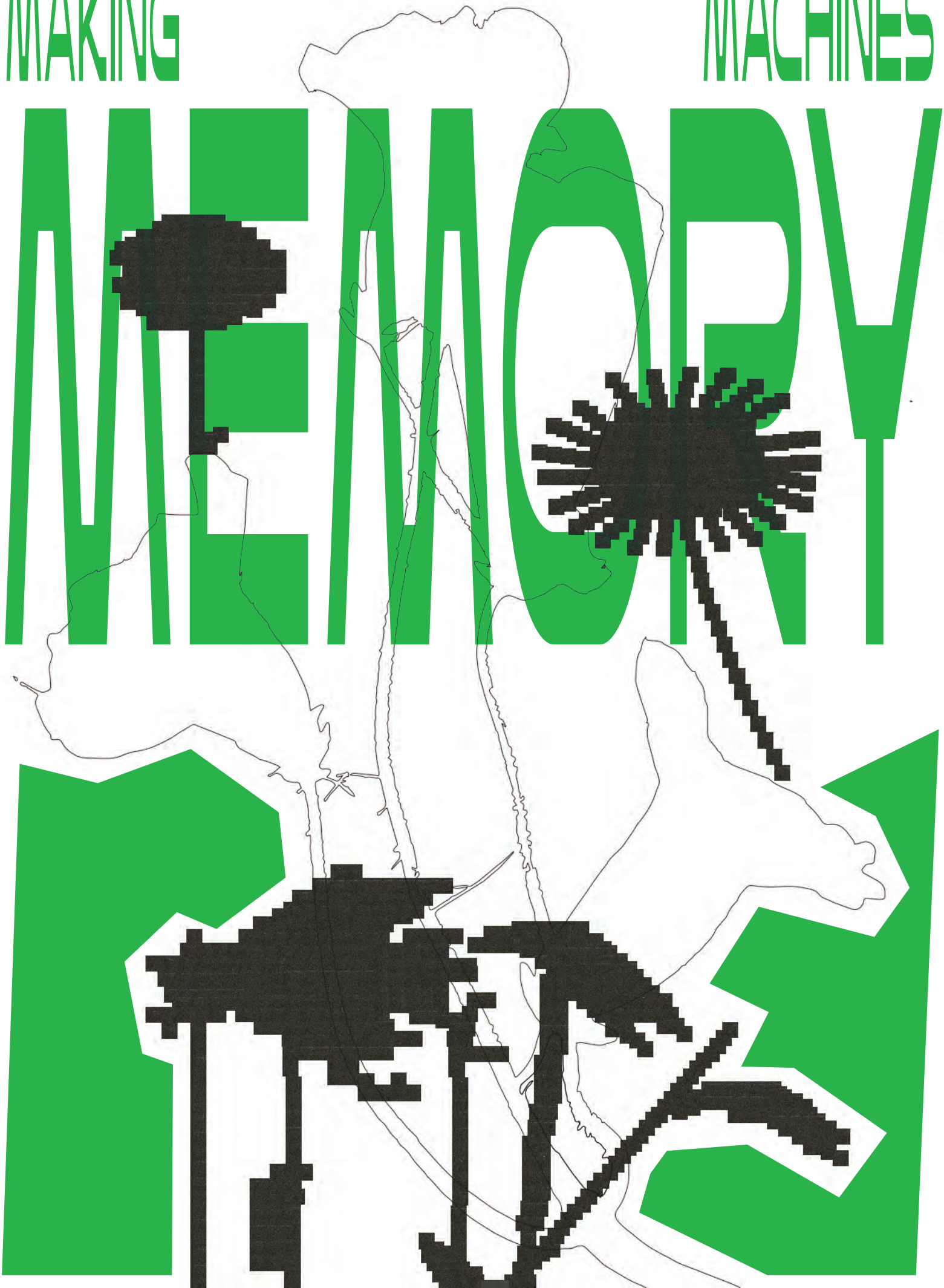
MAKING MACHINES MEMORY

A MANIFESTO FOR ART WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



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Saudade
/saʊˈdɑːdə/
noun

Profoundly nostalgic longing for a beloved yet absent something or someone. It is often associated with a repressed understanding that one might never encounter the object of longing ever again. It is a recollection of feelings, experiences, places, or events, often elusive.

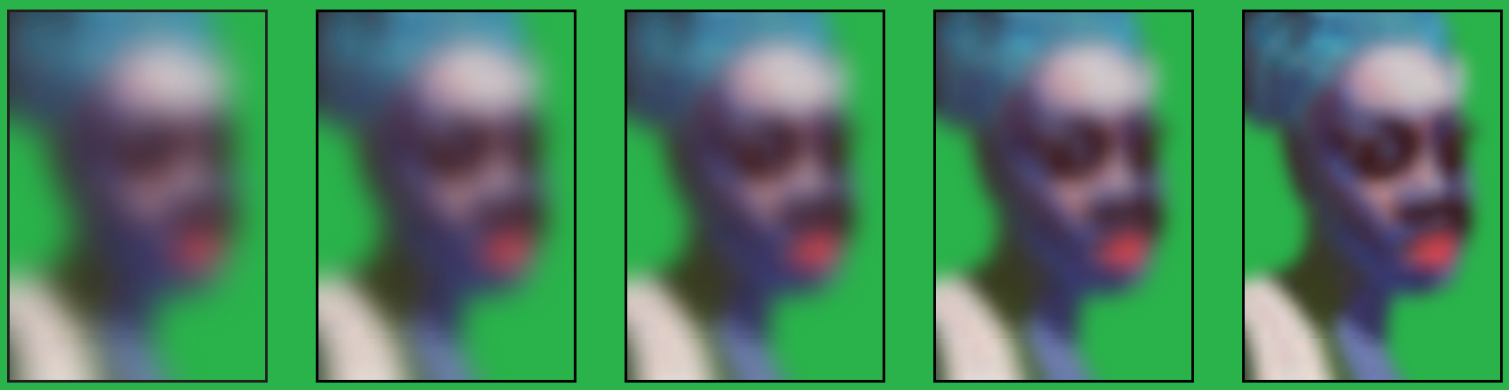
Visibility matters to me, because to be visible is to be acknowledged and considered. I would like to be considered in how AI evolves so that it doesn't exclude my context, my concerns, my realities.

My desire for a version of AI that represents the actual cultural diversity and plurality of the world isn't just animated by a sense of justice. To me, it's about making fundamentally better tech — tools that respond to the needs of everyone and is accessible to everyone. If AI's goal is to reflect humanity as a whole, it is only right that it learns from all that makes up humanity. This includes my grandmother, the street I grew up on, mbalax music, the serer's pangool, flowers of the Sahel, the Ndiaga Ndiaye, the Baye Fall, manjak weaving techniques, the caildecrat trees that line up the road to my primary school, harmattan winds that pass throughmy city on their way to nourish the ocean that surround it: all that made me.

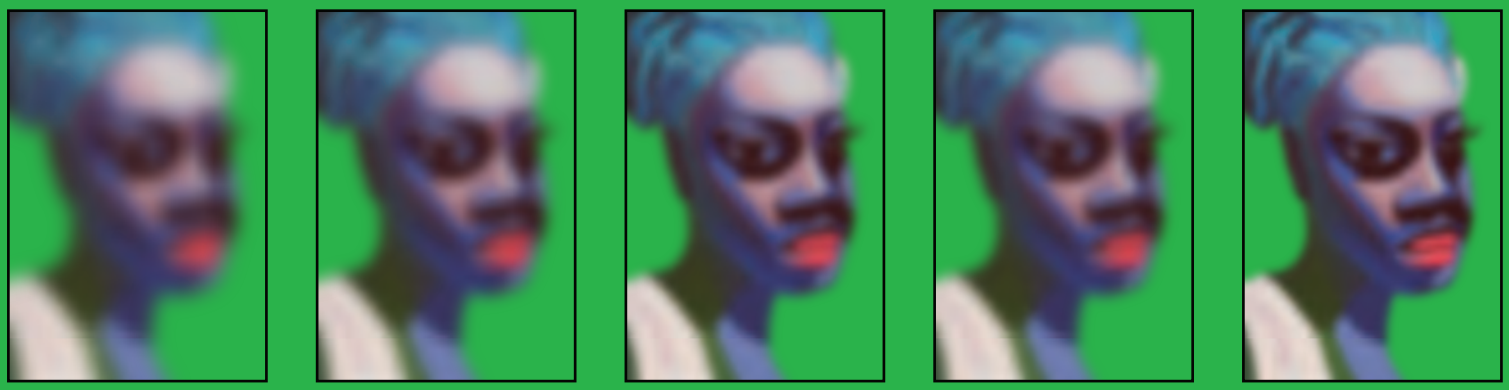
When I create datasets for my work, I try to honour my memories. When I work with AI models, saudade is my compass. It leads me to find beauty and value in the otherwise mundane, because what we overlook still matters. To exclude it is to excise our humanity, one place, person, thing, idea at a time. The bleak picture of humanity that AI serves today is a wake up call to remember more rigorously, more thoroughly, with more accountability.

AI MODELS ARE ONLY DEPUTIES FOR HUMANITY. THEY ARE NOT HUMANITY ITSELF.

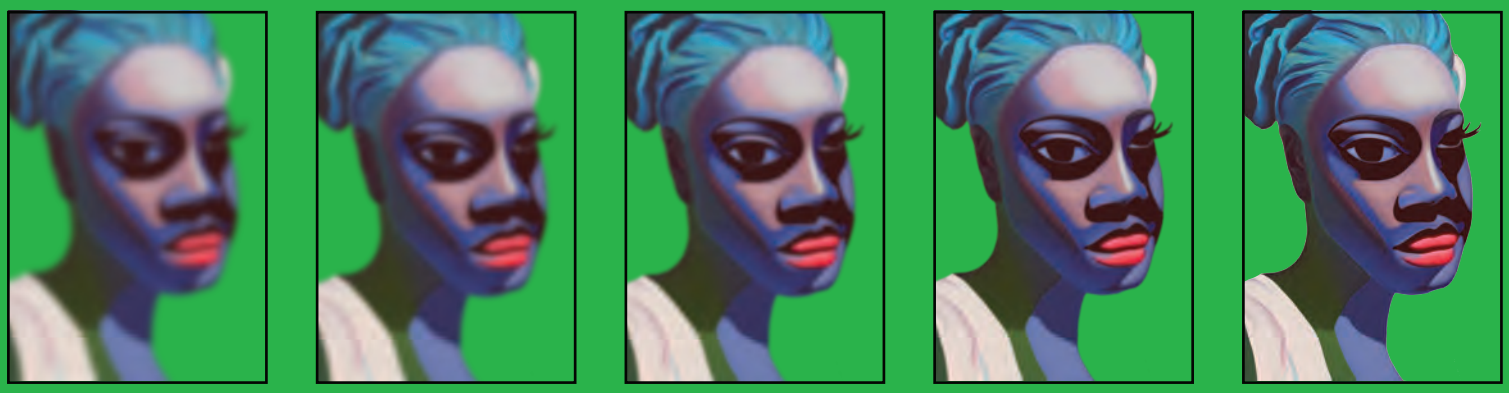
RECKLESS COMPUTATIONAL IMPERATIVE : WHO IS



ALLOWED TO BE RECKLESS ?



WHO SUFFERS FROM RECKLESSNESS ?



SYNTHESIS

The assertion held by so-called techno-optimists that technological progress can continue indefinitely at its current pace ignores the resolutely finite nature of the planet's resources, the vulnerability of the supply chains that circulates these resources, and the significant environmental and human costs associated with advancing AI with an accelerationist mindset. The true toll of the search for more compute and greater model potency is incredibly difficult to quantify. That is why most of us haven't felt the urgency to even ask, but that is changing.

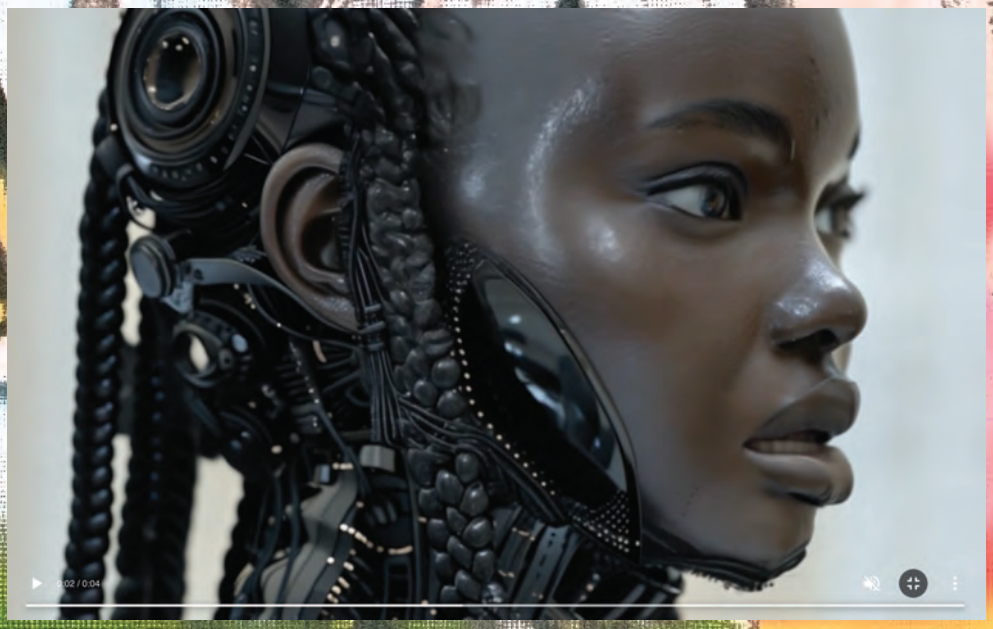
Contrary to the techno-optimism ethos, we do not have unlimited attempts to 'perfect' computing and reach Artificial General Intelligence. When paired with the capitalistic motive for profit and the race for who'sgoing to get there first, each iteration of technologicaladvancement, especially in the age of AI, necessitates the extraction of resources at an unsustainable rate and also demands the wide adoption and normalisation of inhumane labour practices.

This is a fundamental tension that anyone working in AI today has to understand. AI's status quo in this sense makes me feel deeply uneasy. I try to negotiate this tension in my practice by adopting greener practices (such as those of the slow tech movement) and making work that addresses the questions this tension poses.

The engine of history does not run exclusively on cruelty and exploitation. That just happens to be the cheapest abundantly available fuel source.

— Dave Karpf, We Should All Be Luddites Now, Substack, 2023

SPECULATING IS MY RIGHT!



THE FUTURE IS MINE TO DREAM UP.

One of the defining features of our species is that we can manifest the future materially. This ability is innate to every human, but in practice today, only a small and homogeneous group of people enact it. This status quo is the result of intentional social and geopolitical engineering which is rooted in the white imperialist agenda, but more commonly, we refer to it as ‘development’. To people from the Global South, development has meant that:

1. The goal of all mankind is ‘progress’ - which is a single file line where some nations are ahead and some nations are behind, depending on the rate at which they ‘progress’.

2. There is only one type of ‘progress’ which is acceptable - modernization according to the Western imagination.

3. Failing to meet the demands of modernity effectively puts a nation in a position to be helped by those who have - this is the development project.

This premise is not only deeply flawed, it is actually a blueprint for oppression - imposing one imagination of the future, a white patriarchal modernist utopia, above all possible imaginations of alternative futures.

Furthermore, nations are categorized on the basis of this premise: their distance from this singular future imagining determines their level of access to and agency over resources, including their own. According to this logic, a few nations are basically already living ‘the future’ while some are still stuck in the past and need help to ‘emerge’.

One of the opportunities that AI present is the ability for anyone to speculate on the future and to see/hear what they’ve dreamed up materialized. Speculating has always been an integral part of my practice, and AI has helped me expand on it. It is an empowering habit that has helped me develop a greater agency over my condition. I can bring to life the way I imagine the world in my mind’s eye. Feeling like the master of one’s destiny can be a priviledge but it can also be a muscle that we develop over time. It’s been the latter for me.

I AM OF — THIS WORLD — IS MY WORLD TOO.

THE NEW CRAFT OF BUILDING DATASETS

DATASETS AREN'T CREATED IN AN APOLITICAL ACULTURAL VACCUUM. TECHNOLOGY IS MADE OF HUMAN INTERACTIONS, ALGORITHMS, AND SPECULATIVE IMAGINATION.

with her eyes looking directly at the viewer and her lips slightly parted. Her hair is pulled back in a

Building custom datasets for my projects quickly became an evidence when I started working with AI back in 2020, because I didn't see myself in it. Not much has changed since then, unfortunately. I recently trained a LORA using historical references of hairstyle from west and central africa. However the model created outputs of mostly caucasian women. It understood the hair references but not much else.

Making datasets has become a craft I have come to appreciate greatly. There is a lot of poetry in the process of sourcing for data, whether it's through online research, visiting local archives, or collecting the data myself. It is my wish that more people, especially people who don't feel represented by AI, learn to appreciate this emerging craft.

PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

1

What is tech doing to me and people like me? Bodies, minds, relationships, dreams, plans, ways of life, histories, psyches, philosophies? Investigating this question is central to my practice.

2

I am not running out of time. There will always be time to learn, make different choices, and exercise my agency.

3

I strive to bring art to where I am from. I take from where I am from and I bring it back to where I am from.

4

While activism is present in my work, I am an artist, first and foremost. I ask questions, I reflect what I learn and unlearn in my work.

5

Ultimately, art is about feeling. If I can make other people feel the way I do, that's enough for me.

1. What are the deologies that guide the way technology is being developed and disseminated today?
2. Why don't we talking about all that AI is, including its material reality?
3. Is there an ecological future for our planet with AI?
4. What will it mean for everyone to be included in tech? Is there violence on that journey?
5. Who is AI made for? What interests does it currently serve?
6. How do we ensure AI reflects human values? Is there a space for context in defining these values?
7. What ethical frameworks should guide the deployment of AI in the cultural sector?
8. What responsibility do tech companies have in addressing AI's environmental impact?
9. What are the cultural implications of AI's role in surveillance and breaches of personal privacy?
10. Can cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration improve AI's development?
11. What mechanisms can we use to hold AI systems accountable for their decisions?
12. How do we ensure that AI benefits all of humanity rather than exacerbating inequality?
13. What are the long-term psychological effects of AI-human interactions? What does it mean for art?
14. How can AI be used to preserve and promote endangered languages and cultural heritage?
15. How does AI affect our conception of authorship and originality?

OPEN QUESTIONS

LINDA DOUNIA IS AN ARTIST, DESIGNER, AND WRITER INTERESTED IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS OF TECHNOCAPITALISM. SHE IS SENEGALESE LEBANESE, AND LIVES IN DAKAR. HER WORK MEDIATES HER MEMORIES AS ALTERNATIVE REALITIES AND EVIDENCE OF EXCLUDED WAYS OF BEING AND DOING. IT IS FORMED THROUGH THE DIALOGUE AND TENSIONS BETWEEN LIVED EXPERIENCE, CODE, AND AI.

IN 2023, LINDA WAS RECOGNIZED ON THE TIME AI 100 LIST OF MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN AI FOR HER WORK ON SPECULATIVE ARCHIVING — BUILDING AI MODELS THAT HELP US REMEMBER WHAT IS LOST.

IN 2024, SHE WAS ALSO THE RECIPIENT OF MOZILLA'S RISE25 AWARD FOR HER WORK IN AI, ADVOCATING FOR GREATER AGENCY OVER ALGORITHMS — HOW WE PERCEIVE THEM AND ARE PERCEIVED BY THEM.

THIS MANIFESTO WAS PROCUDED TO ACCOMPANY A SKILLSHARE COURSE FOR ARTISTS, DESIGNERS, AND CREATIVES WHO WANT TO SAFELY EXPLORE AI IN THEIR CREATIVE PRACTICE, WHILE ENGAGING CRITICALLY WITH THE LARGER ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS TECHNOLOGY ON ART, CULTURE, HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

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