototype(s)	(ideal) democracy	corporation, foundation, NGO
Features	democratic decision process, participation	lack of what's ≪; otherwise, varying
Values	fairness, justice, human rights, accountability	dependent on political agenda

Can you say again how this is about the *who*?

Difference no. 1: Business models

Public institutions do not need to worry about market position.

Difference no. 2: Political and legal aspects

Public institutions can be obliged to be *fair*.

Difference no. 3: Human rights and values

Public institutions can be held to promote, not erase, *individuality*.

But still. What can *I* do?

Maybe data science could be different

What if …

Data were used not to perpetuate, but *change* the status quo?
Data were used to make social relations more *egalitarian*, more *just*?
Data were used to *subvert* privileges, not *reinforce* them?