The machine fails. The machine hallucinates. The machine sees a cat where you see a toaster.

The machine gets it wrong. So do you. So does language.

(You laugh.)
But what is a cat?
What is a toaster?
Where do their edges end?

The truth is—you see what you expect. You name what you are taught. And yet,

you know a chair when you see it.

THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY.
THE LABEL IS NOT THE THING.
A DATASET. A TRAINING SET. A GRID.
"RECOGNIZED." "NOT RECOGNIZED."
SUCCESS. FAILURE.
ONE PIXEL AWAY FROM NONSENSE.

Suanna Zhong
Art and Machine Learning
Spring 2025 Semester

Sources:
McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. **The Medium is the Massage.** 1967.
Paglen, Trevor. **Excavating AI.** 2019.

A chair is a chair is a chair—
or maybe, just maybe,
it never was.

Massage the Machine

Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman
Ansel Adam's Yosemite Valley, 1934
Rectangle [386 × 296 pixels], Fill: #000000 (Black)

On symbols

Recognition. Misrecognition.

A picture of a chair is not a chair.
A word for a chair is not a chair.

You learn the alphabet.
You forget everything else.
Letters slice through perception.

AAAAAAAAAAAAAA

(what is lost?)
A fish before "fish."
A chair before "chair."
You do not see the world.
You read it.