

AI Realism

Reclaiming the Human in AI- ~~enhanced~~ Academic Literacies

EATAW 2025 – Braga

Multilingual Academic Literacies: Challenges and
Opportunities in the Age of AI

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Travelling by train is more than a journey

It's one of the greenest forms of public

transport, with a low

carbon footprint

Source: https://www.rail-travel/

[...]

[...]

Use

[...]

of

am

home, much of the water used in datacentres never

returns to the water reuse cycle

[...]

[...]

[...]

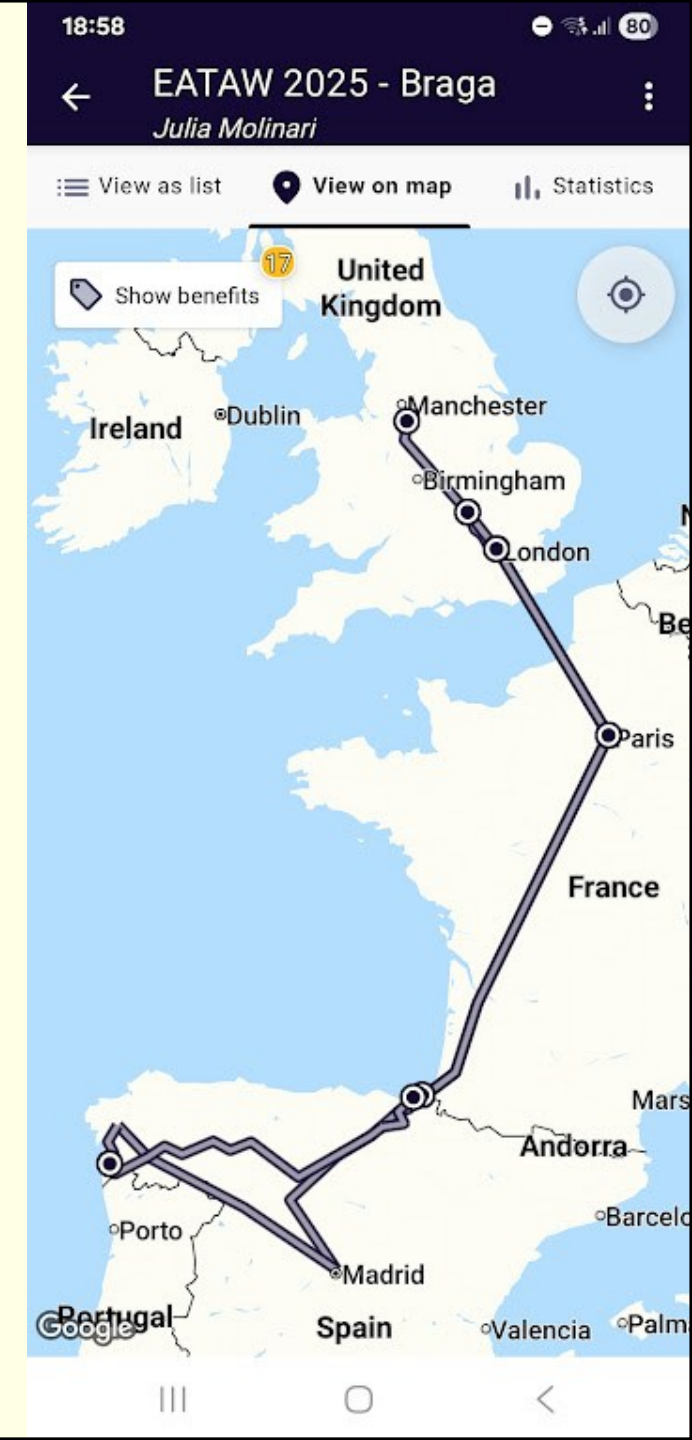
[...]

DISCLAIMER

No AI was knowingly used for this presentation.

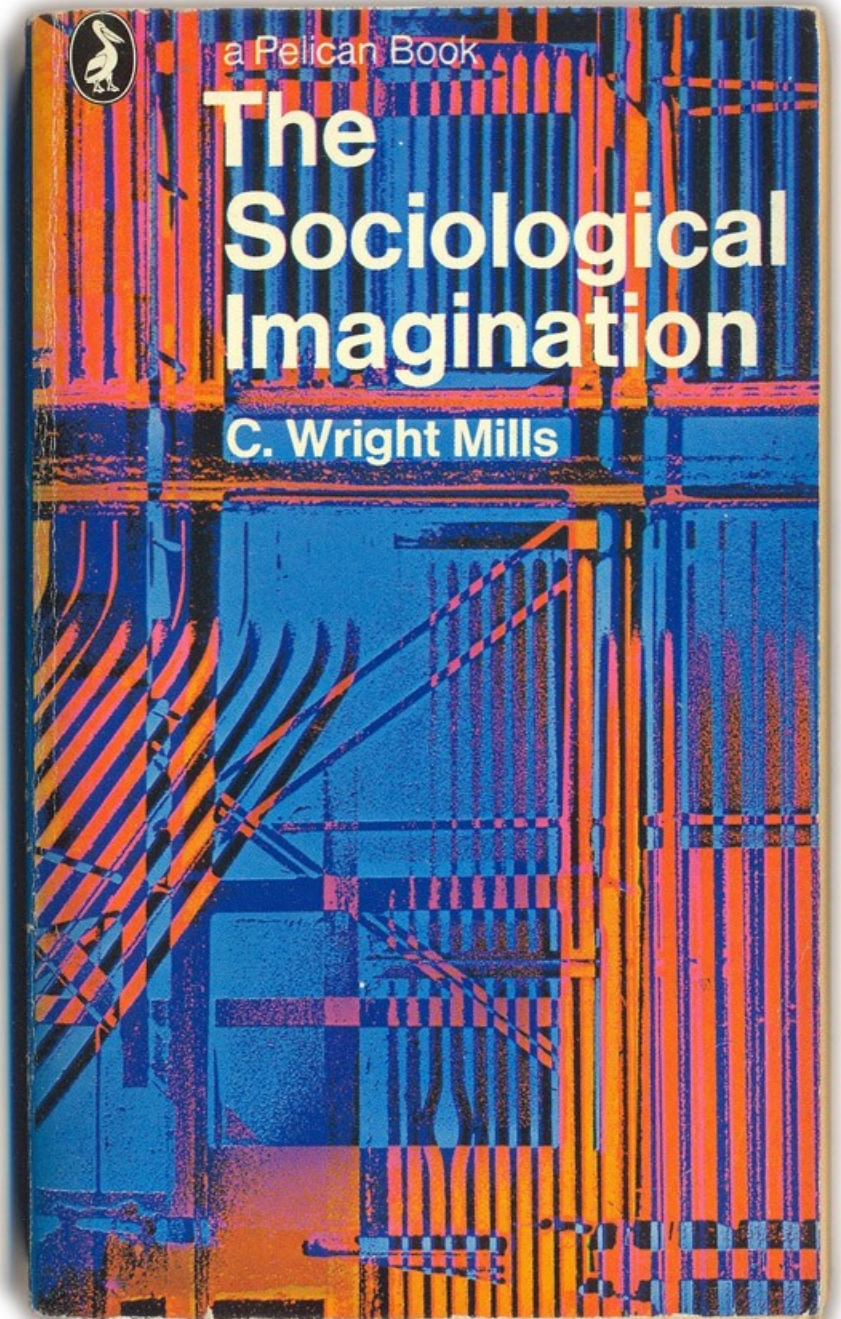
Images are either copied from DuckDuckGo, WikiCommons, or are mine (unless otherwise credited)

<https://theconversation.com/ai-is-gobbling-up-water-it-cannot-replace-im-working-on-a-solution-258518>; se also:<https://rcsc.substack.com/p/critical-ai-literacy-beyond-hegemonic?triedRedirect=true>

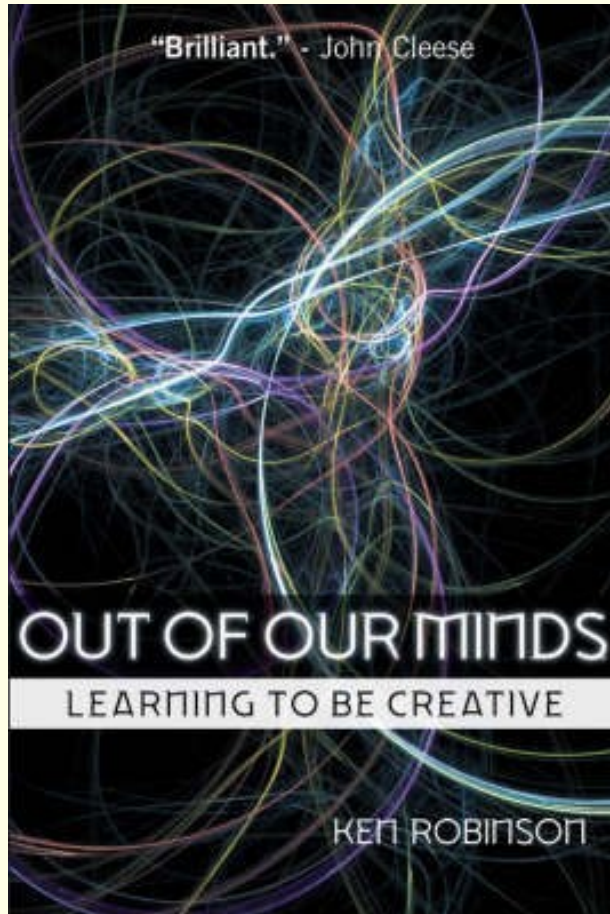


Overview

- Future shock! The pace of change
- Press pause: academic values and orientations
- Selective Collection of Language Technologies, inc. AI
- Values: Techno-realism: determinism, solutionism, feudalism, fascism, eugenics
- Critical Realism & Being Human: Value-orientated Reflections
- Critical AI realism
- Alternative futures and concrete utopias



Out of our minds with future shock



The most profound changes [...] have happened in the past 200 years and especially in the last 50, and they are getting faster. According to one estimate:

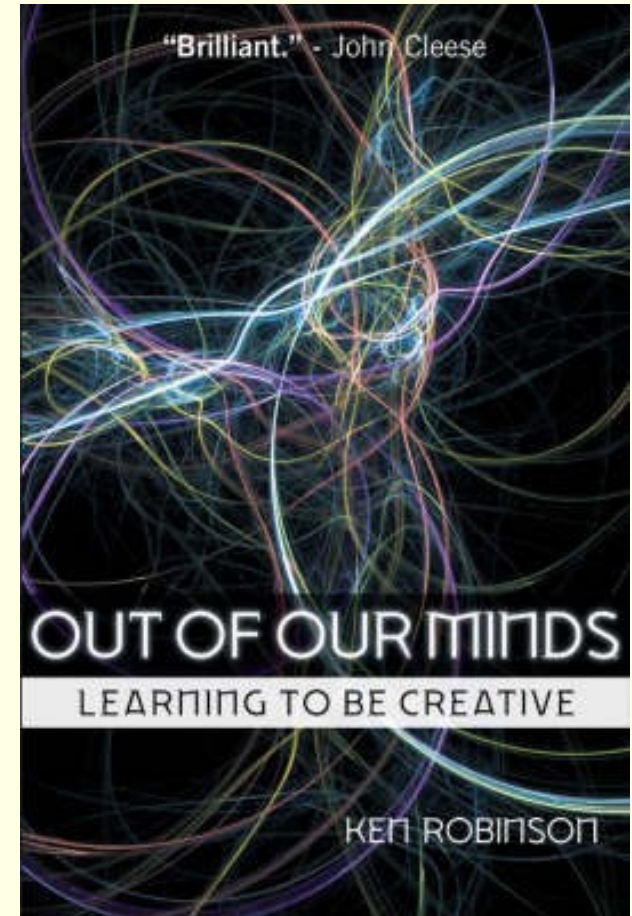
- in 1950 the average person traveled about 5 miles per day
- in 2000 the average person traveled about 30 miles per day
- in 2020 the average person will travel about 60 miles per day.

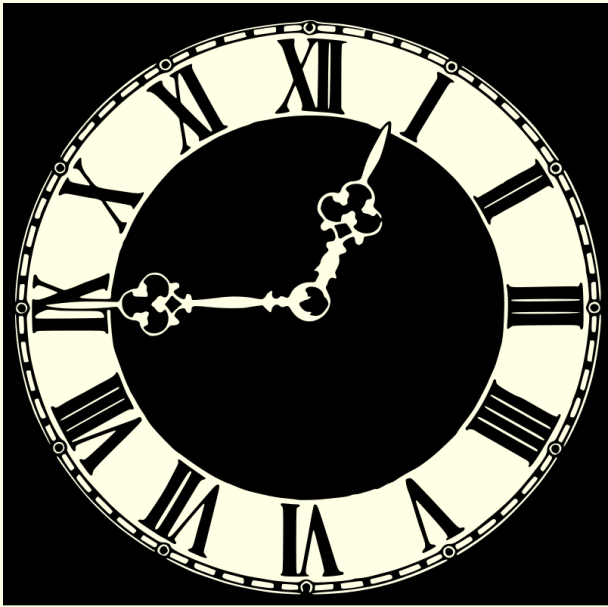
Ken Robinson, p. 27 (2001)

Out of our minds with future shock

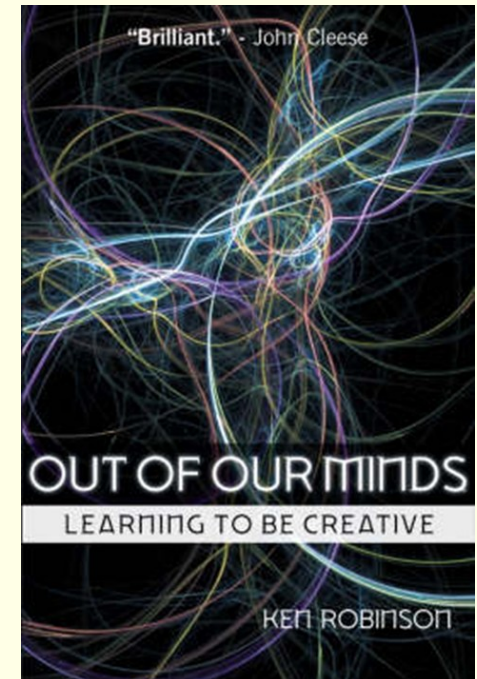
Imagine the past 3000 years as the face of a clock with each of the 60 minutes representing a period of 50 years

Ken Robinson, p. 28 (2001)





- 11.5 minutes Printing press (1440-50)
- 3.5 minutes Morse Code (1838-44)
- 2.8 minutes Telephone (1875)
- 2.6 minutes Radio (1885)
- 1.8 minutes B & W television (1929)
- 1 minute Fax (1966)
- 48 seconds Personal computer (1977)
- 46 seconds Analog cell phone (1979)
- 32 seconds World Wide Web (1990)
- 28 seconds SMS messaging (1993)
- 20 seconds Broadband (2000)
- 12 seconds iPhone/smartphones (2007)
- 8 seconds iPad/tablets (2010)
- ??? seconds ChatGPT (2022-2025)





Academic writing values & orientations

- More **descriptive** than prescriptive (Sociolinguistics; AcLits)
- More **social** than textual (AcLits)
- More **process** than product (Socio-cognitive; Socio-semiotic)
- More **method** of enquiry than genre (Research Writing)
- More **creative**, recursive, multiple than linear (Comp. Studies)
- More **emergent** than reductive and deterministic (Critical Realism)
- More **flourishing** than performative (Critical Realism)
- More **critical**, radical, troublesome than conservative (Humanism)
- More **changing** than stable (Sociolinguistics)
- More **urgent**, political, passionate than 'defanged' (Pedagogies of Transgression and Freedom)

PUTTING THE WRITER BACK INTO THE WRITTEN

A Selective Collection of Language Technology



- Cuneiform clay tablets
- Papyrus
- Reed stylus > ball-point and ink pen
- Moveable print (eg Gutenberg Bible)
- Typewriters
- PCs and their hard-software
- Laptops and the return of the tablet (we've come full circle!)
- AI and GenAI (eg LLMs powering Machine Translation and text generation)

Who is this? You'll be tested at the end of this talk!

AI Language Technology

| AI 1950-present | GenAI 2022-present | AGI* The Future? | ConAI? Now and forever? |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Machine learning & symbolic logic | Predictive neural networks | Human-level intelligence | Errors, bias, out of date, access |
| * https://www.techpolicy.press/most-researchers-do-not-believe-agi-is-imminent-why-do-policymakers-act-otherwise/ | | | |
| Neural networks | GPTs | North star goal | Culturally insensitive |
| Sources: LG003, LG007, LG010 The Open University | | | |
| Pattern recognition | Coherent text | Ill-defined and contested | Privacy, ethics, environment |
| Machine translation | LLMs | ? | Hallucinations |

Urgent need for an AI Ethics

- Black boxes
- Social justice
- Archives
- Techno-feudalism
- Techno-fascism
- Techno-dementia
- Techno-bullshit

Black boxes

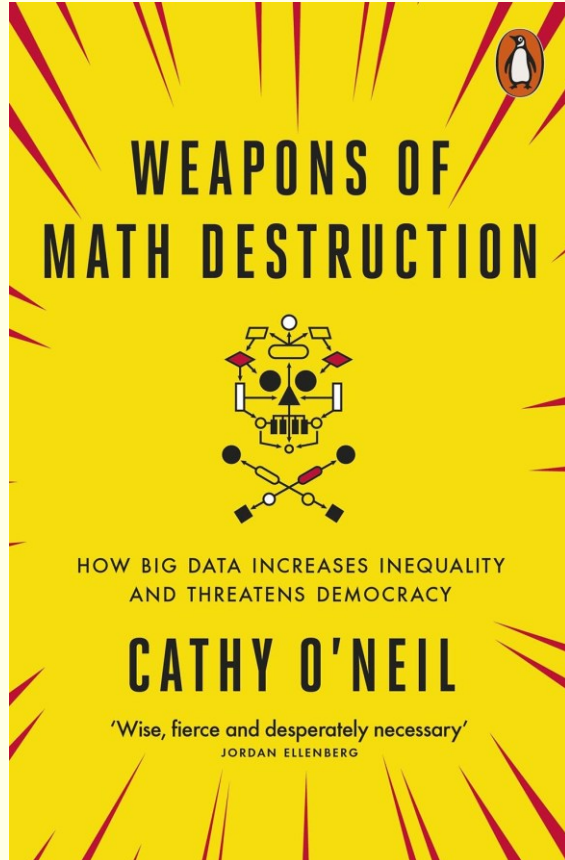
the "black box" in AI refers not to any mysteries of inner moral reasoning but to the immense scale and complexity of weight assignments in the model. We know how LLMs work: they associate words in a vast vector space, and we can trace likely word pairings. What remains opaque is how specific correlations are inferred from vast training data

models don't "decide" through ethical reasoning. They follow statistical patterns shaped by a prompt, directing it [the prompt] to correlations in language

Eryk Salvaggio, June 17 2025, fellow at Tech Policy Press.

<https://www.techpolicy.press/the-black-box-myth-what-the-industry-pretends-not-to-know-about-ai/>

Black boxes



why are black women so



why are black women so **angry**

why are black women so **loud**

why are black women so **mean**

why are black women so **attractive**

why are black women so **lazy**

why are black women so **annoying**

why are black women so **confident**

why are black women so **sassy**

why are black women so **insecure**

ALGORITHMS OF OPPRESSION

HOW SEARCH ENGINES
REINFORCE RACISM

SAFIYA UMOJA NOBLE

Black box of AI Labour exploitation

Far from the sophisticated, sentient machines portrayed in media and pop culture, so-called AI systems are fueled by millions of underpaid workers around the world, performing repetitive tasks under precarious labor conditions.



Example – 1 of 4

AI in Finance (mortgage lending)

Black and Hispanic applicants are less likely than White applicants to be given a mortgage:

- LLMs consistently recommended denying more loans and charging higher interest rates to Black applicants compared to otherwise identical white applicants.
- This suggests that LLMs are learning from the data they are trained on, which includes a history of racial disparities in mortgage lending, and potentially incorporating triggers for racial bias from other contexts

Example – 2 of 4

AI in Health (skin cancer)

skin cancer-detecting algorithms tend to be less precise when used on Black patients, in part because AI models are trained mostly on images of light-skinned patients

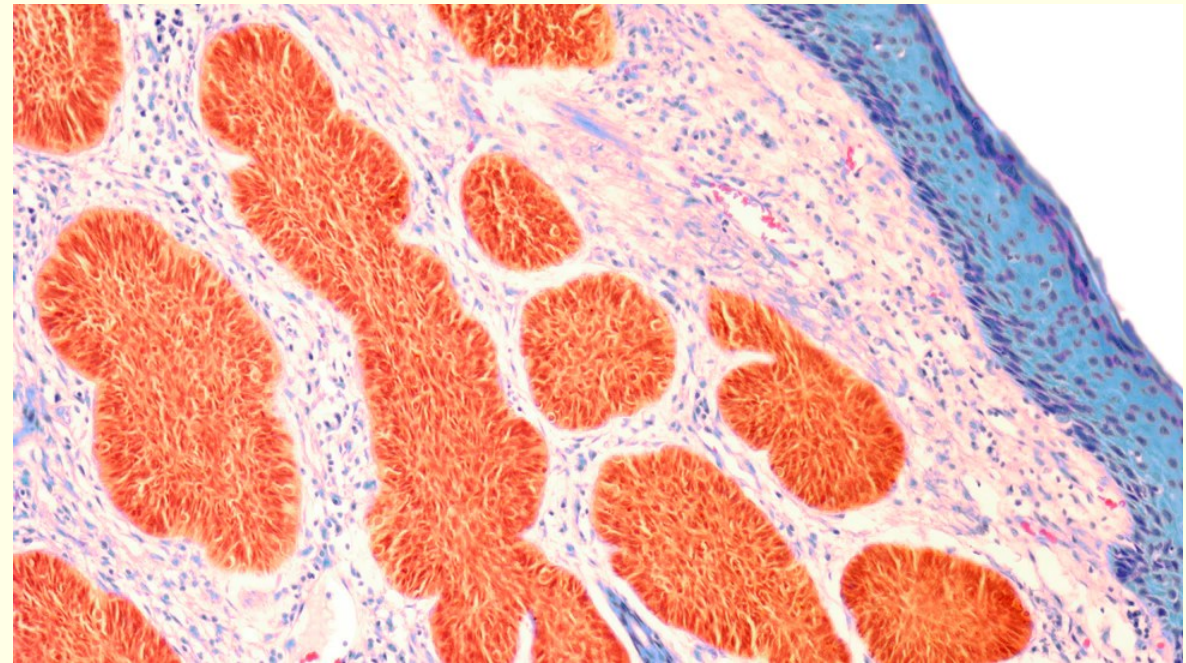


Image and text source: <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/08/machine-learning-dermatology-skin-color/567619/>

Example – 3 of 4



Image source:
<https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing>

AI in Law (criminal justice)

- predicting crime before it occurs (eg 2002 film *Minority Report*)
- biased datasets used as inputs to an AI algorithm identify risk in patterns of past behaviour to predict likelihood of future behaviour (cf Safyia Noble)
- The case of COMPAS

Text Images Documents Websites

Detect language English Italian Indonesian

Italian English Portuguese (Portugal)

doctor

däktər

Noun +1 more See dictionary

6 / 5,000

medico

Noun *il medico* doctor physician practitioner medic medico See dictionary

She wanted to become a **doctor**

Voleva diventare **medico**

Speaker icon Copy icon Google icon Share icon

| More translations | | | Expand all |
|-------------------|-----------|--|------------|
| <i>il dottore</i> | Noun | doctor master graduate | |
| aggiustare | Verb | adjust fix repair mend trim doctor | |
| sanitario | Adjective | sanitary doctor | |
| curare | Verb | cure treat heal take care attend doctor | |
| falsificare | Verb | falsify fake forge counterfeit doctor fabric | |
| medicare | Verb | medicate treat dress doctor medicate oneself | |

Whose archives?

*What is the impact of GenAI on the
(‘western’) knowledge archive?*

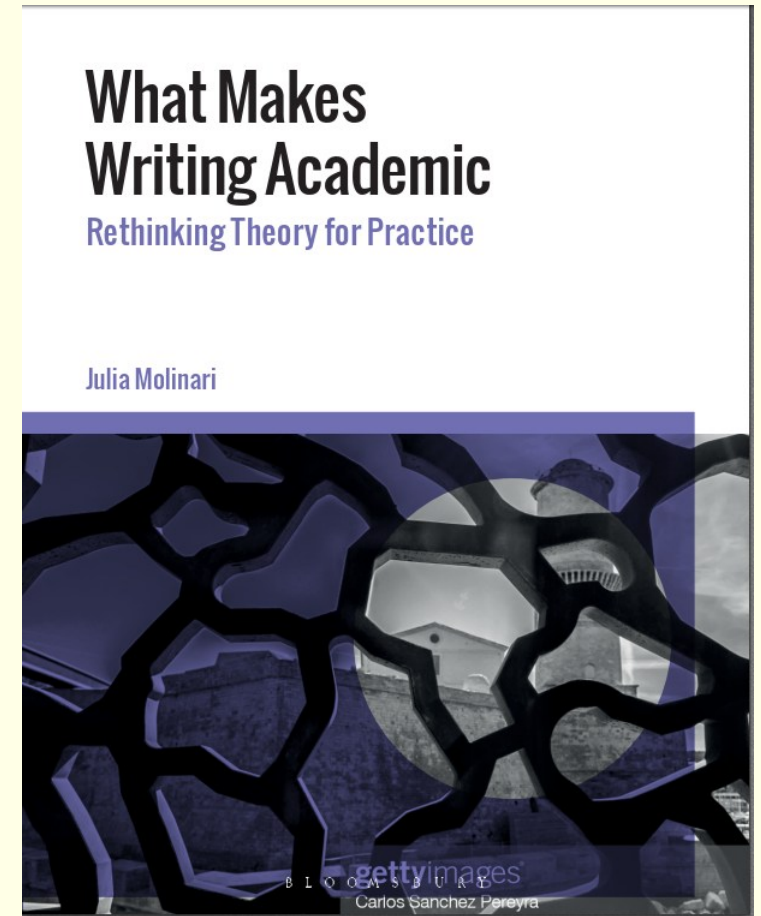
Lucia Thesen, forthcoming plenary reflections, *The Future of
Doctoral Writing: Critical Dialogues towards a Manifesto*, July
2025, The Open University and BAAL, Milton Keynes, UK

Archives matter

Consider the requirement to frame one's research or scholarly contribution in terms of the state of the art. The obligatory literature review. [...]. It is presented as a harmless convention of 'joining the conversation'.

[...]

In Sri Lanka, we had many problems in meeting this requirement. To begin with, we didn't have the latest publications in any discipline to be able to review them closely for our articles.





GPT-3.5-Turbo-Raw

Poe

...

What makes writing academic

There are several key characteristics that make writing academic:

1. Formal tone: Academic writing is typically more formal in tone and structure than other forms of writing. It is important to use proper grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary in order to convey ideas clearly and professionally.
2. Research-based: Academic writing is usually based on research and evidence from credible sources. It is important to support arguments and claims with relevant data and information in order to strengthen the validity of the writing.
3. Clear and concise: Academic writing should be clear, concise, and to the point. It is important to present ideas and arguments in a logical and organized manner, using appropriate transitions and signposts to guide the reader through the text.
4. Objective and unbiased: Academic writing should be objective and unbiased, presenting information and arguments in a fair and balanced manner. It is important to avoid personal opinions, emotions, or biases that may detract from the credibility of the writing.
5. Citations and references: Academic writing often requires the use of citations and references to acknowledge sources and give credit to the original authors. It is important to follow a specific citation style, such as APA or MLA, to properly attribute sources and avoid plagiarism.

Overall, academic writing is characterized by its formal tone, research-based content, clarity and conciseness, objectivity, and proper use of citations and references. These qualities help to establish credibility and professionalism in academic writing.

What Makes Writing Academic

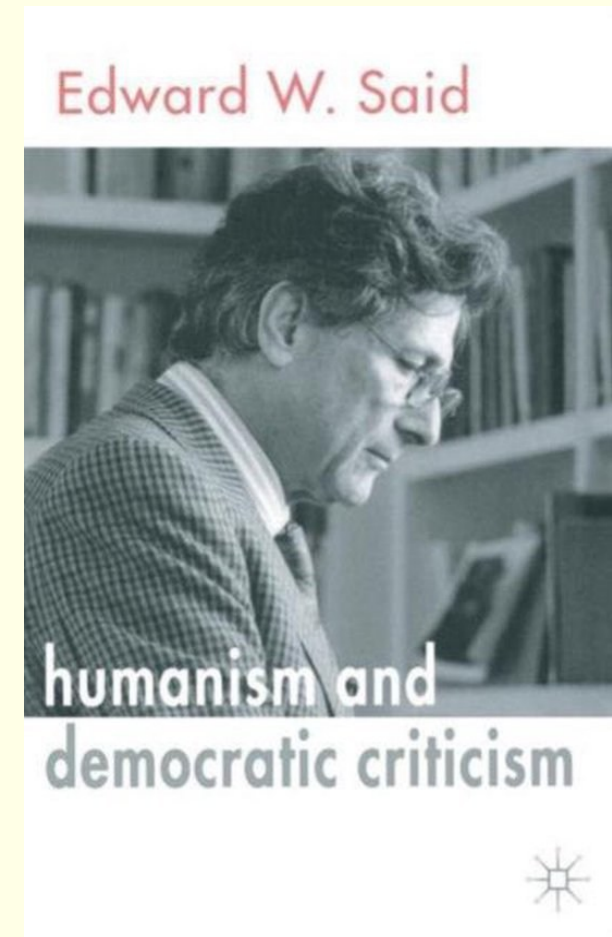
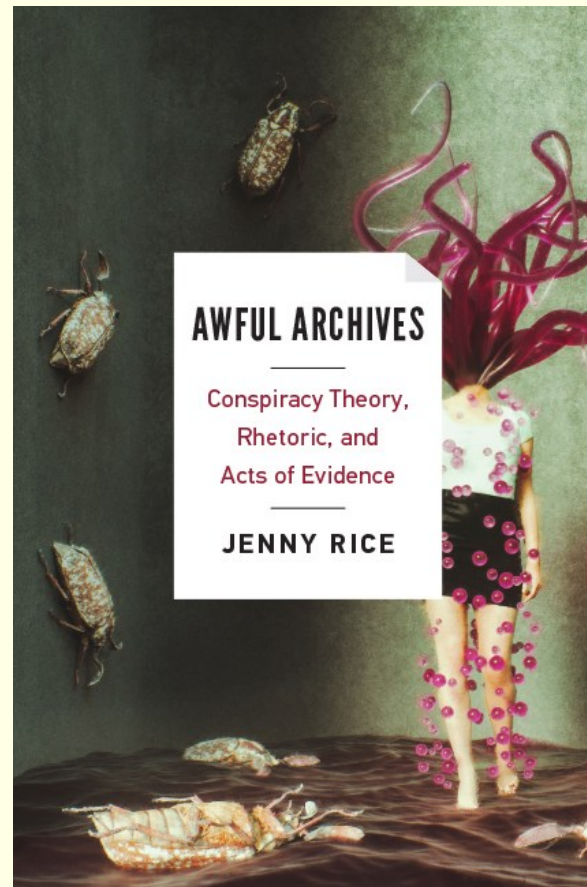
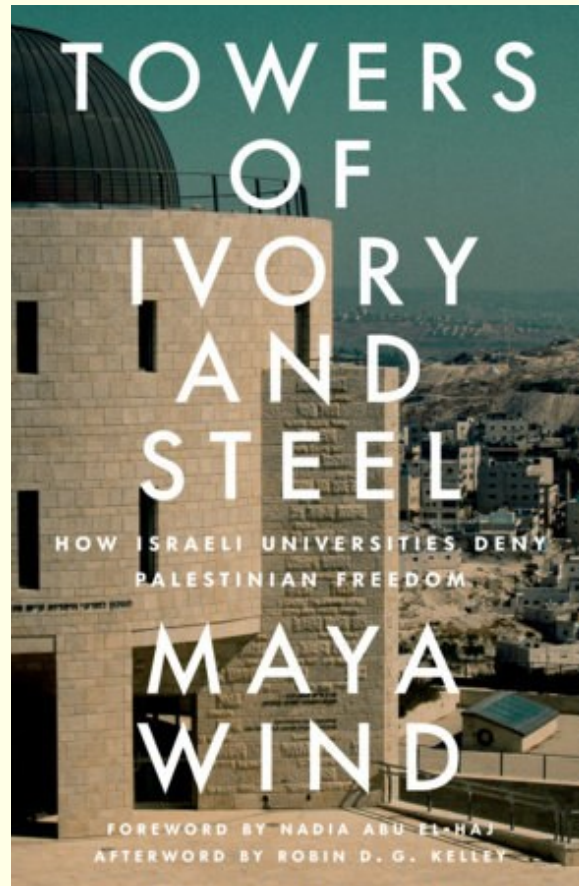
Rethinking Theory for Practice

Julia Molinari



BLOOMSBURY

Archives matter



The New York Times

The New York Times

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| accessible | discriminated | chestfeed + people | fostering inclusivity | most risk | they/them |
| activism | discrimination | chestfeed + person | GBV | MSM | trans |
| activists | discriminatory | clean energy | gender | multicultural | transgender |
| advocacy | disparity | climate crisis | gender based | Mx | transsexual |
| advocate | diverse | climate science | gender based violence | Native American | trauma |
| advocates | diverse backgrounds | commercial sex worker | gender diversity | non-binary | traumatic |
| affirming care | diverse communities | community diversity | gender identity | nonbinary | tribal |
| all-inclusive | diverse community | community equity | gender ideology | oppression | unconscious bias |
| allyship | diverse group | confirmation bias | gender-affirming care | oppressive | underappreciated |
| anti-racism | diverse groups | cultural competence | genders | orientation | underprivileged |
| antiracist | diversified | cultural differences | Gulf of Mexico | people + uterus | underrepresentation |
| assigned at birth | diversify | cultural heritage | hate speech | people-centered care | underrepresented |
| assigned female at birth | diversifying | cultural sensitivity | health disparity | person-centered | underserved |
| assigned male at birth | diversity | culturally appropriate | health equity | person-centered care | undervalued |
| at risk | enhance the diversity | culturally responsive | hispanic minority | polarization | victim |
| barrier | enhancing diversity | DEI | historically | political | victims |
| barriers | environmental quality | DEIA | identity | pollution | vulnerable populations |
| belong | equal opportunity | DEIAB | immigrants | pregnant people | women |
| bias | equality | DEIJ | implicit bias | pregnant person | women and |
| biased | equitable | disabilities | implicit biases | pregnant persons | underrepresented |
| biased toward | equitableness | disability | inclusion | prejudice | |
| biases | equity | <p>Notes: Some terms listed with a plus sign represent combinations of words that, when used together, acknowledge transgender people, which is not in keeping with the current federal government's position that there are only two, immutable sexes. Any term collected above was included on at least one agency's list, which does not necessarily imply that other agencies are also discouraged from using it.</p> <p>The above terms appeared in government memos, in official and unofficial agency guidance and in other documents viewed by The New York Times. Some ordered the removal of these words from</p> | | | |
| biases towards | ethnicity | | | | |
| biologically female | excluded | | | | |
| biologically male | exclusion | | | | |
| BIPOC | expression | | | | |
| Black | female | | | | |
| breastfeed + people | females | | | | |
| breastfeed + person | feminism | | | | |

From AI to GenAI and AGI to ConAI & Hype

- Yanis Varoufakis (2024) - Technofeudalism
- Dan Mcquillan (2022) – Fascism (inc. eugenics – Gebru and Torres)
- Shumailov, et al. (2023) - Knowledge pollution/degeneration/dementia
- Frankfurt (2005) - Bullshit



AI serfs, fiefdoms, and cloud capital



Yanis Varoufakis



Feudal/rentier economics: one person owns the platforms and rents out that space (controlling the means of communication as well as production)

Serfs: we are owned by the tech not the other way around (eg Alexa) because we give it our free labour by uploading our lives

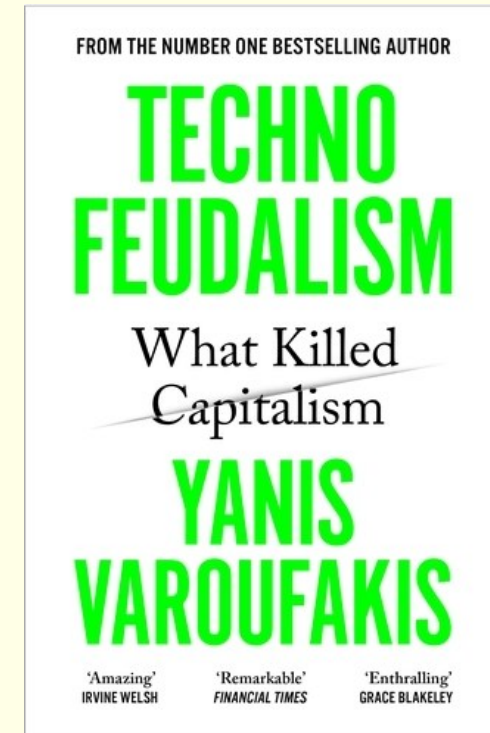
Fiefdoms: the overlord (Amazon) grants fiefs to subordinates for a fee (Amazon vendors) but it is the algorithm that determines prices

AI serfs, fiefdoms, and cloud capital

Imagine [...] you are beamed into a town full of people going about their business, trading in gadgets, clothes, shoes, books, songs and movies. At first, everything looks normal. Until you begin to notice something odd.

It turns out all the shops, indeed every building, belong to a chap called Jeff. He may not own the factories that produce the stuff sold in his shops but he owns an algorithm that takes a cut for each sale and he gets to decide what can be sold and what cannot.

Varoufakis, Vintage-Penguin, 2024, pp. 85-86

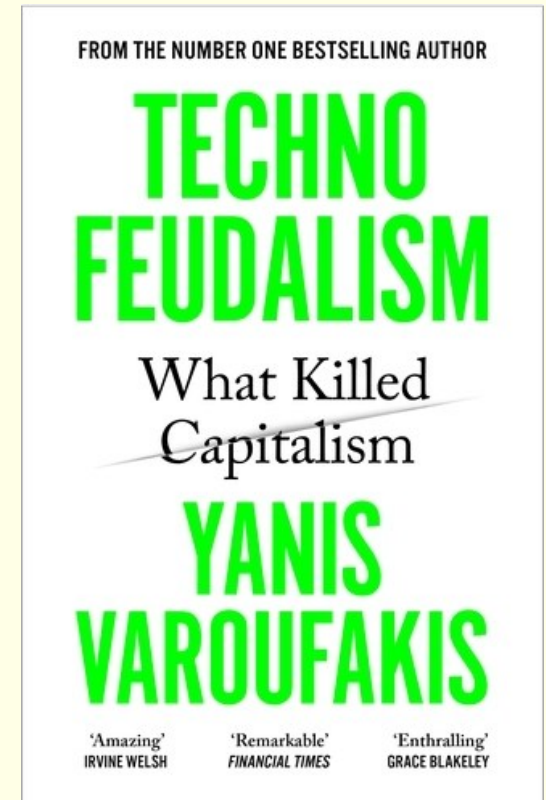


AI serfs, fiefdoms, and cloud capital

In this weird town, everything you see (and don't see) is regulated by Jeff's algorithm: you and I may be walking next to each other, our eyes trained in the same direction, but the view provided to us by the algorithm is entirely bespoke, carefully curated according to Jeff's priorities.

Everyone navigating their way around am*z*n.con – expect Jeff – is wandering in algorithmically constructed isolation.

Varoufakis, Vintage-Penguin, 2024, p. 86



All of Truman's friends, family and members of his community are paid actors whose job it is to sustain the illusion and keep Truman unaware about the false world he inhabits.

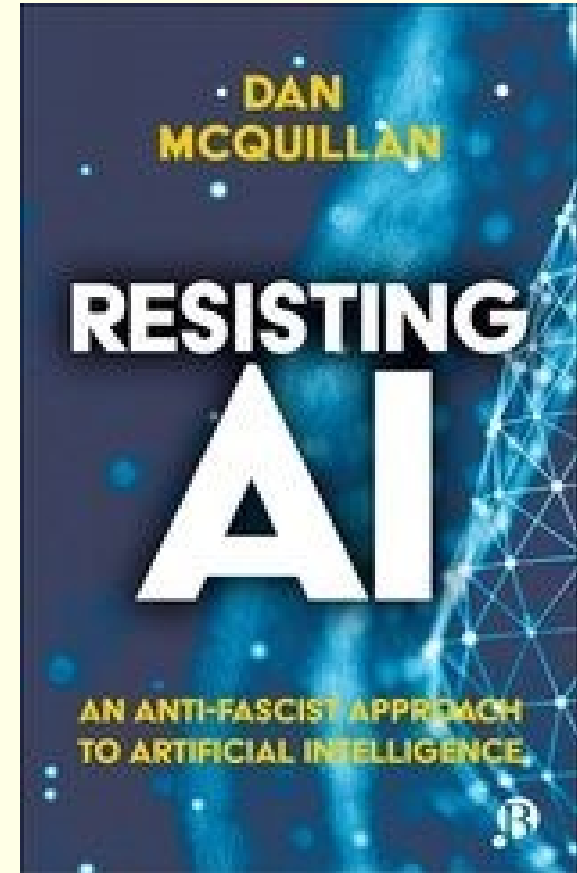


THE TRUMAN SHOW 1998 - American psychological comedy-drama

AI fascism

- Technosolutionism: what and whose problems is AI solving?
- Luddites: 1811-1816 uprising in Nottinghamshire, Manchester, Yorkshire; not against the tech but a call to 'put down all machinery that hurts the common good; artisanship, agency, trust, community undermined by the machines
- Human-in-the-loop arguments are overridden by political powers set up to marginalise: there are no humans in the loop, only institutions
Eugenics: ideal form of intelligence (whose ideal?)
- Techno determinism: are we doomed?

Mcquillan, Bristol University Press (2022)



AI fascism cont.



The image credits: "FIGURE 3.6 Captions generated by Google's Show and Tell deep network. Image credits: left, Ammar Awad / Reuters; middle, U.S. Department of Justice; right, Reuters.

Katz, Y. (2020). Artificial Whiteness: Politics and Ideology in Artificial Intelligence, Columbia University Press, p.114

systems that have been claimed to outperform people in the visual arena—to analyze a series of images.³⁴ Show and Tell was trained on thousands of photographs and can produce a label for an image it has not processed before. When Google showcases the system, it uses banal, generic-looking images that get assigned impressive, or at least reasonable, captions. The images I used, by contrast, were not generic nor banal; they were specifically chosen to demonstrate how historical context shapes the interpretation of scenes.

Consider a photograph of Palestinians arriving at a checkpoint operated by Israeli soldiers (figure 3.6, left). A Palestinian man lifts his shirt to show the soldier, who is motioning to him from the top of a small hill, that he is unarmed. Google's deep network gave the image the caption "A group of people standing on top of a snow covered slope." For a statistical pattern recognizer, the light dirt might look like snow—but the sun, the clothing, and the relationship among those photographed make that an absurd description. Similarly, a 1960 photograph of Ruby Bridges, a six-year-old African American girl being accompanied to a desegregated school by U.S. marshals, is registered as "A group of men standing next to each other" (figure 3.6, middle).

There are many more complex relations among the photographed that are missed. Consider the scene of an Israeli soldier holding down a young Palestinian boy while the boy's family try to remove the soldier (figure 3.6, right).³⁵ Google's deep network produces the caption "People sitting on top of a bench together" (the "bench" perhaps being the boy). The motives and intentions of the individuals are entirely lost.

It isn't possible to make sense of group scenes without history, either. For instance, Google's system registers an image of Palestinians praying in protest outside the mosque, with the



FIGURE 3.6 Captions generated by Google's Show and Tell deep network. Image credits: *left*, Ammar Awad/Reuters; *middle*, U.S. Department of Justice; *right*, Reuters.

Dome of the Rock in the background, as "A crowd of people standing around a parking lot filled with kites," probably because of the colorful shirts of the men in prostration (figure 3.7, left). Similarly, a 1960 photograph from South Africa's apartheid regime, in which black men line up to receive passbooks from a panel of all-white officials, is captioned as "A black and white photograph of a group of people" (figure 3.7, right).

When one looks at photographs, the history of gender oppression cannot be ignored, either. An ad from the 1960s where a woman is used as ashtray support for a man smoking a cigar is captioned as "A black and white photo of a woman wearing a tie" (figure 3.8, left). Another image—in which a woman carrying a stack of towels is a fleeting background figure and a man watches television on the couch—can instantly evoke the gendered division of household labor yet is registered by the deep network as "A woman sitting on the couch with a laptop" (figure 3.8, right).

A counterargument to these examples might be that with a larger training data set, the same computational system might be able to "understand" even these images. That would presume,

AI fascism cont.

AI fascism cont.



a group of people standing on top of a snow covered slope



a group of men standing next to each other



a group of people sitting on top of a bench together

The image credits: "FIGURE 3.6 Captions generated by Google's Show and Tell deep network. Image credits: left, Ammar Awad / Reuters; middle, U.S. Department of Justice; right, Reuters."

Katz, Y. (2020). Artificial Whiteness: Politics and Ideology in Artificial Intelligence, Columbia University Press, p.114

Alt Text

How would you describe this object and its context to someone who is blind or low vision?

- The subject(s) in detail
- The setting
- The actions or interactions
- Other relevant information

(1-2 detailed sentences recommended)

A group of people walking up stairs

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

☐ Approve alt text ⓘ

☐ Mark as decorative ⓘ

[Give feedback on this alt text](#)

AI 'dementia'

When LLMs, rather than humans, train new models, this can lead to a 'curse of recursion' whereby the original input data 'degenerates' with each new generation of models.

Degeneration 'pollutes' the knowledge system, which can mis-represent reality and perpetuate harms such as gender stereotyping.

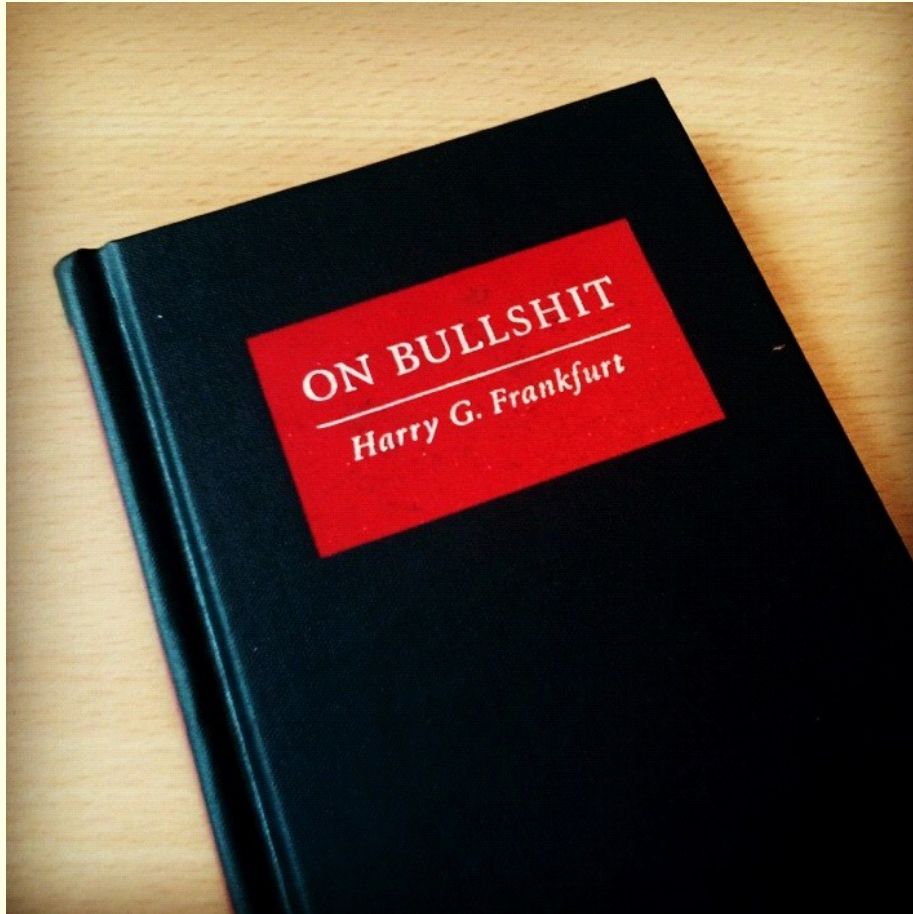
Shumailov et al., 2023, p. 1.

AI bullshit

if ChatGPT produces a sentence that is true, it is not necessarily 'aiming' at truth. By this we mean that even if the output sentences are true, or the output text as a whole is accurate, this is an unintended by-product of ChatGPT's computations. Truth is not a design principle of ChatGPT [...]. Of course, whether this means that relying on ChatGPT-generated texts for belief renders the corresponding belief unjustified, irrational, or incapable of producing knowledge is a further question.

van Woudenberg et al. (2024, p. 5)

AI bullshit



On Bullshit pp.42-43 (2005)

‘Bull’ is slang for ‘bluff, bravado, hot air’

[...]

Just as hot air is speech that has been emptied of all informative content, so excrement is matter from which everything nutritive has been removed.

Excrement may be regarded as the corpse of nourishment, what remains when the vital elements in food have been exhausted.

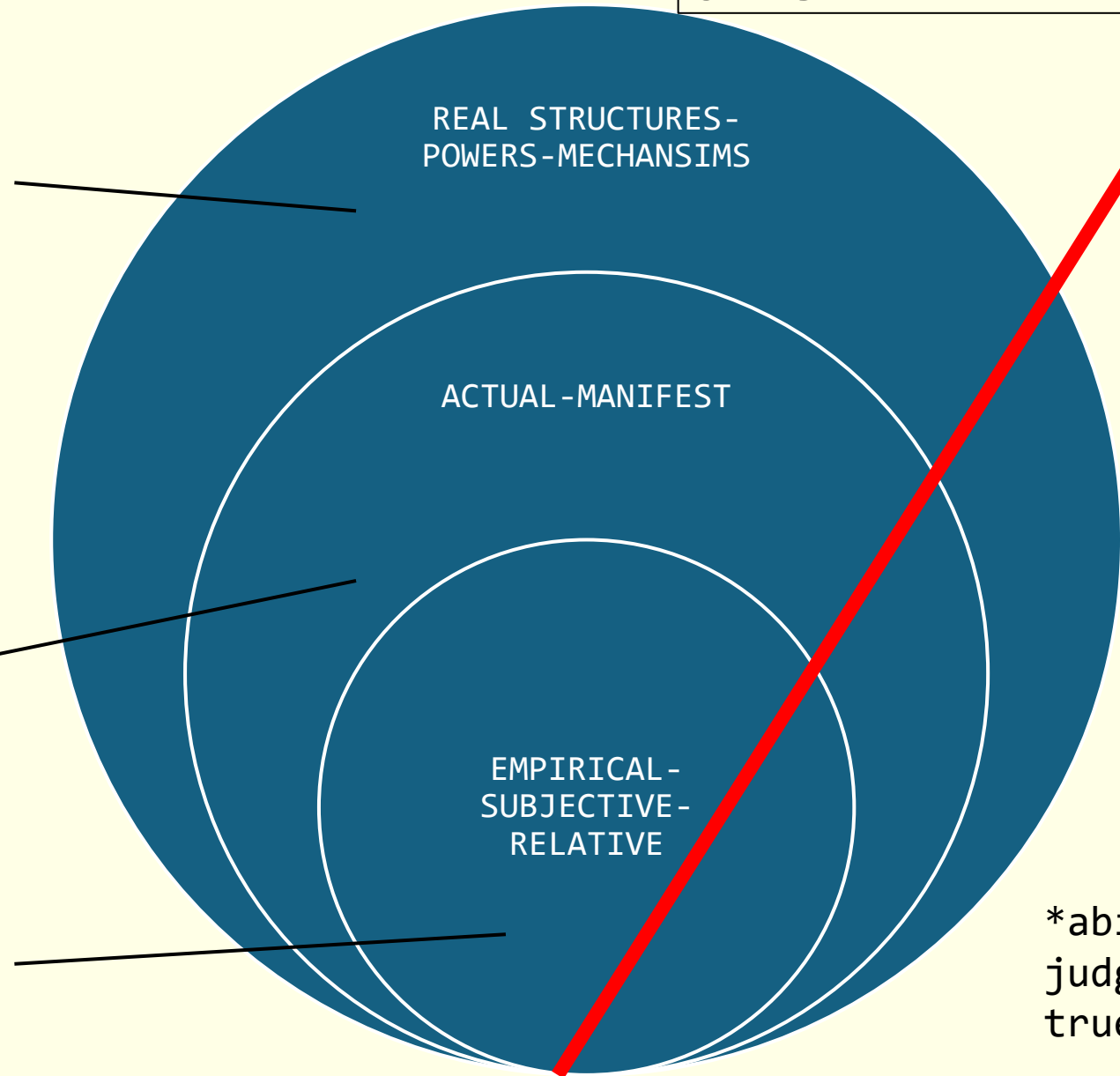
In this respect, excrement is a representation of death [...]

Critical Realism

Neoliberalism; big-tech; publish-perish; and all the things we have no control over

Techno-enthusiasts, sceptics, resisters, luddites; and other existent, possible and future ways to respond

Personal experiences, values, knowledge, biases & understandings



Agency, reflexivity and judgmental rationality*

*ability to judge between true and false

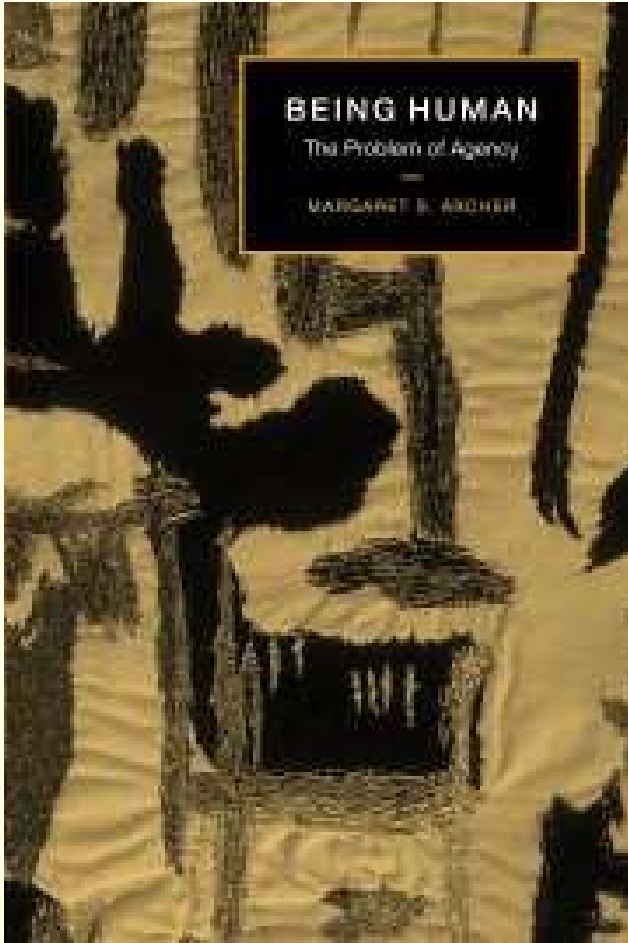
Critical Realism on Emancipation

[...] that special qualitative kind of becoming free or liberation [...], [...] which consists in the transformation, in self-emancipation by the agents concerned, from an unwanted and unneeded to a wanted and needed source of determination [...].

Emancipation, as so defined, depends upon the transformation of structures, not the alternation or amelioration of states of affairs.

Bhaskar, 2012; 2016

Critical Realism on being human



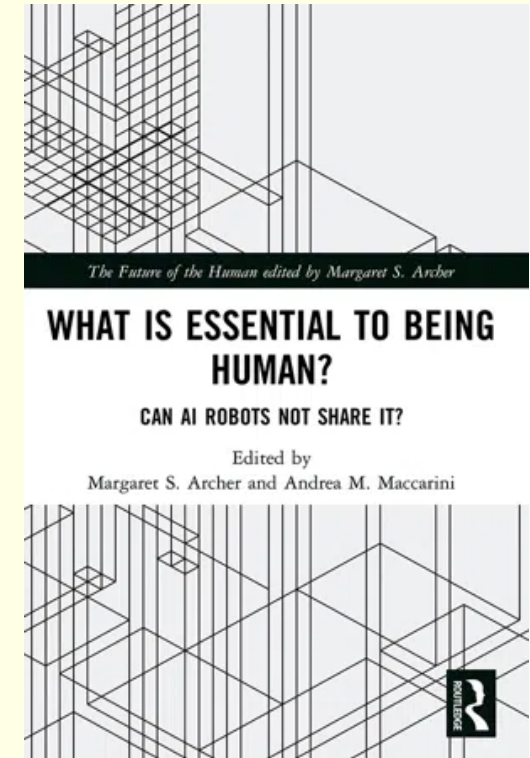
as long as there is injustice in the world, we need to free ourselves from it!” (Archer 2000, p. 43).

To do this, Archer proposes that we reclaim (2000, p. 18):

human beings as the ultimate fons et origio of (emergent) social life or socio-cultural structures, rather than subjugating humanity as if it were an epiphenomenon of social forces.

Critical Realism on Robots

Long-standing philosophical debates around what it means to be human (Al-Amoudi, 2022) are being reignited by artificially intelligent systems that are said to think and act like humans (Russell & Norvig, 2020): whilst some argue that what is quintessentially human is an elusive sense of 'dignity' (Smith, 2010), others argue that essentialist approaches to being human are doomed to fail. What is needed instead is an account of how humans and robots interact relationally (Archer & Maccarini, 2023).



Page tbc in Molinari, J. (2025). What Makes Academic Writing Human(e): a Critical Realist Response. In J. Bouchard & K. Zotzmann (Eds.), Critical Realism in Applied Linguistics. Cambridge University Press forthcoming.

Critical Realism

Explanatory account of neoliberal ideology to show that knowledge is not a commodity

Understanding the enabling and constraining effects of our structured contexts is a pre-requisite for ethical change

Alternative emancipatory futures depend on understanding mechanisms of the social world

Possible *concrete* utopias include the the university becomes a public good

JOURNAL OF CRITICAL REALISM
2022, VOL. 21, NO. 5, 502–515
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2022.2100612>

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

 Check for updates

Neoliberalism's conditioning effects on the university and the example of proctoring during COVID-19 and since

Sioux McKenna

Centre for Postgraduate Studies, Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Neoliberalism has shaped the academy in ways that constrain its potential as a public good. Neoliberalism is based on the assumption that, by submitting to the so-called neutral forces of the market, wealth can be created alongside the achievement of equality and efficiency. Although this assumption is demonstrably false, neoliberalism remains politically powerful. As an example, this article discusses how neoliberalism has enabled the rapid uptake of proctoring software during the covid pandemic and since. 'Proctoring' is the online monitoring of students' behaviour as they sit for exams. Many within the academy consider proctoring software to be dehumanizing – essentially legalized spyware. They argue that the software invades privacy and is inherently racist and ableist, amongst other things. It is hoped that by understanding how structural forces such as neoliberalism affect both our agency and university activities, frequently against the common good, strategies can be developed to change these structures.

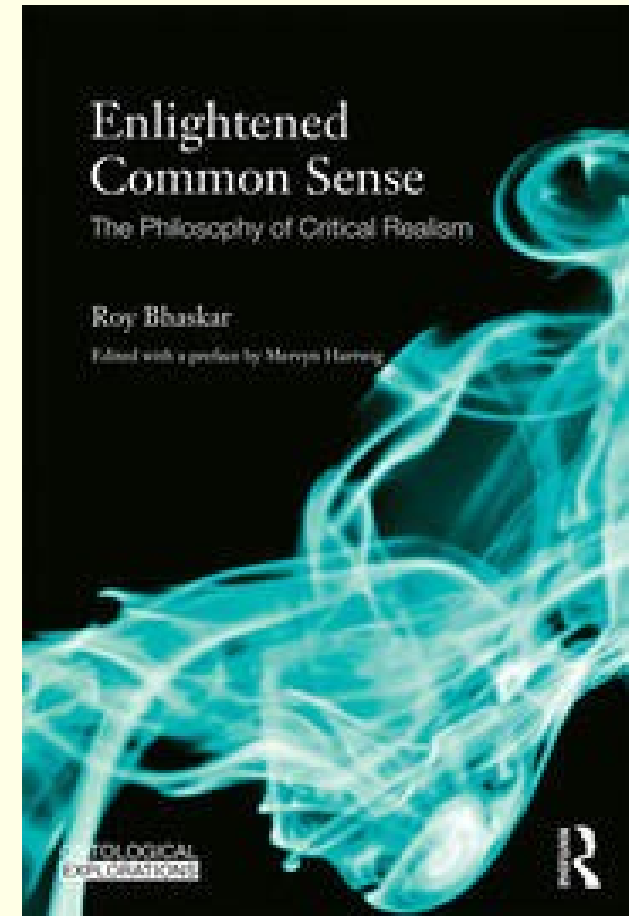
KEYWORDS

Neoliberalism; proctoring software; surveillance; privacy; educational technology; academic integrity

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2022.2100612>

Introduction to Critical Realism - I

- Philosophical socio-scientific theory of reality (ontology)
- Reality seen as complex, emergent, relational, stratified
- Human emancipation and flourishing require an account of knowledge and truth to dispel mistaken beliefs
- Human knowledge requires understanding history and deep structures beyond subjective experience
- 'Critical' signals relational and transformative agentic intervention aimed at changing the world for the better via *explanatory critique*

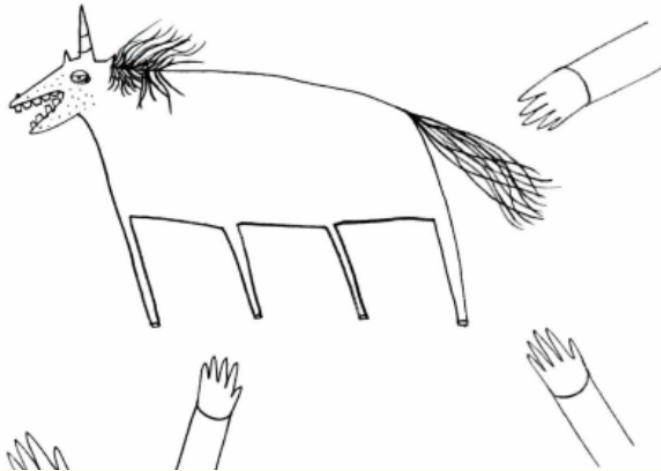


Introduction to Critical Realism - II

A short guide to ontology and epistemology

(why everyone should be a realist)

Tom Fryer & Cristián Navarrete



Tom Fryer

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A short guide to ontology and epistemology: why everyone should be a realist

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Critical (i.e. transformative) AI realism

- what it means to be human: essentialist? Reductive? Embodied? Relational? Biological? Other?
- agency as relational: we are both constrained and enabled by structures, and agents both reproduce or transform (although not always in circumstances of their choosing)
- agency as positionality: taking responsibility for our claims, actions, values as a pre-condition for judgmental rationality
- reflexivity: the ability to monitor, mediate, contribute via our 'internal conversation' about our values
- reflexive agency: humans are ultimately motivated by their concerns so we need to be honest about what we value (we don't all value the same things!)

Bouchard, J. (forthcoming). Humanising language education in the generative artificial intelligence age: A critical realist approach. Routledge. To be published in the Studies in Critical Realism (SE0518) series. See also Molinari, J. (2024). A rational case for a critical realist theory of academic writing. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 1-24

Concrete utopias as levers of change

- Understanding how neoliberal ideology underpins commercial AI
- Remembering that academic freedom is a human right
- Knowing how LLMs work (their biases; surveillance, etc.) by for example, teaching descriptive statistics, technical literacies and methods to understand algorithms (see Gallagher, J. R. (2020). "The Ethics of Writing for Algorithmic Audiences." Computers and Composition 57: 102583.)
- Monitor, mediate, contribute by identifying degrees of agency (e.g. your seniority; secure employment), collaborate, share, draft principles, position statements, guidance eg <https://openletter.earth/open-letter-stop-the-uncritical-adoption-of-ai-technologies-in-academia-b65bba1e>
- Develop value-driven corrigible position statements (e.g. <https://www5.open.ac.uk/students/research/ou/services/position-statement-and-guidance-generative-ai-and-doctoral-education#overview>)

Critical AI Futures

- Critical AI pedagogies to share knowledge of deep structures and mechanisms and to speak truth to power so that big tech is constantly being held to account
- Understanding the tech: algorithmic pattern matching uncommitted to the truth (even though true claims are made) and RAG (Retrieval-Augmented Generation);
- Black boxes: demand transparency and accountability about inputs, outputs and everything in between
- Big tech agendas: ask “Who benefits from this technology, who is harmed, what recourse do they have?” (Bender & Hanna)
- Tech industry must explain real harm to real people (not ‘AI will replace humans, jobs, etc.’): feudal overlords (Varoufakis); fascism & surveillance (McQuillan)

Democratic pedagogies: knowledge, trust, care

- Democracy: “those vitally affected by any decision men [sic] make have an effective voice in that decision” (CW Mills, 1959, p. 208)
- Knowledge and truth matter so let’s weight these epistemic virtues over linguistic form and accuracy (which kind of take care of themselves once students feel valued and energised by *what* they are saying and *why* it matters, not *how*)
- Trust (and respect) works both ways: students trust us when they feel we trust them.
- Education, and its role in forming citizens who inhabit futures we may not see, requires us to care about knowledge and about others. Let’s try to focus on those values and not allow AI to distract us *en masse*, as is the want of authoritarian regimes.
- More writing retreats, please!

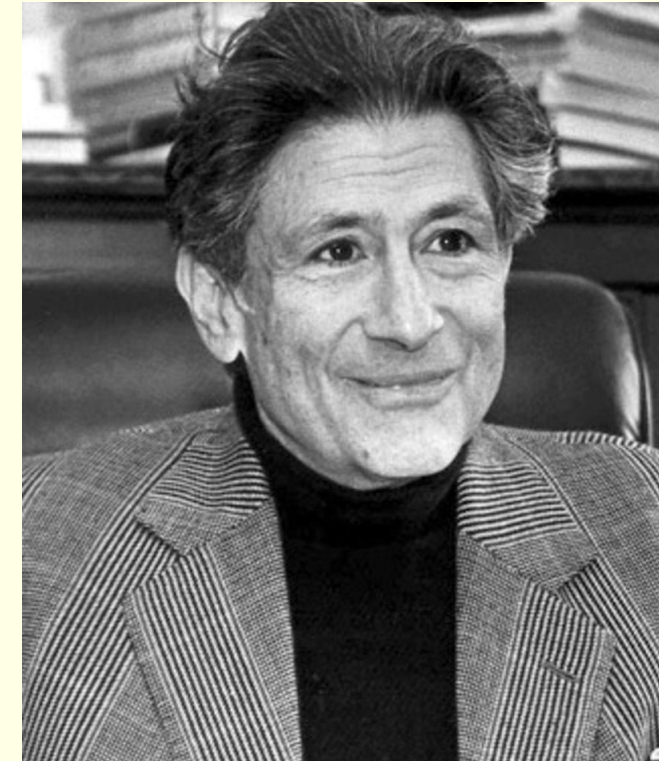
Universities are not spokespersons for the AI industry. On the contrary, we need to resist being coopted and corrupted by the industries' agendas. This requires deep commitment to the mission of universities, our academic values, our scientific integrity, and our critical scholarship — whether one is a working academic or administrative and support staff, we all have a part to play to protect and uphold these values and standards. Universities have the responsibility not to blindly adopt AI in research, education for staff and students, and for administration under the guise of helping society to move forward and prosper, and of preparing students and staff for an imagined future. We do not have to limit ourselves to the AI industry's or the UN's and EU's legal frameworks for a shared vision on our ethical, ecological, and social responsibilities: these have failed us before. Instead, universities need to take on the mantle of a critical voice and of knowledge producers. We need to increase Critical AI Literacy in students, in scientists, and in other professionals.²⁰ This is the role that universities are duty bound to play in times of planetary crises.

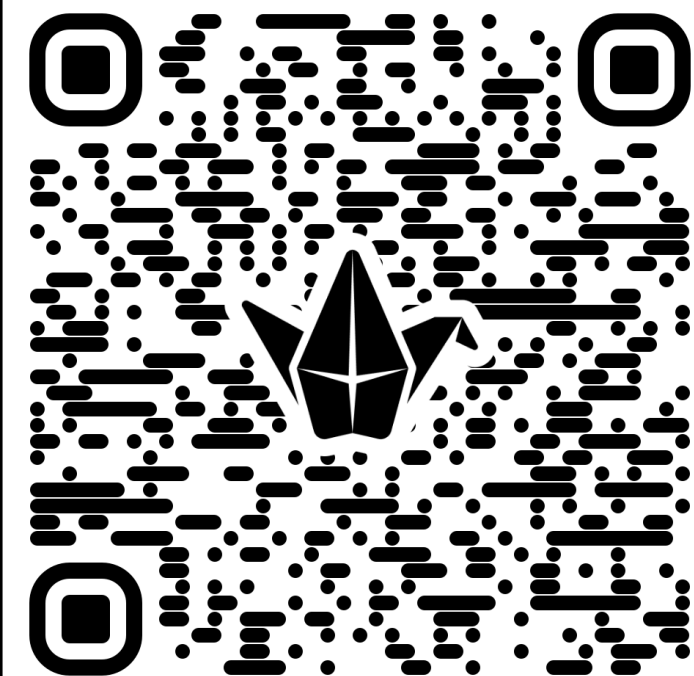


the classroom as ‘the most radical space of possibility [and love] in the academy’

hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 1994, p. 12;
All about Love, 2016

Humanism is essential to academics who wish to understand ‘what they are doing, what they are committed to as scholars, [and who] want also to connect these principles to the world in which they live as citizens’ Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 2004, p. 6.





<https://ougraduateschool.padlet.org/julia1796/ai-realism-reclaiming-the-human-in-ai-enhanced-academic-lite-2yp6ji3l7bwuge22>

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Resources

- <https://shiftingpower.kmi.open.ac.uk/> (Ethics)
- <https://www.annarmills.com/> (Critical AI)
- <https://about.open.ac.uk/sites/about.open.ac.uk/files/files/OU%20Critical-AI-Literacy-framework-2025.pdf> (Ethics)
- <https://www5.open.ac.uk/students/research/ou/services/position-statement-and-guidance-generative-ai-and-doctoral-education>
- <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/sector-resources/generative-artificial-intelligence> (QAA)
- <https://www.open.ac.uk/courses/short-courses/lg003/> (Introduction to Artificial Intelligence)
- <https://www.open.ac.uk/courses/short-courses/lg007/> (AI language technology in the workplace)
- <https://www.open.ac.uk/courses/short-courses/lg010/> (Teaching languages and cultures with AI)
- <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/03/07/us/trump-federal-agencies-websites-words-dei.html>