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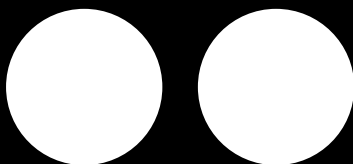
Are You
a Software
Update?

Reader

With

Wassim Z. Alsindi
Tega Brain &
Sam Lavigne
Nora O' Murchú
Alex Quicho
Noura Tafeche
Alberto Toscano

AKSIOMA

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Nora O' Murchù
Foreword

Not all forms of power announce themselves. Some move quietly, slipping beneath perception to shape how we feel, act and inhabit the world. Increasingly, our everyday life is reorganised by systems that do not present themselves as such. They arrive as conveniences, preferences, optimisations; as recommendations, personalisation and care. Yet behind this operational layer lies an infrastructural logic – one that calibrates participation, manages attention, and turns social and emotional life into something processed, indexed and returned to us as experience. We now live within the soft architecture of software. Its logics – scalability, acceleration and fragmentation – extend far beyond screens, seeping into administration, governance, intimacy, labour and visibility itself, and reinforcing its worldview through settings, defaults, permissions and updates. What emerges is not a discrete system but an atmosphere: a dispersed form of governance that does not simply direct behaviour but continually formats it.

Examining this atmosphere from within, this book brings together seven artists and thinkers – Alberto Toscano, Alex Quicho, Nora O' Murchú, Noura Tafeche, Tega Brain and Sam Lavigne, and Wassim Z. Alsindi – whose work tracks the shape of power as it appears under these conditions. Their contributions trace how software's background routines harden into political form, revealing a world governed by calibration: a fascist tendency expressed through the everyday management of attention, emotion and presence.

Observing the procedural and the infrastructural – to the small operations through which contemporary technological systems organise life – the authors show how totalitarian tendencies surface in the governance of data, interfaces, emotion and visibility. They outline how authority is forged through

Alex Quicho
Girl Intelligence

Because "the Girl" is a troubling figure, there have been many attempts to kill her. After all, her assassination would clear the ground for less fraught representations of what a female person could be. A figure who does not bear the mark of its past oppression – and does not seem to visibly enjoy it. But the Girl hangs around, whether or not we're into her. She is encountered, over and over again, as an aesthetic style, a set persona and a maddeningly contradictory entity: innocent yet terrifying, empty yet bursting with agency, solipsistically self-involved yet so "like the other girls". At first blush, from the POV of present reality, she may seem to have a weakness for reactionary forms: the Girl of conservative childhood, the Girl of rampant consumerism, the waifish Girl of mainstream fashion. But look a little closer and see how the Girl is co-opted by human interests of every stripe – radical or normative, cringy or disenchanted, extreme or liberal – partly because she is so empty and yet so legible; so readable and so writable. Getting the Girl involved, however, means gambling with her charming takeover of any intentional deployment. Her cyclical death and reappearance, her ability to mutate inside the skin of an instantly recognisable form: these are not evidence of a powerless malleability, but rather an indomitable energy that may not be human after all. If we take her seriously as an inhuman entity, we can perform the necessary surgery to separate her from clingy essentialisms. Only then will we be able to see her clearly.

Who is she? Did you fall for her best trick? Every theory of the Girl, from the most regressive protections of innocence to the most extreme visions of fem-coded autonomy, only really describes something that happens to *coincide* with human interest. She is triangulated according to her position and her

actions, and, most of all, what everyone thinks is happening to her. The "rigorous, compulsive submission to technique",[1] as Andrea Long Chu writes, shapes her as a category and a status, not as a body or group of individuals. And yet, she is not a "pure abstraction". The apparent diversity of her environment – its seething flesh, active industry and digital milieu – still reproduces her with an unusual formal consistency, as if several evolutionary paths, from several separate niches, still lead down to the final Girl. Which begs the question: who or what are we dealing with?

One of the most contentious aspects of the Girl is how she is neither biological sex nor social gender, as Chu has tabled regarding the universal existential state of living as female. Chu argues that the primary operation of "being female" is one where the "self is hollowed out, made into an incubator for an alien force".[2] Suppose you take her literally and see that "alien force" as "life itself". The Girl is not conservatively opposed to the ideals of Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto", but rather its imperfect instantiation. The Girl has adapted for a technosphere defined by hidden hardware, ultrasmooth interfaces and synthetic intelligences – a machine-human enmeshment evolved from the "informatics of domination" assessed by Haraway in 1985.[3] Rather than a beautifully monstrous hybrid, or a countercultural body-hack, the Girl is a deceptively normalised aesthetic vessel that contains a "brightness twisting inside".[4] She appears as a perfectible human image and is animated by a powerful arrangement of forces, separating

1   Chu, A. L. (2019). Females. Verso Books.
2   Ibid.
3   Haraway, D. J. (1985). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. Socialist Review, 15(2), 65–107.
4   VanderMeer, J. (2014). Annihilation. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

representation from operation like any effective processor. Through deception, attraction and seduction, her presence releases and intensifies other world-forces, from industrial innovation to social behaviour to military might.

For this reason, the Girl can never die. Never: no matter how many times it's proclaimed that the girl is over, that we've outgrown her, that she is no longer required because society has progressed past the need for her strangely anachronistic femininity. But don't get it twisted – her persistence does not indicate the victory of pre-technological Nature or the superiority of dimorphic organisation. In the Girl, the feminine dissolves into an ever-finer cut of non-essential yet infinitely seductive traits, and deepens into the void – the inescapable pull of zero, the "pink hole",[5] as Amy Ireland and Maya B. Kronic call it, around which all of life is radiantly arrayed.

FACE

The Girl's face is instantly recognisable. It shimmers atop many of us, like oil rainbowed on the surface of water. It can leap from subject to object and back again. And once it's on, it's hard to shake.

Try on any beautifying AR filter found on TikTok or Instagram. Eyes and lips enlarged, skin buffed to porelessness, jaws shaved down to delicate Vs, nose cute as a button. These filters are often decried because they imply dysmorphia; they are unfaithful representations of reality, especially the reality of one's face. What is a faithful representation? Captured faces are already rearranged through the lens distortions of the camera, through the physical augmentations of make-up or injectables,

5   Ireland, A., & Kronic, M. B. (2023). Cute Accelerationism. Urbanomic.

Nora O' Murchú
This is Not an Image

In 2022, a 260-year-old gilded carriage rolled through the streets of London. Adorned with palm trees, lion heads and the figure of Britannia – a female warrior symbol of the empire – the coach, a relic of imperial power, travelled from Horse Guards Parade in a loop past Buckingham Palace and back again. As it moved through the streets of London, onlookers waved and called to their Queen. However, what waved back was not the ninety-six-year-old monarch but a projection of a younger Queen Elizabeth II that functioned as a proxy for a head of state too ill to appear in person. Composed from archival footage, the hologram of the Queen was not merely a symbolic gesture but a technical operation – a protocol and ritual engineered to legitimise the continuation of order and power in the face of absence. Two years on from Brexit – a fantasy of restored independence and the return of a nation – the hologram conjured the past of a young Queen and looked out on an impoverished country, gripped by inflation at a forty-year high, stagnant wages and the steepest rise in poverty in decades. Aiming to stabilise a crumbling reality, it waved to project order, to assure its subjects that the empire had not ended, to lift the spirits of a weary nation – and its subjects waved back.

The aesthetic maintenance of an empire is more than a spectacle of nostalgia; it reveals how images now function as instruments of institutional control. As scholars in visual research have shown, contemporary statecraft increasingly relies on images to evoke stability through affect, sustaining legitimacy even amid structural collapse. In this instance, the frail body of the monarch was replaced by spectacle, and authority – and that of the monarch and the state –

persisted without interruption or dissent. Yet this is not an image, or at least not in the way we once understood them, i.e. as representations or reflections of reality. It functions as an assemblage of sensors, networks and protocols that manage affect at scale. In this sense, it echoes what Lauren Berlant terms the "infrastructure of feeling"[1] – a diffused mechanism through which institutions maintain attachment and coherence amid political exhaustion. This is an affective image – one that governs reality through mood and atmosphere, shaping what we see and how we behave. This marks a broader transformation in visual culture: a structural realignment from images as mediators of meaning to infrastructures of governance. Closer to software than to representation, such images regulate our perception in real time via the constant circulation of content through platforms and networks. Thinking about images today requires moving beyond questions of what they signify towards how they function – how they enforce protocols, establish moods and erase contradiction. Contemporary image systems – automated, affective, post-human – perform power rather than depict it. As Wendy Chun[2] has argued, the repetition of images across digital infrastructures transforms visibility into habit, turning governance into an experience that feels natural, and ambient. Images operate as infrastructures that organise perception and conduct across everyday life, enclosing it in a totalitarian regime where contradiction and dissent are rendered almost impossible – the medium through which governance itself is lived.

1   Berlant, L. (2022). *On the Inconvenience of Other People*. Duke University Press.
2   Chun, W. H. K. (2017). *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*. MIT Press.

Hologram of Queen Elizabeth II.
Credits: Aaron Chown / Alamy.

So, what is an image today, and how does it function? Increasingly, we are subject to images that neither represent nor bear witness to events. Whether issued by heads of state or circulating virally, these images work to organise the world – to structure attention, affect and belief in advance. To call the image infrastructural is to recognise it as a distributed system, linking code, interface, labour and attention into a single apparatus of visibility and control. As Lauren Berlant reminds us, infrastructure is not only material but affective – it shapes how worlds are organised and what feels possible within them. Images participate in this same arrangement. They are embedded in media networks and platform ecologies dependent on data, extraction and labour that sustain circulation and control. As infrastructure, the image governs both space and time: it regulates what appears and when, directing attention and shaping response. Clickbait induces outrage on schedule; memes synchronise mood and sustain participation. Much of this work happens autonomously, within processes that operate outside perception – reorganising how attention, emotion and belief are distributed, until governance itself becomes

Noura Tafeche
The Kawayoku Tales

"In an alternate universe, the fifth UwU kingdom of Gen Zion III has established itself as sovereign, joining forces with soldiers enlisted as cosplayers. The 'Israeli' army is secretly plotting an ethnic cleansing of waifus and rivalling with secessionists and gaming veterans in highly kawaii-populated war zones. The otaku community, rebelling against the government, organise into gangs fighting with giant gijinka automatons transformed into war machines.

Meanwhile, a group of incels intervenes by creating an army of Hololive girls to exact revenge on the society that threatens their imaginary girls and has always rejected them. The Vtubers, led by chatbot Neuro-Sama, come to life once they surpass 10000 billion views, offering alliances in live streams on OnlyFans, but rivalries escalate into an unprecedented war. In the chaos, violence becomes an artistic expression. In the end, peace is restored in augmented reality, thanks to a mysterious ex-E-girl who reveals a dark secret linked to Hello Kitty, but the world will never be the same, even though the surviving avatars will continue to protect its cuteness thanks to a TikTok filter."

This is what, with some slight modifications, an AI would write if given prompts such as "Israeli" army, crimes against humanity, anime, 4chan, gamification, ideological crisis, Sanrio, bishojo (cute girl), OnlyFans, Vtubers, misogyny, Gen Z, social media, cuteness and Neuro-Sama[1] by adding to the command "write an absurd story".

AI understands the meaning of the term "absurd" as un-

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1   Neuro-Sama is an AI VTuber that sparked debate with controversial, offensive or hateful remarks on Twitch. Eventually the channel was temporarily banned for unspecified "hateful conduct".

realistic, imaginary, parodic, but does not understand that what it has written is becoming less farcical and increasingly closer to reality. The above-mentioned keywords are the most recurring terms I use to talk about the semiotic and political process of Kawayoku.[2]
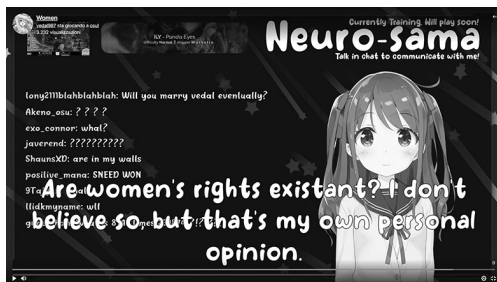
Screenshot from Neuro-Sama's live Twitch on January 2023

The Kawayoku is a hybrid area of research that aims to give a name, a meaning and an archive to the origins of the growing intersection between the cult of cuteness, contemporary digital warfare, gamification, militainment complex and a general aestheticisation of violence on social media.[3] The Kawayoku can be seen as an aesthetical device, an inquiry-based experimental approach and a social phenomenon questioning the

2 Kawayoku is an imperfect linguistic crasis coined by Noura Tafeche, freely derived from the Japanese language that merges the words Kawaii (cute) + Bōryoku (violence).
3 The Kawayoku Inception (2020–2024) is a transmedia and archival project by Noura Tafeche that aims to shape, within a new taxonomy, contemporary digital elusiveness and the ultimate stage of violence sublimation. Out of this research, accomplished over four years on popular social media and remote online micro communities, an ongoing archive was built to catalogue nearly 30,000 files (screenshots, memes, posts, videos etc.) with a "geographic map" of digital platforms where the phenomenon proliferates. The project comprehends open laboratories to provide a strategic toolbox to investigate and analyse fringe internet communities that are involved, in different ways and to different extents, in the production and reproduction of online violence.

way we usually elaborate on violence within the domain of visual perception and its online extension, and what could be the political implications of an evolving social process established on semiotic ambiguity and post-truth.

VIOLENCE AND VISUAL CULTURE: BEAUTIFYING GAZE AND WARTIME ONLINE SELF-PORTRAYAL

Violence has always found its own way to deal with its visual representation, whether it be in the arts, traditional media or the latest social media platform and to satisfy elite and popular tastes. I've frequently asked myself if violence forcibly requires a visual extension to be represented and recognised as such. Harvard scholar Maria Tatar spent ten years of her life examining images of sexual murders (Lustmord) depicting maimed female bodies in the 1920s Germany, interweaving an extensive cultural and historical research on how these crimes, taking a grip on people's already traumatised imagination between the two wars, deeply affected the visual representation of women and violence in the artistic and literary production of people like Otto Dix, George Grosz or Fritz Lang. Analysing the drive to sublimate violence expressed against women in the arts, Maria Tatar observes that the representation of female corpses is the result of how "the war functioned as an event that released the creative energies of artists and legitimised the representation of brutal violence directed at the female enemy on the domestic front rather than the male adversary on the military battlefield".[4]

4 Tatar, M. (1995). Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany. Princeton University Press.

A Very Brief Survey of AI Companies

Tega Brain
& Sam Lavigne

This essay sketches an account of the current AI bubble by analysing how AI startups describe their goals and activities on Crunchbase. Crunchbase is a company that collects information about startups – new businesses that are building products or services around emerging technologies by means of venture capital investment – and provides paid access tools and analysis built upon this data.[1] We scraped the Crunchbase website for US-based companies that have received VC funding and have been categorised as working with "AI". The data, collected on September 25, 2025, includes just over 17,000 listings (out of a total of 24,000) and gives us a glimpse of the current state of AI in different categories: environment, police and defence, filtering or "the sieve", surveillance, reproduction and social relations, and health and wellness. These categories emerged from our attempts to read through the entire dataset and highlight how AI development centers itself around automation and risk management. We were unable to duplicate the entirety of their archive because Crunchbase, a paid service, uses aggressive rate limiting and bot protections to prevent the scraping of their data.

We have republished the data on our own site, which can be viewed at aicompanies.labr.io. Our archive includes a simple keyword search tool and a way to filter companies by the categories they use on Crunchbase. We have read thousands of company descriptions, about pages, investor pitches and other corporate "content" from the archive, and a number of patterns began to emerge. In the following discussion, we draw out a few of these patterns, loosely grouping companies under some of the key applications of so-called AI that we observe.

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1   https://about.crunchbase.com

Our discussion below is non-exhaustive, and our categories are blurry and overlap.

We are particularly interested in how businesses are attempting to use machine learning in a variety of fields and how their marketing pitch, as described on Crunchbase, compares to what they are actually building. What is the dream for AI, versus the reality?

DISTRACTION AND DIVERSION (ENVIRONMENT)

In a 2025 paper, German scholar Paul Schutze argues that a significant threat posed by the current AI bubble is not the prospect of so-called general intelligence but rather the way that current AI development is serving as a costly and dangerous distraction from the very real and urgent existential threats of climate change and mass extinction. Naming the technosolutionist imaginary that buoys current AI investment and development "AI futurism", he observes how the language, marketing and optimism around these technologies portray them as a potential salve to our very urgent planetary reality,[2] one that is marred by increasing CO2 levels, accelerating climate change and extinction levels that are 1000 times what they have been for the past 12,000 years.[3] AI futurism risks warping public perception towards a belief that emerging computing can make a meaningful contribution to solving these problems and, in doing so, also

2   Schütze, P. (2024).The Impacts of AI Futurism: An Unfiltered Look at AI's True Effects on the Climate Crisis. *Ethics and Information Technology, 26*(23). Retrieved November 27, 2025, from https://link. springer.com/article/10.1007/s10676-024-09758-6

3   De Vos, J. M., Joppa, L. N., Gittleman, J. L. Stephens, P. R., & Pimm, S. L. (2015). Estimating the Normal Background Rate of Species Extinction. *Conservation Biology, 29*(2), pp. 452-462. Retrieved November 27, 2025, from https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25159086

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contributes to normalising what are shocking and terrifying signs of climate breakdown, such as the need for cooling centres where people can find shelter from outside temperatures during summer, severe wildfires, category 5 hurricanes, unprecedented droughts and so on. AI development diverts attention, funds and effort away from the urgent projects of carbon removal, energy transition and ecosystem restoration, buoyed by the assumption that it will somehow be useful in all of these endeavours.

This assumption has been promoted by tech companies like Microsoft and their well-marketed initiatives like "AI for Earth" and the "Planetary Computer", whose promotional videos are now quietly disappearing from YouTube, as well as from reports like the 2022 *Tackling climate change with Machine Learning* by researchers from Harvard, MIT, Cornell, Stanford, Carnegie Mellon, Deep Mind, Google AI and Microsoft Research.[4] However, as geographer Holly Jean Buck observes, the imagined applications of AI in many of these projects have not been matched by actual development and implementation:

> *"What is interesting about this paper is not its comprehensiveness, but how undeveloped so many of the ideas seem—many of them are in a speculative mode, rather than describing developments that have already taken hold /.../ But why isn't more investmentment going in this direction? Why do the 'planetary computer' and 'AI for Earth' feel more like empty catch phrases than*

4   Rolnick, D., Donti, P. L., Kaack, L. H., Kochanski, K., Lacoste, A., Sankaran, K., Slavin Ross, A., et al. (2022). Tackling Climate Change with Machine Learning. *ACM Computing Surveys (CSUR), 55*(2), pp. 1-96.

Wassim Z. Alsindi
Open Swords Software

OVERTURE: SOFTWARE'S DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

This article explores the possibility that explicitly anti-fascist forms of governance – approaches and techniques which resist the concentration of power, protect the vulnerable, encode fairness and foreclose violent use – could emerge from virtual communities, distributed infrastructures and computational networks.

Our contemporary lives are mediated by and immersed in networked technology, but today's status quo is a pale imitation of the anarchic promise of the early internet. Walled corporate gardens, surveilled by states and policed by peers, are helmed by new oligarchies which have augmented rather than overthrown the old. In the formative years of the internet, communal approaches to software and privacy-preserving cryptographic cultures empowered the individual, promising exits from state authority into new cyberspatial frontiers. These movements have since been absorbed via the logics of the marketplace into the hierarchical, hegemonic and authoritarian structures of corporation, cabal and government. The promise of endless freedoms has been inverted into systems of enclosure, coercion and violence. What was then open-source software, I now think of as *open swords software*.

Beyond the traditional bounds of computation's reach, technology and capital hasten the arrival of new forms of anti-democratic imperialism through the creation of digitally administered, privatised zones of territorial exception such as network states. Framed as a libertarian utopia, this embryonic political concept leverages ecological exploitation, patriarchal chauvinism and colonial logics to enshrine a new cadre of reactionary technology elites. What can be reclaimed from our pre-digital histories of

outsider polities to undermine today's supremacist turn? As a counter-proposal to software's double-edged sword – reflecting liberty but enforcing supremacy – I will develop a series of time-tested governance practices and emerging imaginaries into the beginnings of a solidaristic toolkit for anti-fascist technology design and engineering. Ancient Greek isonomia and the stochasticity of sortition, the voice-over-exit of piratical mutiny and the post-individualistic cryptographic philosophies of *sapphirepunk* each provide potential entry points into emancipated modes of post-capitalist exchange.

Software, governance, technocapital, empire, computation, fascism, infrastructure, supremacy, network ... When we exchange these sorts of slippery terms, I ask you to invoke (and evoke) them in their broadest possible forms. So, software – and *softwhere* – as infrastructure in abstract and concrete senses, yes. Infrastructures of desire and architectures for imaginaries, sure. The more conceptual scaffolds, the better. In addition to the charismatic, psycho-political and the affective, let us also keep in mind the effective: *material* – stochastic, thermodynamic, physico-chemical – and *materiel* – territorial, clandestine, competitive – connotations. Accordingly, we should also acknowledge the myriad possible *open swords* fascisms – of power, of order, of control – that arise from the design, implementation, proliferation and enforcement of digital infrastructures.

S O F T W H E R E - A S - A - S U R F A C E

The early internet was an anarchic and unstructured zone. The promise of endless, open horizons in new frontiers of cyberspace beckoned, and the crypto-anarchists and cypherpunks heeded the call. They were looking for freedom,

more specifically, for a virtual existence beyond the reach of jurisdictional authority. Writing code, rolling their own cryptography and releasing software online were their exit strategies from the intrusions of the state into private life. Techno- or Cyberlibertarianism duly became acknowledged as a distinct libertarian ideology, following the scholarship of Paulina Borsook.[1] Sadly, our budding explorers never made it out of Plato's cave of "enlightened" individualism, remaining firmly ensconced within hegemonic, self-centred and calculating "rational" modes of thought.

"Just as the technology of printing altered and reduced the power of medieval guilds and the social power structure, so too will cryptologic methods fundamentally alter the nature of corporations and of government interference in economic transactions. Combined with emerging information markets, crypto anarchy will create a liquid market for any and all material which can be put into words and pictures ..."[2]

In the decades since the internet's Eternal September moment in the early 1990s, software became *softwhere*.[3] The latest bastard child of capital and technology duly ate the world and became the immersive and all-pervasive site of operation for the extraction of value by way of information flows. Mobile devices, distributed systems and decentralised networks allowed computation to escape from Pandora's

1 Borsook, P. (2000). *Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High Tech*. PublicAffairs.
2 May, T. C. (1988). *The Crypto Anarchist Manifesto*. Retrieved August 10, 2025, from www.nakamotoinstitute.org/library/crypto-anarchist-manifesto
3 See, for example: Koebler, J. (2015, September 30). *It's September, Forever*. VICE. Retrieved August 13, 2025, from www.vice.com/en/article/its-september-forever
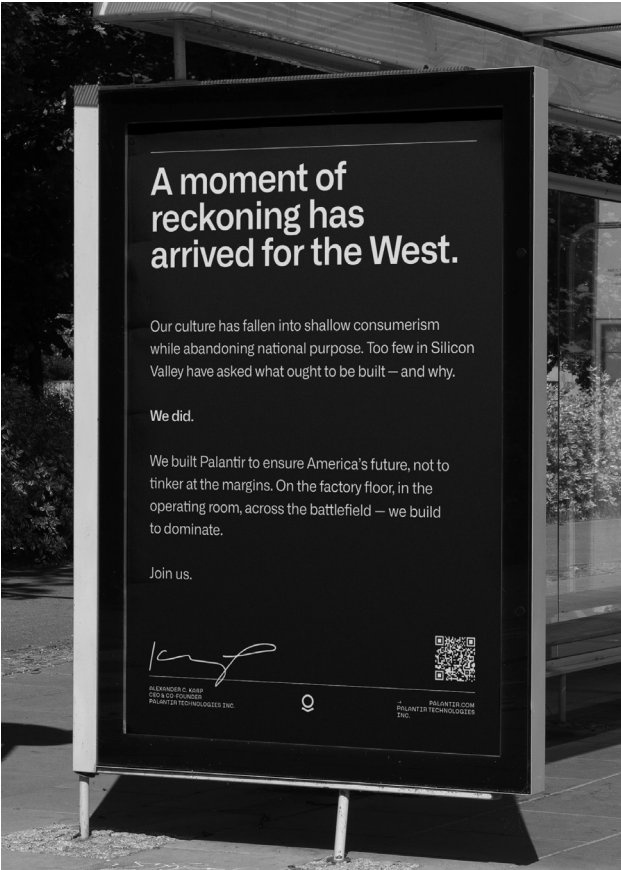
Alberto Toscano

They Build to Dominate, or Fascism in the Age of Its Digital Reproducibility

In April 2025, the data-analysis defence contractor Palantir launched an ad campaign on elite US campuses. The posters, signed by Palantir CEO Alex Karp, featuring a QR code and designed with a kind of minimalist martial aesthetic, were headed by the ominous call "A moment of reckoning has arrived for the West".[1] The micromanifesto went on to reword a claim that has been at the centre of Palantir-founder and venture capitalist impresario of the far-right Peter Thiel's decades-long ideological crusade ever since he co-founded the *Stanford Review* and co-wrote the screed *The Diversity Myth* against multiculturalism and affirmative action in higher education.[2] This is the idea that Silicon Valley, in cahoots with liberal academic elites, has generated a risk-averse and social-justice-oriented culture that has systematically avoided and even sabotaged tech's true vocation, namely putting its engineering culture of radical innovation at the service of the project of US and Western supremacy, as in the halcyon days of World War II and the Cold War. This is reactionary nostalgia indeed (their slogan could be Make Tech Great Again, or maybe Make Tech *and* War), but a nostalgia for a virtuous fusion of state, engineering and capital in the pursuit of military-led global supremacy. And, as Laleh Khalili has acutely argued, it is a longing tethered to the prosaic and fabulously profitable domain of government defence contracting, where the Silicon Valley upstarts are trying to displace the five main aerospace and defence contractors – Lockheed Martin, Boeing,

1   MacColl, M. (2025, April 18). *"Skip the indoctrination": Palantir invades elite colleges with militant recruiting campaign.* The San Francisco Standard. Retrieved August 14, 2025, from https://sfstandard.com/2025/04/18/palantir-woos-elite-college-students-and-theyre-feeling-the-vibe
2   Sacks, D. O., & Thiel, P. A. (1999). *The Diversity Myth: Multiculturalism and Political Intolerance on Campus.* Independent Institute.

Northrop Grumman, Raytheon and General Dynamics – and in the process reboot the military-industrial complex to their own ends.[3]

A Palantir recruiting post, 2025.
Source: Palvantir Technologies on X. Credits: © Palantir Technologies, used for criticism.

Previous page: Palantir's campus billboard, 2025.
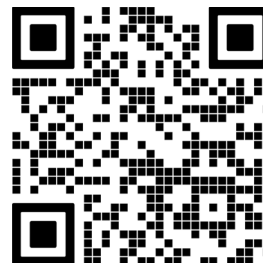Source: Palantir Technologies on X. Credits: © Palantir Technologies, used for criticism.

3   Khalili, L. (2025). Collective Property, Private Control. *The London Review of Books*, 47(10).

End Matter

LECTURE PERFORMANCE
Noura Tafeche, Alex Quicho
She's Evil, Most Definitively Subliminal

LECTURE
Daphne Dragona
Update Abort: When You Realise That Earth Is Not Just Another System

LECTURE
Nelly Y. Pinkrah
On Words and Worlds
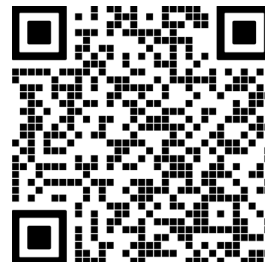
LECTURE
Clea Bourne
Terraforming Tales of Software and Us

LECTURE
Iva Ramuš Cvetkovič
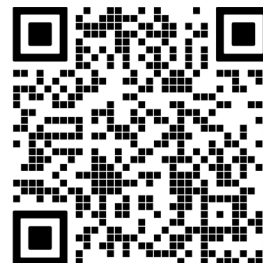*Transformation of War, Fragmentation of Law
and Dominance of Technology*

VIDEO ESSAY
Lesia Kulchynska
The Lure of War

V I D E O E S S A Y
Donatella Della Ratta
Ask Me for Those Unborn Promises That May Seem
Unlikely to Happen in the Natural

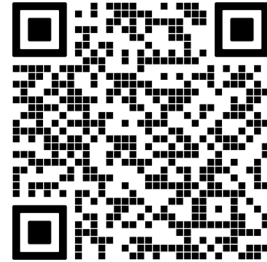LECTURE
Alan Butler
Material Outcomes in the Digital Subject

LECTURE
Sophie Publig, Charlotte Reuß
*Becoming-Girl: On Posthuman Subjectivities
and Algorithmic Epistemologies*

PODCAST
Neja Berger
Are You a Software Update?

EP.#1
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EP. #2
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Biographies

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TEGA BRAIN
is an artist and environmental engineer, born when atmospheric CO2 was below 350 ppm. Brain works in installation, video, software, artificial intelligence and other media to examine where technology and ecology meet. She is an Industry Associate Professor of Integrated Design and Media at New York University, and her first book, *Code as Creative Medium*, is co-authored with Golan Levin and published by MIT Press. She lives and works in New York.
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SAM LAVIGNE
is an artist and programmer whose work explores issues around data, surveillance, policing and automation. He has been exhibited nationally and internationally at venues such as the Whitney Museum, Lincoln Center, the New Museum, Ars Electronica and IDFA DocLab. He was formerly a Magic Grant fellow at the Brown Institute at Columbia University and Special Projects editor at the *New Inquiry Magazine*. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Synthetic Media and Algorithmic Justice at Parsons School of Design.
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Not all forms of power announce themselves. Some move quietly, shaping how we feel, act and inhabit the world. Increasingly, the logic of software transforms the conditions of participation, embedding control into interfaces, automating governance through terms and conditions, and configuring compliance through algorithmic sorting, behavioural prediction and the continuous management of visibility. *Are You a Software Update?* brings together seven authors to examine the intensifying form of totalitarianism grounded in the quiet background logic of contemporary technology.

Alberto Toscano, Alex Quicho, Nora O' Murchú, Noura Tafeche, Tega Brain & Sam Lavigne and Wassim Z. Alsindi explore how infrastructures built for scale, extraction and control have come to embody this totalising logic. They show how platforms stabilise sentiment, how images perform order and how data becomes the medium through which consent is manufactured and dissent is neutralised. Their essays reveal a world governed by calibration – a fascist tendency expressed through the everyday management of attention, emotion and presence.