

# Reclaiming Agency in the Age of AI

## Open-Source Tools, Community Power, and Creative Resistance

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# Line-up

## 1 The Power of Powers

- The Beast of the Sea: False Power — Technology
- The Beast of the Earth: False Prophets — Propaganda

## 2 The Corporate AI

- You Will Know Them by Their Fruits...
- The Dominion
- The Signs

## 3 Get the Power Back!

- Code Locally—Think Globally

## 4 Cocreating with AI: MARE (2025)

# The Problem

- 1 **agent** is "a being with the capacity to act", **agency** = "exercise of manifestation of the capacity" [Sch19]
- 2 *the standard conception of action* = the agent acts intentionally, the agency consists in "the performance of intentional actions"; the intentionality is fundamental (agent-causation)
- 3 the problem: if we act creatively, do we have a control over the chain of actions if the major part is **the black box of AI**?
- 4 the solution: the unpredictable AI black box "does not impede the recognition of the users' control, as users possess the capability for artistic imaginery thinking to direct the entire creation process" [LH25] = collaboration, co-creation, shared agency
- 5 *Therefore*: there is hardly the problem the artistic control *per se*, but who is in the control of AI ("foreign intentionality/power")



**Figure 1:** French *Apocalypse Tapestry*, 1377–1382, source: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, Wikicommons

## Section 1

# The Power of Powers



- In Revelation (13:1–10) the Beast of the Sea persecutes the people and rules the world
- The theory of French sociologist, philosopher, theologian, anarchist and resistance fighter Jacques Ellul (1912–1994) [Ell64]
- **La technique** becomes autonomous — it is not humanity ruling technology, but the technology rules the humanity (rationality, effectivity, algorithms, project logic)

- In Revelation (13:11–18) the Beast of the Earth exercises the authority of the Sea Beast through signs, wonders and convinces people to worship it
- According to Jacques Ellul [Ell73] this beast resembles **propaganda**, the communication mechanism of *la technique* (the communication has to be *effective, rationalised*)
- *Propaganda* destroys the ethics – not dialogical, democratic, personal – but monological, expert-based (what is right or good is based on a large-scale technocratic top-down communication) = **algorithm**



## Algorithm!

$$Q = \frac{1}{2m} \sum_{v,w} \left[ A_{vw} - \frac{k_v k_w}{2m} \right] \delta(c_v, c_w)$$

*Modularity Q, which is used to detect user communities.*

*This is how the Beast operates = the message is formed for a particular echo chamber recognized by this algorithm*



## Section 2

# The Corporate AI

- 1 power concentration and lock-in, non-transparency
- 2 regulatory capture — intense lobbying
- 3 surveillance and privacy harms — big data
- 4 copyright enclosure
- 5 bias, discrimination, democratic harms, inequality
- 6 labor displacement, gender (women represent only 20 % of tech employees in AI [UNE])
- 7 environmental harm
- 8 opacity and weak accountability (legal frame (EU) 2024/1689 [Act24])

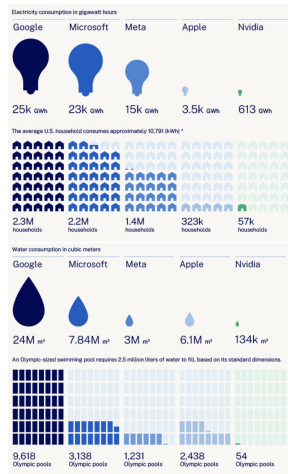
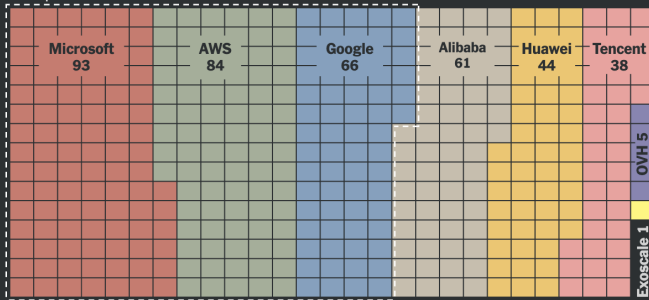


Figure 2: Source [25]

### FEW COMPANIES CONTROL A.I. COMPUTING

Tiles show total availability zones for A.I. offered by each company, a metric used by researchers as a proxy for A.I. data centers.

American companies



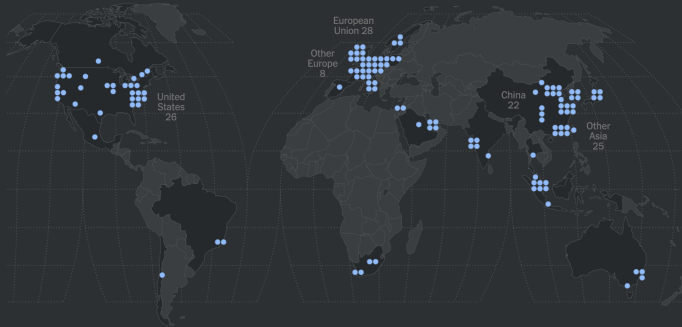
Source: Oxford University

**Figure 3:** Source New York Times / Oxford University [Sat+25]

# The Global A.I. Divide

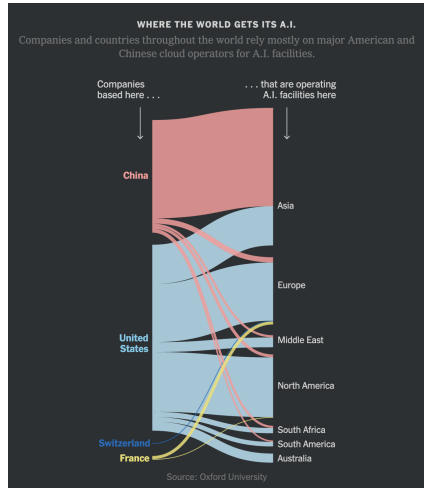
## WHERE A.I. DATA CENTERS ARE LOCATED

Only 32 nations, mostly in the Northern Hemisphere, have A.I.-specialized data centers.



Source: Oxford University • Note: Count of data centers in China excludes facilities in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

**Figure 4:** Source New York Times / Oxford University [Sat+25]



**Figure 5:** Source New York Times / Oxford University [Sat+25]

- machine bias — covert racism, stereotypes (minorities, women), language — dialects, minorities [Hof+24; Ang+22]
- surveillance, big-data exploitation, privacy issues
- algorithms in distributions, research = reproducing biases, click-baits, etc.



Figure 6: Image from [Fer24]

## Section 3

# Get the Power Back!

# Open-source movement

- Before 1974 all software public-domain (no licences), after 1983 Apple vs. Franklin (Apple against the clone of Apple II) code = literary work [App83]
- 1985, Richard Stallman — GNU project, mass collaboration, aim: freedom, transparency and control ("When we speak of free software, we are referring to freedom, not price.") GPLv3; Copyleft forbids proprietization (GPL, AGPL, MPL), Creative Commons
- In OS/free software movement, it is the community of users & programmers who share responsibility and control; as you have access to the source code, the "AI black box" gains (at least in part) transparency



**Figure 7:** GNU mascot  
by Aurelio A. Hackert  
([www.gnu.org](http://www.gnu.org))



# Examples

- **Hugging Face** — pre-trained models
- **PyTorch** — an open-source AI framework
- **LLaMA** — LLM by Meta (Open Source with some restrictions)
- **ComfyUI** — image generator
- **Coqui TTS** — open-source text-to-speech
- **XTTS** — high-quality voice cloning
- **CogVideoX** — generating video

# Code Locally—Think Globally

- 1 Its safe — security control (no internet needed)
- 2 Cuts network energy & platform overhead
- 3 Reduces pressure on hyperscale facilities (power & water)
- 4 Re-using hardware — extends hardware life (reuse & upcycle rather than buy new)
- 5 Avoids training giant models (LoRA, REFT)

## Section 4

# Cocreating with AI: MARE (2025)

Short experimental movie project about refugees in Mediterran see:

- Experimented with XTTS + Coqui TTS, tacotron2-DDC model reading Ibn Hamdis' poem from his *dīwān* (12th Century, Sicilian-Arab poet in exile), used node.js / JavaScript for scripting
- The generative AI's female voice was unable to correctly read part of the poem — mumbling
- From the initial intention disturbing and unwanted = struggling with the technology, then accepted its agency = TTS becoming co-creator
- The distorted, mumbling voice = waves, distorting the lives of refugees

## Mare (2025)

A short experimental film (HD 5:16  
min.) by Jan Motal & the  
Collective



<https://avantwhatever.xyz/w/gmgBfXAyKJTD6Ng7QKLD35>

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