

# Between the Eye and the Soil: Algorithmic Colonialism, Memory, and the Art of Refusal

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## Introduction: The Weight of Being Known

There is a particular kind of violence in being completely understood. Not the understanding that comes from love or deep listening, but the kind that reduces you to a data point, a prediction, a risk score. We live now in the age of this reductive knowing—where invisible algorithms watch our digital footprints like fortune tellers reading tea leaves, except their prophecies have teeth. They decide who gets the loan, who gets flagged at the border, whose resume disappears into a black hole, whose neighborhood gets flooded with police. These systems whisper that they are objective, that math cannot lie. But anyone who has lived on the margins knows: neutrality itself can be a weapon when it's wielded by those who've never had to question whose "normal" the numbers reflect.

Ask yourself this: what happens when technology doesn't just observe anymore, but *knows*—or claims to? When artificial intelligence stops being a tool in human hands and becomes something closer to an oracle, complete with its own liturgy of classification, prediction, and control? The algorithms tracking our movements today, harvesting our data, anticipating our desires before we feel them—they promise us efficiency, convenience, a smoothly managed world. But there's another story here, one that echoes through centuries. For those who carry the memory of empire in their bones, these gleaming systems trigger a deeper alarm.

Are we watching the birth of a new colonialism? Not the kind with ships and flags, but something more insidious—a digital, algorithmic coloniality that extends five-hundred-year-old structures of domination into the realm of data and code? And if we are, then how might we resist? Not just with better regulations or encrypted apps, but with something older and more powerful: memory itself. Place-based knowledge. The art of strategic opacity. The wisdom of knowing when to refuse to be known at all.

This essay traces these questions through territories both theoretical and visceral. Drawing from decolonial thought, surveillance studies that center blackness and indigeneity, and the work of artists who treat research as a form of creative resistance, we'll explore how artificial intelligence tangles with colonial power—and how we might begin to untangle ourselves. The path forward lies somewhere between the eye and the soil: between the drone's omniscient gaze and the earth's patient memory, between what algorithms claim to see and what our bodies know to be true.

# Colonial Modernity and the Algorithmic Frontier: Old Wine, New Bottles

Let's start with a confession that shouldn't be necessary but is: modern technology is not neutral. It never was. Its gleaming surfaces and promises of innovation hide something older, something with deeper roots. Western modernity—the whole project of "progress" that gave us science, industry, and now artificial intelligence—has always been, as decolonial scholars insist, inseparable from the logic of coloniality. You cannot separate the Enlightenment from the slave trade, the scientific method from the plantation system, the university from the missions that destroyed indigenous knowledge systems. The rhetoric was always lofty—civilization, reason, progress—but the foundation was terror and theft on a global scale.

From the moment European ships crossed the Atlantic, imperial powers did more than seize land and bodies. They declared war on knowledge itself. They erected a hierarchy that positioned their own scientific-rational worldview as universal, the only valid lens through which to understand reality. Everything else—the intricate ecological knowledge of indigenous peoples, the sophisticated mathematical systems of the Islamic world, the cosmological insights of African traditions—was demoted to quaint folklore at best, dangerous superstition at worst. As Walter Mignolo shows us, colonial epistemology ordered all forms of knowledge on an evolutionary ladder "from the traditional to the modern, from barbarism to civilization, from the community to the individual, from the Orient to the Occident," with European science perched triumphantly at the top.

The trick—and this is crucial for understanding our algorithmic present—was hiding the trick. Europe claimed to speak from nowhere, from a "zero point" of pure objectivity that transcended culture, geography, history. But this God's-eye view was always a con. It depended entirely on concealing its own locality, its own deeply provincial origins in a specific time and place. The colonizers simply declared their situated knowledge to be universal truth and everyone else's truth to be parochial myth. It's the oldest power move in the book: "My perspective isn't a perspective, it's just reality. Yours is bias."

Boaventura de Sousa Santos gives us a name for what happened next: epistemicide. The murder of knowledge. Just as genocide annihilated peoples, epistemicide sought to annihilate the memory systems, wisdom traditions, and ways of knowing that sustained colonized cultures. This wasn't collateral damage—it was strategy. You cannot fully dominate people who still possess their own ways of understanding the world, their own systems for generating and validating truth. So the colonial project had to destroy those systems first, or at minimum subordinate them so thoroughly that they lost the power to authorize reality.

Now fast-forward to our moment. Walk into any tech conference, any venture capital pitch meeting, any university AI lab. Listen to how artificial intelligence gets discussed: as pure innovation, a frontier unmarked by history, a realm of problems and solutions blissfully free from the messiness of human prejudice. The future! The algorithms are smart, objective, untainted by the biases that plague human decision-making.

Except—no. None of that is true.

AI is not artificial in the sense of being removed from material reality, and it's questionable whether it's intelligent in any meaningful sense. What it definitely is, as Kate Crawford documents with forensic precision, is extractive. "Artificial intelligence is a technology of extraction," she writes, "from the minerals drawn from the earth to the labor pulled from low-wage information workers to the data taken from every action and expression". Follow the supply chain: rare earth elements mined in Congo under conditions that would make a nineteenth-century industrialist blush; clickworkers in the Philippines labeling images for pennies, training the machine to "see"; personal data scraped from billions of online interactions, every click and scroll harvested without meaningful consent. At every layer, AI replicates colonial resource extraction—just with servers instead of ships.

This is what scholars mean when they talk about digital colonialism: tech corporations, mostly Western, using their economic and political dominance to appropriate the "wealth, labour, and natural environment" of the Global South and marginalized communities everywhere through technological means. The parallels are almost embarrassingly direct. Where empires once extracted gold, rubber, timber, oil—treating lands and peoples as raw materials—today's digital empires extract behavioral data and human attention with the same logic. These corporate ambitions are planetary because, as Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias observe, capitalism and colonialism have always been global projects. The ideology is consistent: reduce human life to a resource, people to "data points" and "cogs in the wheel of a global marketplace" ruled by Big Data's imperatives.

And here's where it gets even darker: the algorithms aren't neutral arbiters. They're more like mirrors reflecting back the ugliest parts of our history. AI systems learn from datasets that encode centuries of prejudice—racist hiring practices, sexist language, discriminatory lending, biased policing. Feed the machine our past, and it gives us back our past on steroids, automated and scaled. Facial recognition that can't see Black faces accurately. Hiring algorithms that filter out women. Predictive policing that sends cops to poor neighborhoods in feedback loops that guarantee more arrests, confirming the algorithm's "prediction." As one UN report notes, rather than correcting social inequalities, digital technologies often "exponentially increase and entangle the inequities already present in the world".

Think of it this way: we've taken the colonial matrix of power—that interlocking system of economic exploitation, political domination, cultural subordination, and epistemological hierarchy that Aníbal Quijano describes—and we've encoded it. The content is different (code instead of conquest edicts, datasets instead of racial taxonomies), but the structure remains. Every time an AI system sorts people into categories, every time a platform algorithm decides whose voice gets amplified and whose gets silenced, every time a predictive model flags certain bodies as "risky" based on their zip code or skin tone, we should be asking the colonial questions: Who gets to classify, and who gets classified? Who owns the knowledge infrastructure, and for whose benefit? Who profits from this knowing, and who gets reduced to the known?

The algorithmic frontier is not a break from history. It's history's continuation by other means—the same imperial project of domination dressed up in hoodies and algorithm whitepapers. And once you see it, you can't unsee it.

# Surveillance, Control, and the New Imperial Gaze: The Watchers and the Watched

If you want to understand surveillance, start with a simple fact: it has never been colorblind. The modern surveillance state was not invented to watch everyone equally; it was designed specifically to monitor, control, and discipline Black, brown, and colonized bodies. This isn't conspiracy theory or academic abstraction. It's history you can touch.

Simone Browne lays it out with devastating clarity: "surveillance is nothing new to black folks. It is the fact of antiblackness." Go back to the lantern laws of 1700s New York that required enslaved Africans, free Black people, and Indigenous people to carry candles or lanterns after dark—literally forced to illuminate themselves for white surveillance. Look at the slave passes that controlled movement, the brandings and biometric identification marks burned into flesh, the slave ships whose architectural layouts prefigured Bentham's Panopticon prison design. Browse through the census technologies that colonial administrators used to categorize and manage subject populations by race, caste, religion. This is the DNA of modern surveillance. As Browne argues, understanding surveillance requires understanding "the ontological conditions of Blackness"—in other words, surveillance systems emerged from and remain shaped by the project of racial domination.

The watchtower, the checkpoint, the pass system, the census—all technologies of colonial control that established an enduring principle: to govern is to see, to classify is to dominate. These weren't neutral administrative tools; they were weapons that reified racial boundaries and justified inequality by rendering it visible and "natural." The logic was circular and perfect: we watch you because you're dangerous; our watching proves you're dangerous because look at all the infractions we find.

Michel Foucault gave us the Panopticon as metaphor—Jeremy Bentham's prison design where a central guard tower could observe all inmates without them knowing if they were being watched at any moment. The genius was that prisoners would discipline themselves, internalizing the gaze. But Foucault's analysis, powerful as it is, misses something: in the colonies, the Panopticon wasn't a metaphor. It was reality, scaled to entire territories. Cities, provinces, nations became laboratories of observation and control. The colonial gaze was always already panoptic.

Now take that history and multiply it by a billion sensors. Today's digital surveillance doesn't just expand Bentham's vision—it transcends it into something that would have seemed like magic or nightmare. We're living through what some call the neural gaze: a distributed, computational form of watching that isn't located in any single tower or set of eyes, but woven into the fabric of daily life itself. Your phone, your laptop, your smart TV, your car, the cameras on every corner, the satellites overhead, the algorithms processing it all—they form an all-seeing network that doesn't just watch but learns.

This is the shift that should terrify us: from optical surveillance to predictive surveillance, from watching what you do to inferring what you'll do next. As one artist puts it, this represents "a new epistemology—an imperial mode of knowing born not from looking, but from learning." The old surveillance said "I see you." The new surveillance says "I know you—better than you know yourself, and before you act."

Enter what Shoshana Zuboff calls instrumentarian power: a new species of domination native to surveillance capitalism. As she explains, tech giants have evolved beyond data collection to behavior modification: "automated machine processes not only know our behavior but also shape our behavior at scale... the goal now is to automate us". Through micro-nudges, personalized feeds, interface designs that hijack our psychology, the system doesn't just watch—it sculpts. This power operates through "an increasingly ubiquitous computational architecture of 'smart' networked devices, things, and spaces", seamless and soft, never announcing itself. No jackboots required when you can just adjust the algorithm.

Think of it as the evolution of what Oscar Gandy called the "panoptic sort"—the process of collecting personal data to classify and stratify society. Every credit score, every algorithmic hiring filter, every predictive policing heat map is a panoptic sort in action, determining who gets opportunities and who gets scrutiny. And as Browne and others demonstrate, these systems consistently reproduce racial hierarchies. Facial recognition exhibits racial bias, risk assessment algorithms flag Black and brown people at higher rates, and the whole apparatus becomes automated discrimination wearing the mask of objectivity.

For people living under occupation—Palestinians navigating checkpoints governed by automated systems, Black Americans in neighborhoods saturated with surveillance, indigenous communities whose lands are monitored by corporations and states—this isn't theoretical. It's Tuesday. The walls have eyes. The drones whisper overhead. Databases remember everything: where you were, who you were with, patterns the algorithm found suspicious even if no human ever noticed. Your existence triggers alerts on distant screens. Your identity gets constructed by profiles you'll never see, by probabilities calculated without your knowledge. This is life under algorithmic empire, governance by automated colonial logic.

And nowhere has this fusion of algorithm and annihilation been more devastatingly visible than in Gaza. Between October 2023 and 2025, Israeli forces deployed AI systems with names that drip with bitter irony—"Lavender," "The Gospel" (Habsora), "Where's Daddy?"—to automate mass killing on an industrial scale. Lavender generated a list of 37,000 Palestinian men flagged by machine learning as potential targets, many low-ranking or with no confirmed military role, and operators were given just 20 seconds to verify—essentially to confirm the target was male—before authorizing strikes. "Where's Daddy?" tracked these individuals to their homes, deliberately waiting until they entered so that airstrikes would kill entire families, typically with "dumb bombs" that operators admitted were used because you "don't want to waste expensive bombs on unimportant people". UN experts noted that more than 15,000 deaths—almost half the civilian toll—occurred in the first six weeks when these AI systems were most heavily relied upon for target selection. Read that again: algorithms of death working fastest when human judgment was most absent.

The numbers are almost incomprehensible in their horror. By October 2025, at least 66,000 Palestinians had been killed—83% of them civilians according to leaked Israeli intelligence, a ratio exceeded in modern warfare only by the Rwandan genocide, Srebrenica, and the siege of Mariupol. At least 18,885 children dead—one child killed every hour for two years. But even these figures are vast undercounts: studies estimate the true toll including indirect deaths from starvation, disease, and healthcare collapse could reach 75,000 to 186,000 or

more. Entire housing stock destroyed—62% of residents now lack documents to prove property ownership. Life expectancy dropped 35 years in a single year. This is what it looks like when the neural gaze becomes a targeting system, when surveillance capitalism meets settler colonialism, when the algorithm is given permission to decide who lives and who dies based on patterns in metadata and behavioral profiles. Soldiers interviewed admitted they referred to low-level targets as "garbage" and accepted that most casualties would be women and children. The system allowed for a "collateral damage threshold" of up to 20 civilians per strike, applied automatically without assessing actual threat. Twenty. Human. Beings. Reduced to acceptable statistical noise in the algorithm's calculation.

Where was the international "rules-based order" we hear so much about? Where were the human rights frameworks supposedly encoded in international law? They collapsed—revealed as they always were to be instruments of power dressed in the language of universalism, invoked to discipline the weak and discarded when the strong find them inconvenient. The UN special committee and International Association of Genocide Scholars have recognized this as genocide, yet the weapons flow continues, with tech giants like Google, Amazon, and Meta providing the cloud computing and machine learning infrastructure through projects like Nimbus. Silicon Valley's fingerprints are all over this. The same companies that promise to "organize the world's information" and "bring the world closer together" are complicit in automating slaughter. This is algorithmic colonialism's endgame, stripped of pretense: brown bodies turned into data points, families transformed into targeting packages, an entire population subjected to what one scholar called "AI-assisted genocide", executed with the speed and efficiency that only machines can provide. The algorithm doesn't hate—it's worse than that. It kills with the cold indifference of optimization, the banal evil of automated decision-making, the violence of a system that sees Palestinians not as human beings with names and dreams and children but as nodes in a network to be neutralized. And it forces us to confront an unbearable question: if this is what "smart" warfare looks like, if this is the future of algorithmic governance, then what exactly are we being asked to accept as normal? What does it mean that the machinery of Western technological progress, the same systems that recommend our movies and navigate our routes, can be seamlessly repurposed to generate kill lists and coordinate mass atrocity? The mask has slipped. We are watching in real-time as the digital tools of empire reveal their true purpose—not liberation or connection, but a more efficient, more deniable, more automated form of colonial violence. And the world that built the rules to prevent another genocide simply shrugs and updates its terms of service.

And yet—and this is crucial—people are not passive data subjects. Just as enslaved people found ways to subvert the master's gaze (gathering in secret, developing coded languages, engaging in sousveillance from below, establishing maroon communities beyond the plantation's reach), new forms of resistance are emerging. Legal challenges, encryption tools, privacy-protecting technologies, ad blockers, VPNs, refusals to use certain platforms. But also something deeper: cultural practices, memory work, embodied presence that machines struggle to quantify. Strategic opacity. The cultivation of spaces and ways of being that cannot be fully captured by data.

The watchers are many and their eyes are everywhere. But the watched are learning to watch back, to disappear selectively, to jam the signal. Surveillance may be more pervasive

than ever, but so is the awareness that another mode of existence is necessary—and possible.

## **Memory, Place, and Epistemic Resistance: The Soil Pushes Back**

If the algorithmic empire wants to know us completely—to render every dimension of human life transparent and machine-readable—then perhaps the most radical act is to cultivate opacity. To value what resists capture. To honor the gaps, silences, and mysteries that no dataset can contain.

This impulse runs deep in decolonial thought. Édouard Glissant, the Martinican philosopher who lived through the afterlives of slavery and colonialism, championed what he called the "right to opacity": the right of people, especially formerly colonized peoples, to not be fully understood by dominant systems, to maintain depths that elude the colonial gaze. It's not about hiding something shameful; it's about refusing the presumption that transparency equals liberation, that being seen equals being free. Sometimes freedom means the right to remain opaque, unknowable, irreducible to any external system of classification.

Can an algorithm forget? Can it refuse to see? These questions might sound absurd—machines don't have agency—but they point toward a profound reimagining of what technology could be. What if we designed systems with deliberate blindness, built-in forgetfulness, the digital equivalent of discretion? What if we rejected the assumption that more data is always better, that complete knowledge is the goal?

At the heart of this alternative vision lies a reclamation of memory and place—not as data points on a map, but as living relationships. Colonialism didn't just steal land and bodies; it attempted to sever people from their histories, to break the thread connecting past to present to future. The residential schools that kidnapped indigenous children were designed to induce cultural amnesia. The Middle Passage sought to strip enslaved Africans of their names, languages, cosmologies. Colonial education systems taught colonized peoples to see themselves through the colonizer's eyes, to internalize the hierarchy that placed their own knowledge at the bottom.

But memories persist. They survive in songs that grandmothers sing, in the way elders tell stories, in rituals performed despite prohibition, in the land itself. The earth is not a blank canvas; it holds memory in its contours, in the ruins and the scars, in the seeds that wait decades to sprout. This is knowledge that algorithmic systems, for all their computational power, cannot access—because it's relational, contextual, embodied, alive.

Eduardo Kohn, working with communities in the Amazon, makes a startling argument: seeing, representing, and knowing are not exclusively human affairs. Forests think. Animals have perspectives. Ecosystems possess intelligence. This isn't mysticism; it's a different ontology, one that recognizes intelligence as something distributed across living systems rather than concentrated in individual brains or silicon chips. In encounters with other beings, we are "forced to recognize the fact that seeing, representing, and perhaps knowing, even thinking, are not exclusively human affairs".

This perspective—that the world is thick with intelligences, that trees and rivers and ancestors possess forms of knowledge—stands as a profound rebuke to AI's hubris. Silicon Valley promises us artificial general intelligence, as if intelligence were a thing you could bottle and sell. But indigenous cosmologies have always known what AI researchers are only beginning to glimpse: intelligence is relational, situated, emergent from complex webs of interaction. The difference is that one tradition seeks to replicate human cognition in machines for profit and control, while the other seeks to deepen our relationships with the more-than-human world out of respect and reciprocity.

Decolonial scholars call for an "ecology of knowledges": a dialogical coexistence of different ways of knowing, without imposing a single hierarchy. This means storytelling stands alongside statistics, communal wisdom beside computational analysis, spiritual insight and lived experience beside formal algorithms. No single epistemology gets to declare itself universal. As Walter D. Mignolo puts it, "I am where I think"—knowledge comes from our location, our body, our history. And since "we all are where we think," no single perspective (certainly not the Eurocentric or technocratic one) can claim a monopoly on truth.

Decolonizing AI means stripping away what Mignolo calls the "imperial pretension" that algorithms can know the world from nowhere, that data speaks for itself, that models capture reality objectively. Context must be brought back in. Memory must be honored. Place must matter. An algorithm trained on delocated data might detect patterns, but it cannot understand what those patterns mean on the ground, in the soil of lived reality. It sees correlations but misses causation. It finds signals but can't hear the story.

Artists working at this intersection of technology, memory, and resistance have begun enacting these principles in practice. Through counter-mapping projects, they create alternative cartographies that highlight indigenous place-names colonizers tried to erase, sites of ancestral significance, or the usually invisible infrastructure of surveillance cameras and data centers. These maps don't aim for the totalizing control of colonial cartography; they aim to reveal, to empower, to recover what official maps hide.

Through speculative design, artists imagine technologies that encode different values: an AI that protects sacred knowledge by refusing certain queries, interfaces designed for care rather than extraction, algorithms that deliberately include randomness as an ethical choice. Through performances and installations, they create visceral encounters with systems that usually operate invisibly—walking a city while projecting a drone's-eye view, experiencing what it feels like to be reduced to a pixelated target.

Consider the metaphor that gives this essay its title: "between the eye and the soil." The eye represents the aerial, all-seeing perspective—detached, top-down, seeking visual mastery. Satellites, surveillance cameras, the God's-eye view of maps and dashboards. The soil represents ground truth in its fullest sense—messy, embedded, rich with memory and matter, lived experience that cannot be captured from above. Colonial regimes have always privileged the eye (reconnaissance photos, administrative blueprints, anthropological surveys) while ignoring or actively destroying the knowledge in the soil.

Algorithmic systems perpetuate that separation and intensify it. A satellite sees a territory but doesn't feel the history underfoot. A facial recognition system sees a face but knows nothing of the person's name, their grandmother's stories, their dreams, the particular timbre of their

laugh. CCTV footage captures movement but cannot access the meaning that movement holds for the person moving—are they running toward joy or away from danger? The data cannot say.

Bridging the gap between eye and soil is thus fundamentally a decolonial project. It means refusing to let technology remain abstract and aerial. It means grounding our systems in local context, forcing them to reckon with perspectives they would otherwise overlook. Memory is one such grounding force. Where the database hoards everything indefinitely (because storage is cheap and who knows what might be useful), human memory knows the value of forgetting and selective recall. Communities may choose to keep certain stories secret or sacred, away from digital capture, as an act of cultural survival. To decline to feed the data economy—by encrypting communications, avoiding surveillance cameras, refusing certain apps and platforms—can be a political act echoing earlier acts of cultural preservation in the face of forced assimilation.

As Boaventura de Sousa Santos reminds us, each technology carries "the weight of its mode of seeing and being in nature". Our current modes of algorithmic seeing carry the weight of colonial-capitalist values: extraction, expansion, perpetual growth, control. Changing this requires developing technologies—and more importantly, practices—that carry different values. Reciprocity. Care. Respect for limits. The dignity of not being fully known.

In many indigenous cosmologies, knowledge isn't about representing the world accurately for manipulation; it's about intervening respectfully, sustaining relationships. Imagine if we applied that wisdom to AI: models that are smaller-scale, community-owned, focused on care rather than profit, willing to say "I don't know" or remain idle rather than constantly surveilling. Databases that auto-delete sensitive information like an act of digital forgetting, honoring the idea that not everything should be preserved forever. Algorithms designed with deliberate gaps and randomness so they don't become perfect tools of tracking.

These aren't fantasies. They're design choices that could be made if we valued different things. The question isn't whether it's technically possible—it's whether we have the collective will to prioritize human flourishing over optimization, community autonomy over corporate profit, the right to opacity over the imperative to know.

Finally, art's role in this struggle cannot be overstated. Art operates in realms that algorithmic rationality dismisses as irrelevant: imagination, metaphor, emotion, ambiguity, beauty. Yet these are precisely the domains where tremendous power resides. Art creates what some call "poetic resistance"—spaces where critical thought and creativity fuse, where the cracks in the system become visible. As Palestinian artist and researcher Izz al-Jabari writes, art can "interrupt those circuits, redirect the signal, and speak back in unfamiliar tongues." Art confounds the algorithm. It shows us futures where technology serves flourishing rather than domination. It reveals the moments where the machine falters, where human experience overflows the categories of data.

By reconfiguring archives, reimagining maps, holding up mirrors to the algorithm's assumptions, creative practice keeps alive the possibility that another mode of knowing exists. This isn't naive escapism—it's necessary freedom work. Because if we cannot imagine alternatives, we're trapped in the future someone else is building for us.

## Conclusion: Toward a Freedom That Exceeds Knowing

So we return to the question that opened this essay: what does freedom look like in a world that thinks it already knows you?

In an age when our digital shadows precede us, when predictive algorithms claim to understand our desires before we feel them, when every action feeds a system designed to anticipate our next move—freedom might consist precisely in exceeding that knowledge. In asserting the parts of ourselves that resist calculation. In cultivating mysteries that no dataset can contain.

This is not a small thing. The ability to remain unknown, to surprise yourself and others, to change in ways that violate the algorithm's expectations—this is the essence of human dignity. And it's under assault.

Reclaiming it will require work on multiple fronts. Yes, we need better laws protecting privacy and limiting surveillance—the right to opacity translated into legal reality. Yes, we need data sovereignty movements that let communities control their own information rather than surrendering it to corporate or state databases. Yes, we need education that demystifies AI, exposing its biases and teaching critical data literacy so people aren't seduced by the false aura of algorithmic infallibility.

But underneath these practical struggles lies something deeper: a fundamental shift in what we consider knowledge and whose knowledge matters. Decolonizing the algorithmic world means re-centering human and ecological concerns over the abstract logic of optimization. It means listening to those at the margins—often the first to sense when "progress" masks oppression—and taking inspiration from age-old practices of resistance and adaptation. It means remembering, as decolonial theorists insist, that Western science and technology represent just one way of world-making, not the only way or even necessarily the best way. Other worlds persist. Other worldviews endure and can illuminate paths forward that the mainstream cannot see.

Perhaps the machine will never learn to value those ways of knowing—and that's fine. We can.

In the end, the contest isn't simply between human and algorithm. It's between two different visions of how knowledge and power should relate to each other, two different dreams of what kind of world we want to live in.

One vision—the dominant one, the one currently winning—holds that with enough data and computation, we can perfectly manage society, predict behavior, eliminate uncertainty, render the world transparent. This is the dream of the all-seeing algorithmic god, the ultimate culmination of colonialism's fantasy: total control, total knowledge, no corner left in shadow. It's a world where mystery itself becomes suspicious, where opacity reads as guilt, where the unmapped and uncategorized pose threats that must be neutralized.

The other vision holds that true freedom and justice require honoring the opacity and complexity of life—acknowledging that not everything can or should be known. This vision urges us to recover what we might call the wisdom of unknowing: accepting limits, cherishing

the dark spaces and the deep soil (the past, the particular, the unscripted, the sacred) even as we use our eyes and tools. This stance is inherently anti-colonial because it refuses the fantasy of omniscience that has always been empire's core delusion.

We stand now between the eye and the soil. On one side, a proliferating array of eyes: satellites orbiting overhead, cameras on every corner, algorithms in every device, all hungry to extract knowledge and convert it to profit or control. On the other side, the rich soil of collective memory and lived experience—messy, opaque, irreducible to data, yet sustaining everything that matters. In that soil lie seeds of alternative knowledge waiting to sprout.

Bridging this divide is the work of our generation—a work of both ruthless critique and generous creativity. By illuminating how algorithmic knowledge mystifies and extends old structures of domination, we clear ground for something new. By nurturing arts and practices that keep human experience at the center, that value the local and the embodied, that resist the seduction of abstraction—we water the roots of a more humane future.

The fight for a decolonial future in the digital age is, at its heart, a fight for our right to remain beautifully unpredictable. To insist that we are more than what any machine—or any empire—can know. To preserve spaces, practices, and knowledges that exceed the grasp of the neural gaze. To honor the wisdom in the soil even as we navigate a world of watchful eyes.

This is not a call to reject all technology or retreat into nostalgia. It's a call to reimagine technology as part of a different story, one where progress is measured not by how completely we are known, but by how deeply we honor each other's irreducible humanity and the living world that sustains us. One where the algorithm, if it exists at all, knows when to stop looking, when to forget, when to leave something unmapped out of respect rather than ignorance.

The door is open. We can walk through it. Between the eye and the soil, there is a path forward—if we're brave enough to take it.

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